

**BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES AT
GLOBAL EARTH SUMMITS:
COMPARING RIO AND JOHANNESBURG**

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ABSTRACT

Studies of global environmental politics have not paid much attention so far to the role and views of the international business community. This thesis seeks to analyse how the business community has approached global environmental issues as discussed at the so-called 'Earth Summits' in 1992 and 2002. The specific focus is to address the question of how the international environmental discourses of business have changed from one summit to another. Are there sufficient empirical grounds to suggest that business is progressing towards a unified and cohesive set of discursive themes and issues? The method used combines qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative content analysis. Combining the 'best of' these two approaches means that a more detailed and rigorous analysis of the content of a large amount of material can be undertaken. This is applied to compare the business discourse at the 1992 Rio and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits. These are two of the key events in the formation of international environmental politics discourses and provide an excellent opportunity to examine the changing role of business over time. The empirical results of this work reveal some continuity, but also major changes within the discourses used by business actors at mega earth summits. There is a high level of continuity not only in the commitment to free market principles but also in the notion that embracing sustainable development is good for business. Looking at changes over time, among the key findings is that business appears increasingly willing to reach accommodation with environmental non-governmental organisations and is keen to overcome its traditionally defensive, reactive role, adopting a proactive approach to shaping the international environmental agenda. While the main elements of a new master business environmental discourse were formulated in 1992, the new approach only become dominant afterwards. By 2002, the discourse had not only been refined and extended, but it had also achieved a much higher level of consensus with the business community taking an active part in the Johannesburg summit. The thesis concludes by discussing the significance of these findings in our understanding of the environmental role of business within global environmental debates.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BASD	Business Action on Sustainable Development
BCSD	Business Council on Sustainable Development
BP	British Petroleum
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESR	Corporate and Environmental Social Responsibility
EU	European Union
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISO	International Standardisation Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
US	United States
WB	World Bank
WBCSD	World Business Council on Sustainable Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues have assumed an increasingly international dimension in recent years. One feature of this development has been the creation of arenas of political debate that transcend the predominantly national and regional focus of environmental decision-making. Starting with the Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the internationalisation of the environment took a gigantic step forward in the 1980s with the development of major international environmental regimes. This culminated in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), usually referred to as the 'Earth Summit', in Rio de Janeiro. With the passing of the climate change and biodiversity conventions, as well as Agenda 21, Rio set in motion a complex set of international environmental processes that required continual development and review. As a result, international conferences became a regular feature of the environmental debate which developed a strong focus on the numerous meetings of the post-Rio agenda. With the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, the tradition of major environmental summitry was also carried forward into the new century.

This internationalisation of the environment has given rise to a huge academic literature. Within the social sciences, one of the key topics that have attracted major attention was the role of environmental movements and pressure groups. Under the guise of their formal status as 'non-governmental organisations' (NGOs), the role of environmental groups in international negotiations and discussions has become a major research topic, attracting not just international relations scholars, but also researchers in social movement development and environmental politics (cf. Arts 1998; Newell 2000).

By contrast, the role of other NGOs that were not part of or associated with the environmental movement has attracted comparatively little attention. Perhaps the most important type of NGO that falls into this category is business organisations. The role of 'business' – either individual firms or business associations and pressure groups – in environmental politics at local, regional and national level has attracted

some major attention, but there are few studies of its role in international environmental politics. How is the business community organised at the international level? How active are business groups, what approach do they take to the international environmental agenda in general, and the activities of environmental NGOs in particular?

Crucially, the role of business in international environmental politics raises the question of power. Among social movement scholars, the dominant approach to researching the role of business groups is that of the 'counter-movement' (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003). Business is seen here as responding to a threat to its influence by environmental movements. Could the role of business at the international level also be understood in these terms? A cursory look at the role of business in environmental debates on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrates that it seems unlikely that there is just one business approach: while business in the United States often takes a very anti-environmental attitude, in general business in Europe seeks to avoid an antagonistic approach to proponents of environmental activism. Furthermore, business cannot be taken as a homogeneous actor, with sectoral differences leading to very different interests as far as specific environmental issues are concerned. How, then, has the business community approached the internationalisation of the environmental debate?

In order to study the role of business groups in international environmental politics, a number of pragmatic decisions had to be made, in particular on the feasibility of empirical work. It was particularly fortuitous timing that attention could be focused on the Earth Summits: with the Johannesburg Earth Summit coming up in 2002, an opportunity presented itself for the analysis of the role of the business community at a major event in the international environmental debate. However, the focus on the Johannesburg Earth Summit also had potential drawbacks: one popular perception of the summit was that of an international 'talking shop' at which no real decisions were to be made (cf. Von Frantzius 2004). Unlike international conferences on the development of specific international regimes, e.g. the various Conferences of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Johannesburg was not the venue where specific decisions were to be taken with immediate effects on national

policy-making that had to be promoted or blocked. The initial question thus was whether business groups would be 'concerned' enough to make any effort to make their views known. Attendance at the conference very quickly revealed quite the contrary: the business community was represented very prominently and was very active in promoting its particular view of the environmental agenda. Furthermore, business groups at Johannesburg generated a fairly sizeable amount of 'texts' in the form of statements, speeches, etc. that provided an extremely valuable and useful resource for empirical inquiry.

The high profile of the business community at the Earth Summit II in Johannesburg raised some interesting questions. Business groups undoubtedly were, or were seeking to become, major international actors on the environmental scene. What did these groups hope to achieve? Were they presenting a united front? Was there a concerted effort to promote one business view of the environment, and what exactly did this amount to? How new and innovative were the approaches promoted by business groups at the 2002 WSSD? In order to set the Johannesburg experience in its proper historical context, a comparison between WSSD and UNCED thus offered itself as a unique opportunity to study the international environmental role of business. Not only had ten years passed between the two conferences, Johannesburg was also billed as the 'Rio +10' conference charged with the task of reviewing the progress made since Rio. As several years have now passed since the Johannesburg meeting, it looks as if this second Earth Summit has not had the same importance as Rio in policy-making terms. However, despite these important differences, what Rio and Johannesburg have in common is that they were unique arenas for the global environmental debate. No other conference or venue has had a similar standing. Comparing Rio and Johannesburg in terms of the shape of the global environmental debate is thus a legitimate undertaking. Given the difference between both summits, the focus of this analysis is thus not the influence of business groups on actual decision-making processes, but on the way in which the environment is framed and discussed; in other words, on the 'discourse' of the environment.

The focus on discourses brings with it a range of opportunities and challenges. To dominate a debate by framing it in a specific way, by defining what are the relevant

questions to be asked and how they could best be answered, is one important way of exerting power and achieving dominance. One possible narrative of the international environmental debate sees the environmental movement as having defined the agenda in the 1980s, with environmental NGOs achieving a level of hegemony in this field. For business groups, two basic strategies could be thought of as having been available: to resist the NGO agenda with an essentially anti-environmental programme, or to embrace the environmental agenda and mould it in a way that would be amenable to business interests. If some kind of accommodation with the environmental agenda were to be the aim, how could this be achieved and how effective could it be in influencing the political agenda? The challenges involved are both theoretical and empirical. A whole range of possible theoretical reference points offers itself. The systematic empirical study of environmental discourses and, in particular, of the change of discourses over time also raises some important methodological issues that need to be addressed. What, then, is this thesis all about?

The thesis aims to compare the environmental discourses produced by international business actors at two key events: the 1992 Rio de Janeiro and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits. The key research question is concerned with change: to what extent has the dominant international business environmental discourse changed in the period between the two Earth Summits in 1992 and 2002? If evidence of change is found, what is the nature and significance of this change in the international business environmental discourse?

In terms of theoretical reference points, the thesis is located within the tradition of critical discourse analysis. A significant question arising from such an approach is how successful international business has been in forming a hegemonic dominance over global environmental concerns. While framing this thesis mainly within a discourse-analytical approach, a series of other approaches will be considered and discussed. In particular, the phenomenon of business 'greening' has generated a substantial body of literature. What contribution to an understanding of international environmental business discourses can this literature make? The development of an approach using a specific form of discourse analysis in order to understand environmental debates should be developed and defended within a broader review of

the literature of both business greening and the study of environmental discourses in a variety of settings.

The successful development of a discourse-analytical approach goes hand-in-hand with the choice of adequate methods to pursue discourse analysis as a form of systematic empirical inquiry. While this thesis is critical of much of the literature on business greening and environmental discourses on both theoretical and empirical grounds, it also formulates a critique of much of what is advertised as 'discourse analysis' as insufficiently rigorous in empirical terms. Particular attention is thus paid to the development of empirical approaches that overcome what could be regarded as an overly subjective interpretation of texts in traditional discourse analysis.

The methodology chosen is distinctive in its combination of qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis. Within the field of discourse theory, the dominant approach has been to analyse small samples of text and generalise upwards. On the other hand, quantitative content analysis tends to focus on merely counting frequencies and distributions at the expense of an in-depth appreciation of the role of language in constructing particular meanings. This thesis combines these two methods, as they are the most viable means of analysing the richness and complexity of a large number of different types of documents (speeches, oral presentations, policy papers, evaluation studies and company reports). This combined methodology systematically compares business discourses produced for the 1992 Rio and 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits.

The empirical part of the thesis starts with a qualitative analysis of two key texts which could be seen as representative of the dominant business environmental discourse at each summit: *Changing Course* (Schmidheiny 1992) is compared with *Walking the Talk* (Holliday *et al.* 2002) using a discourse-analytic approach. The second part of the empirical analysis is based on a dataset created by processing hundreds of individual texts from business sources at both the Rio and Johannesburg summits. The Johannesburg data were collected while attending the summit as an observer; the Rio data are based on extensive historical research using a range of

databases. These texts are submitted to a range of empirical tests designed to address the main research questions. Based on a 'discourse' reading of a representative sample of material, relevant themes and debates were identified. These were then used to construct a thematic coding frame, generating quantitative data to analyse each discourse. The use of more than one method of textual analysis will also allow a systematic comparison of the reliability and compatibility of the various methods used.

This research thus seeks to break new ground in a number of ways. First, it will rectify the lack of empirical research tracking the development of international business discourse on the environment with the collection of a unique dataset of textual sources forming the basis of business environmental discourses. Business groups have produced a hitherto untapped range of documentary material at both Earth Summits that are analysed here for the first time. Second, it will analyse the data using a combination of methods, namely discourse analysis and content analysis. In particular, the thesis tries to introduce elements of a more quantitatively oriented approach to discourse analysis, making use of some forms of content analysis. While content analysis has been severely criticised in the past, it is argued here that combining some elements of traditional discourse analysis with content analysis provides an empirically sounder basis for making claims on the nature and change of discourses. Finally, the thesis aims to undertake these empirical inquiries informed by theory, addressing specific theory-derived research questions. These questions are based on a broad review of the theoretical and empirical literature on environmental discourses and the role of business in political debate. As a result, new insights into the nature and historical development of business environmental discourses will be generated.

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. The first two chapters set the scene with reviews of the literature on business greening and discourse analysis. The first chapter reviews a range of studies from a variety of social science disciplines that could inform our analysis of international business discourses. The contributions of political science to the analysis of business influence on politics in general, and environmental politics in particular, are discussed. One area of work that seems

particularly interesting is the literature derived from hegemonic theory. Various ways of conceptualising the idea of business developing a 'greening' approach as a way of imposing hegemony are discussed. The main assumption here is that powerful groups maintain their dominance through collective organisational strategies, material concessions and discursive politics. This discussion is supplemented by a review of approaches to business greening from authors writing from within the business and management studies disciplines. At the end of the chapter, specific research questions are formulated that could be tested with the data.

The second chapter focuses centrally on the empirical and theoretical literature on political discourses. The main purpose of this chapter is to develop a picture of a range of approaches on discourse analysis that will inform the development of specific research questions on the nature of environmental business discourses and their possible changes from Rio to Johannesburg. In addition, a detailed review of a range of possible ways to conceive and classify business environmental discourses will be of crucial importance in the construction of a coding frame for the empirical analysis.

In Chapter 3, the empirical part of the thesis is introduced. This chapter details the procedures involved in collecting and interpreting the data. Content analysis is combined with discourse analysis to produce a discourse content coding frame that can compare a substantial volume of documents.

The next two chapters then present the main empirical findings. Chapter 4 employs a 'traditional' discourse-analytic approach that focuses on two book-length reports produced by business leaders. This provides a complementary approach to the discourse content coding frame, as one methodological objective is to compare the findings of each approach. Chapter 5 focuses on presenting the findings of the quantitative analysis of the data by the use of the discourse content coding frame.

The Conclusions seeks to draw all the elements together and summarises the main findings. The major areas of change and continuity are outlined, and the implications

for future research on the role of business within global environmental politics are explored.

CHAPTER 1: BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

1.1. Introduction

International business generally has much to say about the environment and the role business can play in stabilising global ecological change. One indication of this enhanced status within the global environmental arena is the increasing presence of lobbying associations and individual companies at global environmental conferences, and the involvement of business in the governance of environmental issues. Business expansion into global environmental politics has also produced a corresponding body of literature on the greening of business discourse. The literature selected for review focuses on theories of greening that could account for greening at the international level. Marketing and business analysts dominate this literature and tend to focus on offering practical advice aimed at creating a culture of 'best practice' strategies for implementing business greening. Political scientists tend to focus less on business and more on political institutions. There is also a sharp divide within the literature on business greening between the critics, who believe that growth-oriented production places strict limitations on how far business can integrate and put environmental considerations into practice, and the optimists, who focus on institutional learning, the role of creative innovation and the transformational impact of technological change on production processes.

The complexity of theorising the international politics of business greening is best accounted for by adapting concepts from several different disciplines, including sociology, management studies and political science. This chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the organisational strategies developed by business to respond to external pressure. These include hegemony, and structural and representational power. A number of secondary concepts are also relevant. These include rational planning, managerial systems and changes in production processes. The main concern is not with outlining how different companies or sectors respond to national or local pressures. Instead, the literature reviewed aims to strengthen the idea that business has initiated a number of organisational and material responses, specifically designed to circulate at the international level.

The main purpose of this chapter is to review how international business greening overall could be understood within a broader heuristical framework and to develop specific research questions that can be explored in our empirical analysis of the discourses at Rio and Johannesburg. One important element of such a review is to see what can be learned from past efforts, both theoretical and empirical, to analyse the role of business in politics in general and in environmental politics in particular, in order to understand the role and structure of the international business environmental discourse and its change over time. The following questions are particularly important for this review.

First, while some attention has been paid to the activities of business at the international level, most of the literature is concerned with the role of business in local, regional and national politics. Are there any questions arising from this literature that can inform the analysis of the role of business at the international level?

Second, as business groups are clearly very active in the international arena, what could account for this level of involvement? Why should business become active and organise individual or joint efforts to influence debate at the international level?

This chapter begins with an overview of the literature drawn from various sub-disciplines in political science and sociology. One element of this literature that is particularly interesting is the idea of business having a dominant position within the political process. Two aspects characterise this. The first is that business has a high level of representational and structural power, and the second is that the motivation for greening is partly a reaction to setbacks incurred through conflicts with regulatory institutions. Here greening is forced on business by external pressure and then used to gain advantage over subsequent policy debates. Following this is an overview of the main organisational responses undertaken by business at the global level. The focus is on hegemonic theory and its central point that greening reflects the expansion of representational power. Some business actors, notably neo-liberal reformers, have adopted a 'leadership role' to engage in a 'battle of ideas'. Following this is a more detailed consideration of how hegemonic theory could conceptualise

some of the recent developments within global business greening. This introduces the idea that business is at the same time antagonistic and pragmatic, with the former seen through an historical bloc to demonstrate political, cultural and moral leadership.

Finally, there is an overview of approaches to business greening taken from other disciplines, in particular management studies. While most of the authors discussed earlier have a critical attitude to business and its operation, how is the attitude of business to the environment approached by authors who work from within the business community? What empirical questions, if any, are raised by this literature? In this area, a 'mainstream' interpretation of business greening appears to have developed. The main claim made by this literature is that greening is a series of calculated incremental steps that reflect different managerial styles, and the gradual implementation of greening is a 'win-win' strategy that gives the trailblazers a competitive edge. Many of the changes made go beyond compliance and seem to occur independently of regulatory pressure. One of the principal explanatory concepts developed within the cultural dimension of this literature is Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility (CESR). This mainstream business greening literature is, however, not without its critics. In the business studies literature also, there is a divide between those who see business greening as a genuinely progressive development and others who adopt a more sceptical perspective. Following a review of this broad range of approaches, a number of specific questions can be formulated to inform the empirical inquiry.

1.2. Political Science Approaches

Political science has not produced a canonical body of literature on business greening. Searching for literature on business and the environment, one finds that the most pertinent and well-cited titles, such as Eden (1996) and Welford (1997), are associated with other disciplines. Looking through political science and sociology journals, including specialist journals on environmental politics, one is hard pressed to find any articles with a central focus on business and the environment – Levy and Newell (2002) and Clapp (2003a) being among the few exceptions. In contrast, whole journals are devoted to the question within management studies, for example

Business Strategy and the Environment and *Corporate Environmental Strategy*. General business studies journals also overflow with articles on the greening of business at all levels (for more details, see Chapter 1.3 below).

While political science has not produced a comprehensive analysis of business greening so far, there is nevertheless a fairly large and challenging literature that is concerned with the influence of business on environmental decision-making. Some of the most pertinent contributions date back to the 1970s and 1980s. In order to structure the discussion of this literature, three aspects are considered that will be crucial to the discussion. This also provides some clues as to which aspects of the literature would be most interesting for an analysis of environmental discourses at the international level.

First, various analyses focus on different parts of the political process: within the public policy tradition of the discipline, the political process could be seen as divided between agenda-setting, policy-making and policy implementation. From the perspective of this study, previous work on agenda-setting appears to be the most promising starting point leading towards an analysis of discourses.

Second, policy studies can be concerned with the political process at different levels within a multi-level polity: some of the classic studies to be reviewed next are concerned with political processes at the local level; many other policy studies are concerned with processes at the national and European levels. One important question has to be to what extent any findings from such studies could be transferred to the international level.

Thirdly, policy studies are usually focused on one particular policy field, such as air pollution or one or more specific environmental problem. Here, it is important to see to what extent a study of a political discourse is concerned with the general basis for environmental policy, such as the concept of sustainable development.

In the remainder of this section, attention will first turn to a discussion of two classic studies of the role of business in environmental politics; this discussion will also

raise a number of important theoretical issues, such as different concepts of power. This will be followed by a discussion of the literature on the environmental policy process at the national and EU level, and this will in turn be followed by an extensive review of possible approaches to understanding the role of business in international environmental politics.

1.2.1. Two Classic Studies

Crenson (1971) and Blowers (1983) have written two 'classic' studies that explored the political power and influence of US and UK business within the environmental arena. Both studies provide useful insights into how business mobilises a range of discursive and organisational resources to exert influence over environmental decision-making. Crenson (1971) was concerned with explaining how pollution issues were routinely marginalised in one city and considered problematic enough to warrant political action in another. The aim was to highlight the role that business played in the agenda-setting process and establish some of the strategies used to exert influence. The case study focused on two US cities and looked at the 'mobilisation of bias' employed by business actors to keep pollution issues off the agenda. Crenson (1971) concluded that Gary (Indiana) was a 'one company' city dominated by the steel industry and the industry 'reputation' effectively kept pollution out of the limelight. This form of 'latent' power involved the tacit collusion of political elites and the media. The prevailing discourse was that jobs and prosperity were more worthwhile objectives than air quality. This suggested that local elites were more likely to 'do nothing' as a preferred policy strategy due to the pervasive business presence in the town and reliance on the company as a major source of inward investment and employment.

In contrast, air pollution *was* on the agenda in East Chicago. Here, business interests were relatively weaker due to a combination of structural factors. Some of these factors included the presence of political frameworks that were not dominated by one party, and a wider variety of business actors, not all of whom were located within heavy industry. Local elites had political room to manoeuvre as they were less reliant on securing the goodwill of one specific industry. When operating together, these factors produced a more open political opportunity structure (a pluralised arena) that

allowed for the (albeit limited) construction of pollution as a policy problem. However, business was still able to organise resistance and attempted to shape how the pollution problem was defined and the kinds of solutions offered.

Blowers (1983) used a political economy and pluralist perspective to analyse how a specific business (a brick maker) responded to environmental pressure in the UK. He used several analytical components to study business responses which included a focus on identifying the main actors able to maintain dominance over decision-making. Also important is the identification of the different types of observable effects directly attributable to the exercise of business power, particularly in the form of business 'reputational' power influencing the actions of local elites. Blowers' (1983) overall conclusions favoured a neo-pluralist reading. Here business is both a 'master of fate and a victim of circumstances'. However, one important insight is that over time business 'was able to exercise power by inaction and by taking the requisite steps to thwart opposition' (Blowers 1983: 208). Limiting opposition firstly involved doing nothing, hoping that the matter would go away, and then relating pollution control to business interests. Pluralist tendencies are also evident, due to the spatial, temporal, organisational and contextual fractures that introduced unwanted turbulence into the smooth exercise of business power. In essence, the relative plurality of the political system allowed other groups to mobilise 'space'. This forced the company to 'negotiate ... and when that failed retaliate'. Blowers (1983: 208) concluded that 'when business is at its weakest in economic terms it can defend itself against environmental pressures best' and 'when jobs and profits are on the line the business case meets with more sympathy from government'.

Blowers' case study complements that of Crenson, as both help illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of business power. It is worth stressing that both studies highlighted the interplay between business and other political and ideological factors, and the impact these had on weakening business influence across different locations. Whilst this produced short-term losses, business was also able to reorganise and engage in a more focused long-term lobbying strategy. Crenson and Blowers also highlighted the competence of business in establishing an implicit affinity within political circles through its 'reputation for power' and 'representation' of

environmental issues. This may help alleviate the relatively short-term compromises often made by business and produce a more beneficial (although difficult to establish) long-term influence. In both cases, when pollution issues were raised, the debate tended to centre on defining broad 'business friendly' policies that focused on operational standards and practices designed to accommodate the problems within the local political context. Business was also very flexible in its responses, although the preference was to do nothing when things were going well. Additionally, both studies also suggested that, if other actors manage to construct environmental issues as multidimensional problems, then business also appeared to be relatively weaker and lacking in direction. Business was more inclined to react and adapt when faced with regulatory pressures emerging from more than one source. However, it is also able to mobilise powerful sets of background assumptions about its pivotal economic role.

What can we learn from these studies? While both point to the capacity of business to influence the political process in a major way, two rather different interpretations could be put forward. On the one hand, both studies produce evidence of the importance of specific local factors: the way business responds to environmental issues, the success it has in defining the agenda and, ultimately, its impact on outcomes is not uniform. Institutional, economic, social and political factors that vary from community to community, from environmental issue to environmental issue, from country to country, are likely to affect the actions business takes.

A second, rival interpretation of these studies is that business is in a privileged position in the political process and is able to mobilise a unique set of resources. In particular, one feature of the prominent position of business is its control over the political agenda, over what are issues and non-issues. This raises a whole set of interesting theoretical and empirical challenges that need be explored in greater detail. But first, what specific lessons for a study of international business greening could be learned from the first perspective?

1.2.2. Pluralist and Institutional Perspectives

The vast majority of empirical studies of environmental policy and the role of business in policy-making emphasise the importance of political and institutional factors. Of particular interest here are studies that compare political processes across policy sectors and national political systems.

Looking at studies of the role of business in general, the dominance of the pluralist approach is particularly obvious (cf. Grant 1993). The focus on institutional features also means that factors specific to national political systems are accorded a dominant role. For example, one of the few contemporary introductory texts on business and politics unambiguously insists that the global policy of multinational business actors ultimately reflects the operation of national power structures (Wilson 2003). The overall depiction of business set out by Wilson (2003) is that marked variations exist across institutional structures and that business actors respond to political issues in different ways. Companies within the same sector are also prone to producing different strategies and responses. Such interpretations place more emphasis on identifying specific economic, political and social factors that operate within an issue area. These themes are also reflected in the work of Vogel (1989) who suggests that the decentralised structure of US regulatory politics produces different responses from business.

There is also a tendency to portray business as a reaction-oriented agent, as Eder's (1995) study of European business responses to environmental issues suggests. One of his main findings is that 'the influence of command and control mechanisms in tandem with critical impulses from the environmental movement have been important catalysts for change within business' across Europe's different political systems (Eder 1995: 92). One reason often cited in this context is the role of different national capitalist styles. Wilson (2003) acknowledges the roles that American liberalism and European corporatism play in shaping the strategic activities of business.

Research by Marien (1999) looked at the strategic responses by business to climate change and found that variations between American and European business can be

explained by the level of power available within the wider context of the issue while the 'severity of the challenge' [of climate change] played no role. As Scott (2001: 57) notes, business 'pressure is exercised in relation to certain issues or areas of policy and it is often quite difficult to transfer this power from one area to another'. The broader argument of this literature is that business discourse on any given issue tends to reflect the policy styles of different national and regional institutional structures, and different types of domestic policy ultimately determine the way business will organise its political responses (Lowi 1964).

These perspectives also argue that business interests are not monolithic or feature sets of easily transferable generic goals. One assumption these traditional approaches make is that business faces a range of localised factors that limit its capacity to organise its influence at the international level. One of these is the problem of uniting the different factions and range of opinion within the business community and translating this into a coherent voice on the international stage. This makes it extremely difficult to produce a collective voice, as reaching any agreements often involves establishing a consensus based on the lowest common denominator and making pragmatic compromises that serve the long-term strategic self-interest of the company. This is a major problem for the collective organisation and representation of business interests identified in the literature. Again, different national styles appear more or less conducive to resolving this problem, with important implications for the style and power of lobbying of US and European business interests (Grant *et al.* 2000; Gonzalez 2001).

The general assumption is that European business is more proactive and sympathetic towards the environment and US business is more antagonistic and anti-environmental (Clapp 2003a: 3–4). Gonzalez (2001) suggests that business elites dominate US environmental policy. The interpretation of a predominantly anti-environmental position of US business interests is also supported by sociological studies of counter-movements: US academics have documented the use of anti-environmental counter-movements among US business lobby groups and various conservative 'think-tanks' (Switzer 1997; Luke 1999; Austin 2002; McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003). For example, McCright and Dunlap (2000, 2003) have

highlighted the organised opposition of US business to policies designed to combat global warming. A major element of this opposition strategy was the attempt to define climate change as a 'non-problem'.

If there are regional differences in business political strategy that do reflect the favoured approaches of particular national capitalist styles, and different business sectors have responded in a variety of ways to the rise of environmental issues, what are the implications for a study of the role of business in international environmental politics? Any attempt to formulate a joint international business position would have to overcome major obstacles in the form of national and sectoral differences in the approach that business is taking on the environment. This clearly leads to a number of possible questions on the influence of national origin and sectoral positions of specific business actors at the international level. For example, could we expect business actors from the United States to promote a more anti-environmental, anti-NGO discourse as compared to European businesses? Are business actors associated with specific sectoral interests, such as oil, going to be more hostile to environmental activism than others? Ultimately, these potential obstacles also pose questions as to how coherent and comprehensive an attempt to promote a unified 'business' approach to the global environment could be.

However, approaches that emphasise the dominant role of sectoral interests and national styles may be challenged on a number of grounds. First, pluralist accounts of business influence often see business as just reacting to specific challenges. Utting (2000) points out that business greening reflects wider developments in the production, investment and marketing strategies of business. Often these display a tenuous linkage with the rise in public concern about environmental issues. Utting (2002a) updates a strand of literature that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s (Berle and Means 1968; Barnet and Muller 1974; Greenberg 1974; Gorz 1983; Utton 1982). The age of this literature does not detract from the current salience of its main themes and ideas. Business responses to political issues must be understood as a controlled and measured process. Business does not merely react, but also aspires to shape and guide the direction of debates that may affect long-term business interests.

Secondly, theorists of globalisation would argue for the dominance of a global discourse over national and sector interests. As Hay (1996: 426) has pointed out, the analytical preference had been to look at environmental problems within a local and national context without giving adequate consideration to their global character. The issue of globalisation is also addressed by Stokman *et al.* (1985) and Scott (1985) who highlight the increasingly global reach of companies through mergers and acquisitions, the use of organisational networks to facilitate joint ventures, sub-contracting and strategic alliances. Hymer (1979) has also noted that business investment in developing countries encourages unequal development. One overlooked aspect of this issue is that the legitimacy of business actors has also expanded. Higgott *et al.* (2000) note that business actors are slowly assuming 'authoritative positions' within policy implementation mechanisms and are actively involved in the setting of global governance standards. The issue of business expansion into global politics has also been discussed by Maucher (1993), Browne (2002) and Stigson (1998b).

This type of reasoning may be followed up more systematically with the rival approach that was derived from Crenson (1971) and Blowers (1983): here business is not just one actor among many, but structurally privileged and able to define the terms of political debate, imposing hegemony. This approach will now be explored more fully in the following section.

1.3. Business Greening as a Hegemonic Project

Crenson's *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution* remains one of the few empirical studies of 'non-decision'-making. First introduced by Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1970), the idea of 'non-decisions' sparked extensive discussion in the late 1960s and early 1970s: power was redefined, involving not just influence on decisions made by government but also on how the political agenda was formulated: some issues never made it on to the agenda and thus were never the subject of decisions. Lukes (1974) extended this approach further by adding a third dimension: the perfect exercise of power would influence the political process even before any non-decision-making could occur. For non-decision-making, an issue has to be recognised by a political

actor making an effort, and failing, to place it on the agenda. But some political problems would never be seen as potential issues, they would never reach the level of being seen as 'problems' that could be subject of politics.

Very close to Lukes' thinking on power is hegemonic theory. The concept of hegemony originated from the work of the Italian Marxist political thinker Antonio Gramsci (1977, 1978, 1985; cf. Ransome 1992), who sought to offer an account of the socialising role of political systems. One of Gramsci's broad aims was to transcend the Marxian view that the economic base determined the general condition of the superstructure and to inject the notion that ideology plays a more significant role in securing consent and manufacturing legitimacy (Eagleton 1998). This places more emphasis on the role of dominant groups as active political agents, identifying the various ways that dominant groups secure and expand the influence of capitalist economic relations over subalterns. In the struggle to maintain hegemony, business elites have an impressive range of resources that help facilitate the exercise of intellectual, cultural, moral and political 'leadership'. Hegemonic theory accords elite groups the power to mobilise pro-business beliefs, values and solutions. This involves continuously maximising opportunities to depoliticise contentious issues and thwart the activities of oppositional groups. Gramsci also retained some critical elements of Marxian political thought: emphasising the role of class and the importance of conflict and crisis as forces propelling structural change. For Gramsci, the relationship between the economic and the social was more complex, and political change did not automatically reflect the workings of the economic base. This refocused the Marxian idea of conflict and struggle as a source of societal change and extended it into the socio-cultural realm.

How could we conceive of business greening in terms of a theory of power and/or hegemony? There are many authors who have written about the dominant place of business in the political process in general terms. One of the most influential works has been Lindblom (1977) who suggests that business has a disproportionate influence and a higher level of 'structural power' within societies organised around the capitalist market. He introduced the concept of 'circularity' which means that 'corporations can effectively tailor the issues which citizens raise and the volitions

(i.e. the mixture of preferences, moral evaluations and judgements) about feasibility which citizens form' (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 294). Lindblom (1977) also suggested that powerful business actors have a 'reputation for power' and governments tend to calculate their policies based on their perceptions of this power. He also recognised, however, that business involvement and activism are not uniform, and suggested that one way of explaining the variation in business responses is that business actors have different levels of structural power.

The importance of Lindblom's approach is generally recognised in the literature on politics and business (cf. McLennan 1997; Wilson 2003). But how can such an approach be employed empirically? One approach is to focus on communication. Carey (1997) has systematically documented the high level of representational power within American business, particularly the substantial number of public relations strategies that aspire to alter public perceptions of business. Carey (1997: 146) also identifies two broad strategic objectives. The first attempts to use public education and information saturation to alter perceptions of business performance; the second approach aims to change the symbols and language used to describe business performance. Both approaches generally involve only the minimum of change in business performance. Some of the targets of these programmes include the more common 'grass-roots' shaping of public opinion and more sophisticated efforts oriented towards the policy elite. Molotch (1970: 138–141) also noted that realising such objectives depends on the skilful manipulation of events to portray them as 'pseudo' or 'creeping events'. Pseudo-events allow some form of limited participation so that those taking part can 'blow off steam' or be passive observers of tokenistic action, whereas 'creeping' events, involve rearranging a discourse associated with controversial processes in order to portray events as taking place at an 'inconspicuously gradual and piecemeal pace'. One important technique used by business is to strengthen its symbols by repeating them across a variety of contexts.

How could a hegemonic theory of business influence be applied to environmental issues, particularly at the international level? There are quite a few studies that have argued that international business is a privileged actor who occupies a dominant position within global environmental politics (e.g. Levy and Newell 2002; Paterson

2000; Vogler and Imber 1996; Utting 2000, 2002a,b; and Sklair 2001, 2002). The main suggestion is that the trajectory of international business greening is shaped by the interrelationship between politics and economics and critical variables such as class and ideology. Levy and Newell (2002) point out that the rise of ecological problems has defined new political struggles between international business and other non-state and state actors over the form in which global environmental discourse is institutionalised. Sklair (2002) has also suggested that international business attempts to use its structurally privileged position to ensure the long-term institutionalisation of environmental policies and debates are conducive to their economic interests.

But how exactly is business exerting its influence, and what research questions for our empirical inquiry can we deduce from this literature? One possible way forward for international business is to influence the way in which environmental issues are framed and discussed. As Fuchs (2004) has pointed out, business can mobilise its 'discursive power', displaying a seemingly limitless capacity to frame and reframe how environmental issues are discussed. What can a theory of hegemony, however, suggest by way of influence in the case of the Earth Summit discourses? To approach this question, a deeper discussion of the literature is necessary, and it is particularly the work of the sociologist Leslie Sklair and his notion of the 'historical bloc' that is of particular use here.

Sklair (2001) expands on the Gramscian idea that dominant groups establish exclusive organisational structures and alliances to transmit intellectual, moral and political leadership, and suggests that international business greening is organised around a 'sustainable development historical bloc'. Andrée (2005: 136–137) defines this as 'the alignment of material, organizational, and discursive formations' with the overall objective to 'stabilize relations of production and meanings'. This organisational framework looks at reducing risks through policy standardisation and the 'ecological' rationalisation of resource exploitation. Cutler *et al.* (1999), Higgot *et al.* (2000), Hall and Biersteker (2002) and Carroll and Carson (2003) also suggest that international business is now more predisposed to forming 'private regimes' and expanding their 'authority' into new regulatory areas. Levy and Newell (2005: 29)

define these as ‘international institutional mechanisms, aimed at bringing order to an area of business activity, in which state authority is either not present at all, or not the predominant form of political authority’. Vertovec (2001) suggests that this is very similar to an historical bloc, due to the emphasis placed on the capacity of business to utilise its high-profile roles within transitional business networks to develop specific issue-related organisational structures and initiatives. In essence, the terms ‘private regimes’ and ‘authority’ could be considered, for analytical purposes, as facets of an historical bloc.

Sklair (2001) uses the historical bloc as a heuristic tool to describe how business is organising at the global level. The suggestion made by Sklair is that key business actors,¹ most notably the neo-liberal regulationist faction, now play a prominent role in the ‘sustainable development historical bloc’. The most active business sectors tend to be companies that have a high public profile, international/global organisational and operating structure, and a globalising outlook. Other affiliates of this bloc include elites from state institutions, international regulatory bodies and selected NGOs.

The sustainable development historical bloc is a loose ‘voluntary’ coalition that broadly functions as a large-scale policy network. Within this, other smaller blocs also form to address specific issues or policy domains. Andrée (2005) and Newell (2003) have both identified a ‘biotech bloc’. A major part of what an historical bloc does involves promoting more effective policy co-ordination or ‘governance’ between business, states, non-state actors and the environment. Sklair (2000) primarily employs the historical bloc concept as a heuristic metaphor to help identify the emergence of a relatively new political project by business. This concept also relates to the historical development of environmental problems, with particular emphasis on the environmental impact of the neo-liberal globalisation of trade and commerce.

¹ This generally covers the ‘major players’ in each sector and includes oil and petroleum, chemical, automobiles, manufacturing and biotechnology. In addition, these companies have the most to lose through adverse publicity and the imposition of unfavourable regulation.

The sustainable development historical bloc also represents a set of institutional practices and ideological beliefs that operate on a relatively large scale. A prime example of a business-sanctioned sustainable development historical bloc is the gradual involvement of individual corporations and business lobby groups, and global financial institutions such as the World Bank and selected NGOs in the formulation and implementation of UN developmental projects. Another example is the intensification of business involvement in designing initiatives that further the deregulation of international environmental policy through securing voluntary outcomes. Finally, global voluntary charters and codes of conduct, such as the UN Global Compact with business, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises are also relevant examples of the sustainable development bloc thesis (Clapp 2003a, Richter 2002). Clapp (2005) has also highlighted the entrenched business involvement in the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) that formulates voluntary certification and standardisation mechanisms for industry. One important comment is made by Levy and Newell (2005: 29) who suggest that such arrangements are often made at the behest of business. They identify a range of substantial business benefits such as 'establishing rules, norms, and decision-making procedures, without requiring the exercise of state power to validate or enforce them'. This also helps legitimate business as a leading environmental actor. One further benefit is that these arrangements potentially exclude other small to medium-sized and local enterprises from participation, due to the high entry and compliance costs.

What kind of evidence is there that business has formed a sustainable development historical bloc? Sklair's (2001) account involves primary documentary work that focuses on what companies are saying in their social and environmental reports. These are combined with secondary accounts of observable behaviour, largely derived from NGO reports. Sklair (2001) also employs economic data to identify changes in the global financial infrastructure. These data highlight the trend towards concentrated patterns of ownership, increases in capital flows and more companies using foreign direct investment (FDI) as a tool to gain political advantage (Hymer 1979). Hymer (1979) has noted that this allows companies to negotiate operating terms and conditions and to disperse their operations across different geographic

locations. Utting (2002a) also notes that these global commodity chains allow companies to outsource their production and market goods to a number of different places. Sklair (2001) also suggests that the cultural-ideological and production aspects of globalisation play an important role in the formulation of a globalising 'worldview' among business elites. The broader argument made by this literature is that the later shifts have provided business with a set of rationales to form various strategic blocs organised around global environmental issues.

One unresolved problem with the historical bloc thesis is the lack of detail on the actors involved and how the bloc is organised. Carroll and Carson (2003a,b) and Carroll and Fennema (2002) seek to rectify this. The latter have also highlighted the growing importance of transnational inter-business elite co-operation and cultural networks in disseminating their 'worldview'. The difference is that they use the policy network metaphor. Carroll and Carson (2003a,b) map out the leading corporate actors involved in an international pro-business sustainable development policy network. Scott (1997) and Herman (1982) have pointed out that one important background factor that makes this possible is the complex nature and high number of interlocking directorships held by chief executive officers (CEOs).

Prominent in this 'network' is a new generation of business lobbying associations, such as the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and traditional sectoral associations that have expanded their remit into the global environmental policy arena. Carroll and Carson (2003a,b) provide a useful map of the high number of linkages between corporate elites and different lobbying groups. They conclude that five international policy groups exercise *de facto* business domination over the international environmental scene. These are the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission, the World Economic Forum and the WBCSD. There are also numerous inter-elite connections with other globally oriented trade and development institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation.

Schneider (2001) also suggests that ICC plays an important role in representing business within the global arena and actively lobbies for fiscal and trade liberalisation and voluntary regulation.

Carroll and Carson's (2003a,b) method begins by identifying the most active business elites clustered around sustainable development issues. The main difference is that they trace and map elite membership patterns across the various network organisations. This records the number of different companies that are most active at the global level. They concluded that it is 'clear that a few dozen cosmopolitans ... actively engaged in corporate management ... knit the network together' (Carroll and Carson 2003a: 54). This network is global in its outreach, but is dominated by European and US and, to a much lesser extent, Asian-Pacific Rim companies. Interestingly, Carroll and Carson (2003a,b) note that regional differences are also reproduced at the international/global level. However, they are unclear about the extent to which this network may actually act as a forum for modifying national positions, and smooth over differences or developing distinct transitional identities. Also making similar points is Sklair (2002: Ch. 1) who argues that business uses these types of network to promote a 'globalising ideology' that aggressively employs the 'discourses of national competitiveness and sustainable development' to promote the transnationalisation of economic activity and a culture of consumerism. For Sklair, global companies consistently present different or modified sets of ideological beliefs and practices at the global level.

Levy and Newell (2000) also argue that there is an emerging transatlantic consensus between European and US companies, and this is reflected in the circulation and socialisation of elites at formal and informal international gatherings. They identify a 'regulatory bloc' that is organised around a key issue and the objective is to establish a discursive and organisational consensus. Their evidence points to the formation of relatively new lobbying and promotional organisations such as the Transatlantic Business Dialogue. Grant and Coen (2000) note that this was established in 1995 with a remit of fostering cross-sector and inter-regional elite consensus on political strategies. The main thesis presented by Levy and Newell (2000) is that, despite the blustery anti-environmental rhetoric among some US companies, European and US

companies appear to be broadly pursuing strategies that display many similarities. They have identified a tendency towards American and European companies supporting the adoption of similar institutional, regulatory and economic frameworks. One reason for this is that the 'economic environment is globalizing and companies facing these issues are more multinational in their structures and outlooks; not surprisingly, there is a trend toward convergence' (Levy and Newell 2000: 12). They conclude their study by suggesting that, whilst there are still differences in the business approach to specific issues (e.g. genetically modified crops and emissions reduction), these tend to be about the 'form' rather than the 'substance'. Dunn (2003) has also noted that globally operating companies within the US and Europe are investing heavily in self-regulatory mechanisms, such as cleaner technology and aggressively lobbying for the widespread use of voluntary mechanisms. One drawback here is that Levy and Newell (2000) and Dunn (2003) can only partially confirm this theory as they focus on only a small number of companies, although they do find roughly equal investment patterns in developing new 'green technology' and 'renewable energy'.

In a separate study, Jordan *et al.* (2003) note that there is a growing consensus among European business on regulatory preferences, and this appears to be proving successful, as the use of voluntary and market instruments is now widespread. These are labelled 'new environmental policy instruments'. The European dimension is important as many of these companies also operate at the international level. Jordan *et al.* (2003) also suggest that one of the key ideational drivers is the 'neo-liberal paradigm'. However, they also found institutional differences in take up, the evolutionary and incremental nature of institutional adaptation and the continued use of 'command and control' regulation as a 'support function' (Jordan *et al.* 2003: 220–222). One problem is that 'national environmental policies have probably diverged in the last 30 years in spite of the EU's attempts to promote greater harmonisation and hence convergence' (Jordan *et al.* 2003: 220). Conversely, whilst Levy and Newell (2000) have identified strategic policy convergence within the business community, Jordan *et al.* (2003) note that states also adopt different forms and variations of regulatory instruments.

A further variable not referred to in previous accounts that could make a contribution to a hegemonic theory of business greening is class: business elites could also be seen as a class-conscious group, and the discourse of business greening could thus be understood as an class-driven concept. Class interests provide business actors with a transferable set of shared affiliations, duties, obligations and beliefs. These are the broad arguments made by authors who include Bellamy Foster (2000, 2002), Kovel (2002), Gonzalez (2001), Tombs (1993) and O'Connor (1994). Bellamy Foster (2002) believes that business elites are a social class that displays a unified consistency in ideas such as the liberalisation of markets and the freedom of transnational capital being axiomatic to altering the negative aspects of global environmental conditions. O'Connor (1994: 63–66) also suggests that business greening reflects an unfolding 'crisis' within capital, and the necessity of exerting 'solutions' that advocate rational control over production processes and business dominance over the environment. To this extent, business production processes are inherently harmful to the environment, yet within the logic of accumulation, they are always considered as separate from each other. Explaining these conditions requires business elites to develop feasible 'solutions' to address different 'macro' crisis tendencies and the specific conflicts between different groups organised around environmental issues. Robinson and Harris (2000) disagree, and believe that business actors should first be analysed as a class-conscious unit, and second along issue-based lines. It is more productive to consider the two as complementary, as class ideology shapes organisation, and in turn conflicts over different issues also shape class ideology.

Generally, this body of literature employs an analytical approach that moves beyond accounting for business greening in terms of identifying observable variables such as different national policy styles, company variations towards the take-up of technological innovation, a desire by the company to be responsible or the role of managerial 'champions'. Instead, authors such as Bellamy Foster (2002) and Sklair (2000) suggest that identifying the different class factions active at the *global level* highlights the possible spectrum of elite opinion on environmental issues. This then offers an indication of some of the possible shared ideological areas that assist in the production of business greening. O'Connor (1994), Kovel (2002), Bellamy Foster

(2000, 2002) and Sklair (2000) all see business as sharing a common ideological framework that draws its most significant meanings from relatively fixed points of reference (often derived from economic reductionism). These include such factors as the necessity of private ownership and control, economic growth and the importance of profitability. They broadly suggest that a combination of wider societal and economic changes (including the global character of environmental issues and public opinion) and internal cultural shifts within business contribute towards modifications in the ideological and organisational structure of business. Ogbor (2001) sees this as a corporate managerial culture that reinforces the ideology, legitimacy and power relations of managerial elites.

On the basis of much of this literature, one could thus expect an international effort on the part of business to form a unified view on global environmental issues and to promote such views at high-profile venues such as the Johannesburg Earth Summit. Before considering more specific research questions for empirical inquiry that could be derived from this literature, what views of business greening are promoted by academic disciplines that, by definition, have a different general outlook on business, such as business studies, market communication and management?

1.4. Managerial Approaches

A significant volume of the mainstream business studies literature emphasises business greening as an incremental series of production process improvements and the spread of a culture of environmental responsibility at senior managerial level (Hitchcock and Blair 2000: 137). Rikhardsson and Welford (1997: 51–58) suggest that these are filtered through a positivist framework that emphasises cultural change and rational planning. A corresponding body of academic literature has also emerged that aims to improve how business understands and implements these processes. Taken together, this creates a powerful group of normative and prescriptive assumptions about business greening.

The research on business greening discussed here aims to provide business and other policy-makers with empirically verifiable facts and workable management models

for improving future business environmental scenarios. The rational element assumes that it is both possible and desirable for business elites to impose certainty and predictability on the future direction of environmental problems through better measurement and quantification. Rikhardsson and Welford (1997: 51) identify standardisation and cost savings as key drivers of business greening, with standardisation defined as a 'wish to minimise human effort and simplify decision making'. McIntosh *et al.* (1998: 105–113) present current business cost savings made through management systems and technological developments as facts that contribute towards sustainable development. The language of this literature favours 'systems' metaphors that prioritise strategic options and preferences through the application of ranking tools such as cost–benefit analysis and total quality management.

Business appears to be taking greening seriously. A cursory glance through the annual report of any multinational company suggests that business has transformed how and why it does business. The reports highlight multitudes of case studies that detail shifts in investment, production and marketing towards 'sustainable development', as well as outlining plans for more of the same. Fineman (2000) suggests that many of the companies producing this kind of literature share a general optimism that the environmental agenda represents a 'challenge' and at the same time an 'opportunity' for the most 'far sighted' companies to gain a 'competitive advantage' by embracing environmental issues and thinking up new ways to turn these into profitable opportunities. Failure to adjust to the 'sustainability challenge' potentially means a loss of market share and legitimacy and, in the worst-case scenario, company failure.

The main concept with a cultural explanation is Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility (CESR) (Shrivastava 1995; Macleod and Lewis 2004; Whitehouse 2003). CESR incorporates a number of different components. These include the belief that business is an integrated part of society and that environmental problems significantly affect business legitimacy and profitability. Some authors see an unacceptable level of irresponsible behaviour within business that needs to be addressed (Mitchell 2001; Moore and Richardson 1987; Wartick and Wood 1998,

Ch. 4). Sethi (2003) also notes that 'globalisation' places more pressure on business to act responsibly. CCSR is a concept that now operates across the full range of different business sectors and has also attained a high international profile. It has thus come to be associated with the expansion of global business. Consumers, as opposed to governments, are the key agents within CCSR and have the capacity to inflict damage on business competitiveness (Gueterbock 2004). One of the central claims is that business continues to develop a collective sense of environmental responsibility and has instilled business commercial objectives with a moral and ethical purpose (Barry 1991; Paladino and Willi 2001; Dyllick and Hockerts 2002).

The socially responsible company is an historical idea that revolved around business elites using enlightened self-interest and individual philanthropy to mitigate the worst effects of their practices and secure their status as both moral and ethical guardians (Himmelstein 1997). This is often associated with the work of Victorian philanthropists in the UK such as Robert Owen and his 'model' villages (Owen 1813/1999; Pike 1999, 2000). One trend is that the implementation of this ideology has often been undertaken in an ad hoc fashion, often at the discretion of individual companies and small groups of enlightened business leaders (Kolasa 1972).

Three interrelated claims are attached to the CCSR concept. These are:

1. The belief that greater legitimacy is bestowed by 'society' upon environmentally responsible companies.
2. Business is now more responsible for outcomes that were traditionally treated as externalities. This has shifted towards favouring outcomes that are defined along environmental lines.
3. The globalisation of trade and production means that managers have a higher degree of relative decision-making autonomy. This allows them to exercise moral and ethical discretion.

Much of the contemporary literature builds on the historical residue of the social responsibility doctrine and extends this to the environment. Sklair (2000), analysing these developments from a critical sociological perspective, also notes that this concept now has a distinct global dimension. Business is using 'citizenship' and 'responsibility' arguments to produce a common set of ideas within its community (Stigson 1998a; Windsor 2001; Andriof and McIntosh 2001). These concepts have

generated a substantial body of literature that suggests that business has a set of ethical and moral obligations towards minimising negative impacts and ensuring that business is conducted within an 'open and transparent' framework. Achieving the latter involves the application of environmentally oriented operating standards and codes of conduct, both monitored through voluntary and quasi-binding reporting mechanisms (such as the ISO standards).

McIntosh *et al.* (1998) provide one of the main arguments for CESR as a valid political response by business to the rise of environmental issues. Here business has entered a 'new phase' motivated by a desire to implement 'corporate environmental responsibility' and 'citizenship'. This is the result of factors such as the decline of command economies, the spread of economic liberalisation and the increasingly high public profile of companies. This means that 'companies are beginning to understand that they have a moral responsibility towards the environment' and 'taking responsibility for their own waste' by 'internalizing its externalities' (McIntosh *et al.* 1998: 95–101). In short, a 'revolution is taking place that will radically change the way in which companies go about their business' (McIntosh *et al.* 1998: 95–101). These are not isolated views confined to the populist management texts produced by McIntosh *et al.* (1998). Academics such as Smith (1993) employ the term 'paradigm shift' to describe the change in the way business views the environment (cf. Aigner 1999; Altman 1998; Freeman *et al.* 2000; Hollins 2000). Business leaders also share such views, as Chris Marsden, then Director of the BP Corporate Citizenship, asserts:

It is essential to dispense with the old cynically induced paradigm that business is not only essentially amoral but also driven by the profit motive and short term market pressures inexorably into doing bad things (Marsden 1998: 37)²

One of the main claims made within the CESR framework is that companies are more than inanimate structures, as business has obligations towards 'stakeholders' and the environment is increasingly accorded the properties of a 'stakeholder' (Bovens 1998). Although promoting responsible behaviour logically suggests the

² Lord Browne, group CEO of BP, provides a stark contrast to Marsden's claim: Lord Browne candidly reminds us that the environmental approach of BP 'is dictated by self-interest. Companies are not aid agencies or charities – rather, their purpose is simply creating future wealth on behalf of shareholders . If BP doesn't do that it will go out of business' (Browne 2002: 225) .

existence of irresponsible behaviour, this has no negative impact on how definitional components are applied in the construction of the CCSR discourse. Instead, the tendency is to utilise the conceptual terminology within a largely positive light. Shrivastava (1995) provides a good illustration of how CCSR fits within a business-centric, cultural, rational approach. For CCSR advocates, the concept embodies a worthy set of principles for guiding the overall trajectory of business greening.

Shrivastava (1995) and Elkington (1994) both believe that the rise of environmental issues has sparked a cultural change within business ranks and the traditional paradigm of 'industrial management' is evolving towards 'ecocentric management'. Shrivastava claims that this is

...management that respects nature and uses it with care and responsibility. This is not remedial management aimed at repairing environmental damages even as companies continue to further damage the environment (Shrivastava 1995: 188)

As companies experiment and diversify with various environmentally friendly management systems, they produce a cultural domino effect in business practice. This places an emphasis on business establishing and maintaining harmony with nature, viewing resources as a mixture of the finite and infinite, and focusing on pollution, and waste elimination and management. The kind of ecocentric change that Shrivastava (1995: 189) has in mind is located within such areas as process changes leading to environmentally valued products, recycled packaging, cleaner technologies, and energy and resource conservation. These reflect the reorientation of management systems towards reducing pollution and waste and creating new technology markets (Cook and Barclay 2002). The main example used by Shrivastava (1995) to illustrate the dangers of avoiding ecocentric management is Union Carbide and its subsequent decline since the 1984 chemical spillage in Bhopal in India. This is primary due to the company's failure to engage in socially and environmentally responsible practices based on ecocentric management (Shrivastava 1995: 193–196).

One of the most significant background factors driving explanations of cultural change is the desire to move away from the mechanistic top-down approaches of

'traditional industrial management' and the libertarian view of business as a profit-seeking entity (Jacoby 1973; Shrivastava 1995; Arnold 2003). Some of the main features of this include the idea that business exists only to maximise profits and profitability, and the business view of nature as an infinite resource is subsumed to business needs. Here pollution and waste are treated as externalities, occurring when a business indirectly and directly passes on the costs (social, economic, health, safety etc.) associated with its internal actions (Mishan 1971). Business greening, within these perspectives, has to accommodate and formulate its main concepts within an historical framework in which business is viewed as an 'externalising machine' (Mishan 1971; Sethi 1974; Kovel 2002).

One of the best known proponents of 'traditional industrial management' is the neo-liberal economist Milton Friedman. In 1970, Friedman published an article 'The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits'. This sets out what can be referred to as the minimalist position and consists of the following broad arguments. The organisational structure of a business and its legal rules provide a systematic framework for competing within a market economy dictated by the rule of law. In this framework, there are no legal requirements for businesses to engage with moral and social affairs beyond maximising shareholder value. This viewpoint also suggests that legal frameworks require tightening to eliminate any interference with the profit motive and that well-ordered and strong governance is sufficient to ensure business compliance with regulatory regimes. Minimum legal requirements (which vary depending on the operating context) are to act as the prime conduit for imposing socially prescribed norms on to the operating practices of business. Supporters of such a minimalist position, such as Wood and Ivens (1973), contend that there is an irreconcilable tension between profitability and the broadening-beyond-profits rhetoric of corporate responsibility.

The kind of social responsibility Friedman envisaged was the use of quasi-philanthropic investments close to production sites as a means of image legitimisation, issue management and proactive engagement. This is a rational approach that ties business greening in with measured and controlled benefits that demonstrate a clear link to economic objectives. As Friedman (1970) pointed out,

social responsibility was desirable as a 'cloak for actions that are justified on other grounds rather than a reason for those actions'. Because of these kinds of philanthropic actions, profits could be further maximised. Therefore, within the minimalist position, environmental philanthropic activity such as responsible care programmes and charitable donations are legitimate concerns if they ultimately serve the maximisation of profits and shareholder value. Ultimately, these types of ventures are permissible as they entail 'one way for a corporation to generate goodwill as a by-product of expenditures that are entirely justified in its own self-interest' (Friedman 1970).

To recapitulate, the idea that business has a wider environmental responsibility that should influence the way in which companies do business has by no means been universally accepted within the business community and by business academics. It is particularly interesting, however, that the CESR idea seems to have taken off in the 1990s despite a fairly long-standing tradition of scepticism among prominent proponents of neo-liberal economic approaches such as Milton Friedman. The inclusion of environmental issues as part of the corporate responsibility agenda gained prominence at the same time, thus coinciding with the Rio Earth Summit and its aftermath. This raises some interesting questions that will be explored below.

Before discussing the implications of this literature for the present study, another perspective within the mainstream business literature should be mentioned. Much of the literature on CESR is advocacy: authors promote the idea of CESR with reference to environmental and business data as well as broader economic philosophies. A more hard-headed empirical approach is, however, taken by some management studies experts who analyse which companies actually embrace the green agenda and which fail to do so.

Business greening is here seen as a set of rational internal responses, partially dictated by external stimuli. This analytical framework assumes that business structures comprise individual actors who have the necessary operational autonomy to enact personal preferences. In effect, they occupy a dual role as managers and policy entrepreneurs. Explaining how environmental issues are addressed within a

company involves managers weighing up the costs and benefits to the business and ranking strategic preferences. This creates a shared network of knowledge that allows certain pro-environmental practices to be shared and eventually institutionalised (Fussler and George 2000; Green *et al.* 2000).

This is a type of methodological individualism which believes that ‘the policies of composite actors should eventually be traced to preferences, endowments and strategies of individual actors, as articulated *within their internal institutions*’ (Prakash 2000: 140 emphasis added). Dion (1998: 160) broadens this claim and suggests that ‘what basically motivates business leaders in their corporate environmental policies is their personal conception of environmental responsibility itself, because they want to affirm that their actions and decisions are compatible with the protection of the environment’. This mixes a genuine desire on the part of business actors to save the environment from harm with the idea that these actors have a substantial amount of causal power.

One of the major empirical studies in this field has been conducted by Prakash (2000). He combines rational and cultural approaches to explain why some companies adopt green strategies and policy preferences that appear to offer no intrinsic benefits and go beyond compliance. The general conclusion is that different managerial styles are linked to the feasibility of making changes beyond compliance. This leads Prakash (2000: 18–20) to suggest that managers generally try to achieve a positive accommodation with environmentalism, and this group is a driving force in business greening. In addition, the idea of different company cultures is also used to account for variations in environmental policy uptake and implementation by business. Obviously, this does not naïvely locate individual managerial styles as the decisive brokers of change. Instead, their conclusions are arrived at through the study of creative and opportunistic individuals who also function within institutions that have their own organisational rules, norms and goals. Overall, the emphasis is on understanding how individuals or small groups using rational cost–benefit analysis make sense of these contexts. This allows managers to order policy preferences based on factors such as feasibility, cost savings and potential environmental impact. In addition Dion (1998: 160) also suggests that business elites ‘try to make their

corporate policies conform to a conception of environmental responsibility that they perceive as being representative of the whole of society and, above all, of various types of consumers'. These are the main processes that allow business to implement different 'solution oriented' practices.

When viewed from the rational model, the different shareholder groups that have interests in companies reduce the capacity for full control over the actions of managers (Scott 1997). There are legal restrictions and organisational limits that restrict the extent to which those controlling interests can exercise direct authority over what a company does. This creates a gap between the ability of controlling constellations to maintain full control and the localised knowledge and day-to-day decision-making abilities of the managerial strata and their ability to exploit the socially embedded norms and values necessary to legitimate business activity (Morgan 2001). Arguably, this gap provides one possible context for business to develop environmentally oriented practices. However, as Scott (1997; cf. Herman 1982; Mander 2001 Ch. 6) points out, in the long term there are limits to the level and depth of this type of change, as managers are also restricted by legal obligations to maximise shareholder value. Therefore, many of the changes highlighted within these models must demonstrate a clear linkage to cost savings, and these may have a minimal long-term role in lessening the environmental impact of business. Pearce and Tombs (1998) note there are more incentives for managers and companies in general to avoid implementing sweeping environmental change. The most significant is that these may lead to a decline in profits, competitors fill the gap, and managers lose their jobs. Similarly, James *et al.* (1999), in a survey of UK companies, found that the threat of external compulsion (both real and imagined) plays a determining role in determining business environmental approaches. Cultural-rational explanations discount these factors and assume that there are significant differences in the organisational make-up of business and different companies implement their own creative range of environmentally oriented changes. Prakash (2000) disputes this view, arguing that business culture also consists of environmentally minded and far-sighted individuals. These elites also have their own self-directed conception of what is environmentally good for their company and these champions can establish a 'behind the scenes' momentum. In turn, this helps to

diffuse environmentally enlightened management ideas into concentrated change within business practice.

1.5. Discussion

A range of approaches to how business should and does approach environmental questions has been reviewed. The two main traditions that have been contrasted involved political science/sociology, on the one hand, and business and management studies, on the other. Contrasting the literature on business greening in both traditions, some interesting parallels are seen. In both cases, a meta-narrative is offered which links business greening to macro-social changes. In one case, it is the hegemonic desire of business to define the debate and protect its long-term interests which is seen as the driving force; in the other, it is a broad cultural change in which business leaders are converted to take environmental responsibility seriously and adjust business practices to the green agenda. Interestingly, in both cases, this meta-narrative is challenged by empirical studies looking at specific cases of business greening. Within political science, there is the suggestion that the kind of involvement of business in environmental politics is dependent on political and institutional conditions: business greening may thus be different from sector to sector, policy level to policy level, and from country to country. Also within management studies, the idea of a wholehearted embrace of environmental responsibility is countered by empirical analyses of the degree to which individual companies adopt green policies, focusing on many different factors including management cultures and other company-specific conditions.

What are the implications of these aspects of the literature for an empirical study of business greening at the international level? What in particular could be said on this basis about possible changes in business attitudes to the environment from 1992 to 2002?

Many aspects of business greening that are discussed cannot be subject to direct empirical testing, either because of their nature as meta theory, or due to the kind of empirical study that is proposed. For example, the data collection involved in this

study does not allow for a detailed analysis of why individual companies might be represented at an Earth Summit or support a specific group to formulate a position and represent the business community. It also is not the remit of this study to investigate to what extent business groups genuinely believe in the green agenda and the responsibility of business to respond to it, or whether they are primarily motivated by the desire to create a favourable business climate that is not affected by state intervention imposing undesirable regulatory costs.

The empirical study presented here can shed light on a number of key questions, however. First, the narratives of an active business greening raise expectations that, indeed, the business community will try to formulate a joint business approach to the global environmental politics agenda. The hegemonic approach to business greening in particular suggests that business will not just respond but will actively engage with a political agenda that might threaten the future viability of a positive business environment. Findings of a uniform business approach being actively promoted at earth summits would provide support for this particular way of approaching business greening. From within business studies, the corporate responsibility approach – including not just social but also environmental concerns – would also suggest a need for the business community, as led by its more ‘enlightened’ representatives, to promote the business greening agenda.

In terms of the change from Rio to Johannesburg, both approaches can contribute something: the hegemonic approach in particular focuses on major changes in the political, social and economic organisation of business since the early 1990s. The increasing force of globalisation and the corresponding growth of a transnational business elite that interacts constantly provides a basis for expecting the role of business groups and the size of their effort to influence the agenda to have grown substantially from 1992 to 2002. A rival approach would turn to the rise of the environmental corporate responsibility agenda as a contributing factor: CESR took off in a major way in the 1990s. While the corporate responsibility approach is much older, the rise of global environmental issues in the late 1980s provided a platform for environmental issues to be incorporated. As the 1990s progressed, the presence of CESR in the academic and business world increased dramatically. Thus, it could be

expected that by the time Johannesburg came round, the CCSR 'movement' was far more advanced and more influential than it had been in 1992, thus resulting in a far greater effort on the part of the business community to put its case in a coherent way to the world in 2002.

While the reasons for any changes between 1992 and 2002 at the macro-social level are not immediately subject to empirical testing, more promising in this regard are the ideas of the challengers to the meta-narratives who can be used to dispute the uniform nature of the business greening process at the international level. Within political science, it is the pluralist and institutional approaches that are particularly specific in their focus that might provide the basis for interesting research questions, and these are matched by approaches from management studies. To be fair to those working with hegemonic theory, there is also an awareness here that contextual factors can make a difference to the way business may behave.

At the institutional level, the increasing role of business at Johannesburg could also be seen as due to policy learning. In 1992, the internationalisation of environmental politics had already made great strides, but major initiatives were set in motion only at Rio. By the time the 2002 WSSD came along business groups, as well as many other non-governmental participants, had acquired much more experience on the international environmental conference circuit. In other words, while Rio 1992 was still a bit of a novelty, by 2002 actors such as business groups had fully adjusted to the availability and potential importance of such conferences for global debate.

The literature on environmental policy-making nevertheless gave rise to many questions that implicitly challenge central elements of the meta-narrative of an increasing and common degree of business greening activity at Earth Summits. First, there are the sectoral differences: if we assume, as studies such as Prakash (2000) would suggest, that individual companies would consider taking action on business greening on the basis of rational calculations of costs and benefits, then not all members of the business community might have the same degree of interest in being involved in Earth Summits. Furthermore, the approach to business greening might well differ radically between business sectors, leading to the potential of major

internal conflicts within the business sector if attempts at a common approach are made.

Furthermore, we have to consider well-documented cross-national differences in the role of business in the political process in general, and environmental politics in particular. It seems fairly well established that anti-environmental business strategies are not uncommon in the US but rather more rare in Europe. Can any attempt to broker a common approach to business greening succeed under these circumstances?

These approaches certainly define obstacles that business representatives interested in a common approach would have to overcome. The degree of difference in terms of sector and country can easily be tested empirically by recording information about the originators of the text to be analysed, in particular in the case of individual companies and business groups associated with particular economic sectors and/or regions. If the idea popular among some hegemonic theorists, such as Sklair (2002), is correct that the 1990s and 2000s have seen the emergence of a new transnational business elite, then one may expect evidence that the way business was represented and communicated its views changed perhaps rather dramatically from 1992 to 2002, with 2002 seeing a more transnational organisation with a greater effort to produce a common position.

There is another element of the institutional approach that might actually support such a view: Johannesburg and, to some extent, Rio, were dominated by environmental debates on sustainable development, a policy area that arguably could be seen as 'symbolic' politics, using Edelman's (1964) terminology. Two possible consequences could arise from this notion: first, we could expect that the somewhat tenuous nature of debates at these summits would make it easier for business to form a common position – there are fewer possibilities for either sectoral or nation-specific vested interests to intervene. Also, within the sustainable development framework, an anti-environmental position seems rather difficult to conceive. In this way, earth summits could be seen as ideal targets for the formulation of common business approaches. Secondly, however, the low stakes of a 'symbolic politics' event provide fewer incentives for companies to become involved. From that point of

view, one would expect business representation at Johannesburg to be less prominent than at Rio. This is perhaps a crucial question: if, despite the mere symbolic nature of the Johannesburg conference, business activities are much greater and more systematic than at Rio, then the idea of a new international business elite promoting a new environmental activism would gain some support.

In conclusion, the literature review of this chapter has led to a number of interesting research questions, some of which can be tested with the data collected. But there is one crucial aspect of the story neglected so far: the focus on discourses. If, indeed, business is making an increasingly sophisticated effort to promote a business greening discourse at the international level, then the question arises as to the nature and content of such a discourse. What does this discourse amount to, and what does it contain? Has it changed over time and, if so, how? These are questions that first require a closer look at analyses of environmental discourses, and this will be done in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS GREENING

2.1. Introduction

As discourse is the main focus of this thesis, it is important to gain a better understanding of any theoretical and empirical work that has addressed business environmental discourses so far. This is also of major importance in developing the coding frame for the analysis of the Earth Summit discourses. The main focus of this review is to see how discourses can be analysed empirically. A particular feature of this analysis must be how different types of discourses can be distinguished, and how the structure of individual discourses and the interrelationship between them can be analysed. This will help the development of more specific research questions on changes in the type and structure of business environmental discourses that could be expected to occur between Rio and Johannesburg.

In reviewing the literature on environmental discourses with specific reference to the role of business, the study looks at the contributions of a number of social science disciplines. Discourse analysis has been something of a growth industry in recent years, and a number of different approaches will be of interest. The aim is to find a way to make discourse analysis a useful tool to study political discourses empirically within a research agenda essentially determined by political science. So far, it can be argued that discourse analysis has not played the decisive role that might be expected within political science. In particular Van Dijk (1997: 27) has contrasted the growing influence of discourse analysis in the social sciences in general with what he diagnosed as its 'systematic absence' from the political science literature. He may have exaggerated somewhat, as there are quite a few authors working in political science departments who are not just using but promoting discourse analysis (e.g. David Howarth, Ernesto Laclau, John Dryzek). However, most of the literature to be discussed does not come from political scientists. The key challenge to be faced is to develop a theoretically informed empirical research programme on the changes in business environmental discourses. To do this, it is necessary to cast the net as wide a

possible to review a broad range of approaches and consider their potential contribution to the development of research questions.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 1 implicitly suggested that discourses increasingly play a critical role in assembling the various narratives that business employs to structure its responses to environmental issues. However, this has tended to focus more on detailing the organisational and material aspects of business greening. Hegemonic theory has identified the growing importance of the discursive dimension, and is clear about the different discursive mechanisms and organisational changes business has developed to absorb or deflect criticism. Yet, there is less clarity about the relationship between business and environmental issues and the development of specific discourses linked with business greening. The hegemonic literature is good at outlining how business uses discursive politics and weaker on detailing how these discursive strategies could be theorised. In order to establish the major areas of continuity and change within the discursive dimension of hegemony, a range of possible business discourses on the environment must be identified. A central component of the research question of this thesis is a more thorough understanding of the discourse dimension of business activities. If the importance of discourse as a key signifier of change and continuity is to be fully comprehended, then the discursive dimension of business greening must be identified and outlined.

Discourse analysis is a relatively new approach to conceptualising and studying environmental issues. Business greening lacks a significant body of empirical studies and theoretical literature that uses the tools and concepts associated with discourse analysis. This chapter aims to review all strands of literature that have so far contributed to an analysis of business environmental discourses. While the main focus is on business greening, in some cases the literature not explicitly dealing with business greening is also discussed. That literature still offers valuable insights into business environmental discourses, however.

As a way of navigating the vast literature on discourse analysis, the environmental engagement with discourse is grouped into three broad categories. The first approaches use discourse analysis as a generic concept linked to other more

'traditional' theories and/or methods. This encompasses the political economy approach to the study of environmental language and symbols. The key insight to emerge from this is the idea that business has used its status and power to produce and circulate essentially meaningless environmental rhetoric and empty claims. The generic term for this is 'greenwash' and considers the greening of business environmental discourse as a placebo to legitimate 'business as usual' practices.

The second set of approaches uses discourse analysis as part of a more fragmented and open methodology. This highlights social constructionist theory and the various approaches using this perspective. The key insight to emerge from this is that discourses are an integral component in constructing meanings and framing action. Methodologically, this is aligned with a number of different approaches; the focus here is on applying the idea that different discourse types operate at the same time.

The third set of approaches focuses on language as the unit of analysis. This considers the structure of language and encompasses a branch of eco-linguistics known as 'greenspeak'. This approach advocates detailed readings of contemporary environmental rhetoric. The main insight is that environmental discourse is limited in the range of symbols, metaphors and so forth used to describe the environment. There is also a discussion of narrative analysis. Here, the claim is that discourse relies on the development of coherent story lines that use linguistic devices to outline the main characters, situations, causes and outcomes associated with a problem.

This chapter begins with an overview of discourse analysis, outlining what it is and what constitutes it. Following this is a general overview of how discourse analysis is operationalised as a method, outlining the major advantages and disadvantages. The next section sets out three major discourse approaches to business greening, with each identifying a distinctive interpretation of the green language adopted by business. The first focuses on the political economy of language in the service of power, and suggests that the green language of business represents empty rhetoric, referred to as greenwash. The next approach regards discourses as more complex. Here, the green language of business reflects the interaction of various processes of social construction. This attributes to business a multi-layered range of discourse

types. The third aspect is more oriented towards exploring the linguistic construction of business language and the suggestion is that business environmental discourses have developed a specific way of talking about the environment that purifies environmental language of its ecological content. Following this is a discussion of the approaches and the questions they raise about comparing business discourses.

2.2. What is a Discourse?

Discourse analysis offers a variety of approaches for theorising and investigating the social world. It is comparable to most concepts used to account for social phenomena, in that definitions, content and boundaries are ‘essentially fuzzy’ (Van Dijk 1997: 1). Phillips and Jorgensen (2002: 1) take this one step further and suggest that ‘there is no clear consensus about what discourses are or how to analyse them’. Nevertheless, there is some common ground. Most discourse theorists tend to rotate around the broad assumption that the social world is structured, differentiated and changed through discourses. They operate at different levels, broadly encompassing the identification of relatively enduring macro structures and their relationship with micro processes. One of the main foundational claims is that such things as knowledge, social practices and institutions are discursively constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1971). What social actors say and do is organised around a set of changing discourses that enable and/or constrain different courses of action.

One useful way of navigating through the different schools of discourse analysis is provided by Townshend (2003: 133), who divides discourse with a broad brush into ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ versions. The ‘thick’ adherents ‘explicitly deny the importance of institutional and socio-economic factors in shaping discourse and the role of interests in explaining political motivation’. On the other hand, the ‘thin’ theorists accord a ‘greater constitutive role for socio-economic factors and pre-constituted interests’. Power is perhaps the common thread linking the different perspectives. It is a dissipated resource, continuously exercised and contested; in effect ‘language is the site where those struggles are acted out’ (Mills 1997: 42–43). This follows from the work of Foucault (1972) who located power as dispersed and plural, and akin to a capillary network. Power is also a resource that is both constitutive and constituting, as social norms, roles and positions are negotiated and contested.

One generic problem identified with discourse analysis is the eclectic range of approaches subsumed within this approach. Reading the wide range of work that can be classified as using discourse analysis, it seems that 'anything goes'. The implication of this is that the definitional basics always relate to the epistemological assumptions of the various approaches. Accordingly, linguists such as Van Dijk (1997) and Fowler (1991), whilst using the concepts of power and ideology, also allow more space for detailing linguistic features and functions of discourse by looking at the structure of small textual samples. Those who operate within other academic disciplines avoid detailed linguistic analysis. Howarth (2000) argues that emphasis should be placed on discourse analysis as a theory-driven approach (Howarth 2000), whilst Fairclough (2003) has advocated a 'middle ground' between empirical linguistic analysis and theory-driven research.

The literature is also characterised by debates over the operational level and depth of the processes that constitute a particular set of discourses and the extent to which wider contexts influence discourse construction and consumption. These wider contexts include but do not exclusively identify the processes and mechanisms that remain unknown or partially acknowledged by the discourse user. The debates revolve around the extent to which discourses can be detached from wider social and economic conditions. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some common areas of concern shared by most discourse researchers. These go some way to providing the important components of a discourse, which in turn yields a skeleton definition.

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002: 1) define discourse simply as a 'particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)'. Burr (1995: 48) is more specific and suggests that a discourse encompasses sets of 'meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements that provide referential and orientating accounts at both the macro and micro levels of objects and things'. Macdonell (1986: 1-4) adds to this by locating 'dialogue' as the 'primary condition of discourse' as 'all speech and writing is social'. Language in various forms is viewed as a major constitutive component of discourse, both as a set of linguistic structures and as a means of describing, explaining and ordering social reality. By

referring to language as a 'social product', Macdonell (1986: 10–12) locates discourse not 'as an object but a way of treating language'. This suggests that discourse analysis offers a theory about language that relates to different economic, social and political contexts (Wood and Kroger 2000: 3). It is clear that this conception of discourse also defines itself in relation to the phenomenon being investigated (Wood and Kroger 2000: 9). Unfortunately, there is little consensus about how far this enables, constrains or indeed influences the production and circulation of discourses. For example, Wood and Kroger (2000) adopt a 'thin' reading and suggest that discourses can be detached from their wider social and economic structures; it is more productive to understand discourse as knowledge and practices negotiated at local levels. Discourse researchers also ask who produces discourses, how are they circulated, why are they produced and what is their purpose.

Linguistic forms of discourse analysis label wider social structures as 'context'. Context can be summarised as the general collection of experiences that inform individual ideas about the world and help them to make sense of what they are doing. Context also has a more structural/organisational dimension and considers that institutional rules and norms and common sense assumptions are important factors in mediating discourse (Van Dijk 2001). Obviously, context is an important feature within discourse analysis, but the way it is employed is not without controversy (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000: 455). The problem of context lies in separating the broad range of economic, social and political phenomena operating at different levels and deciding how these structure discourses. The interpretative dimension compounds questions about the functionality and purposes of discourse. This makes it difficult to discern what produces and sustains it. For example, does climate change/global warming exist as a real problem outside discourse, or is it a problem simply mediated through the discursive struggles of various interests?

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 37–38) address the problem of context by adding a realist dimension. They place context within a dialectical relationship that consists of relations between differentiated practices that occur at various 'junctures'. This differs from the relativists, as structural factors have a greater influence over discourse. Social interaction produces discourse, but also internalises 'discourse

moments' into other material practices. Another way of putting this is to suggest that discourse is increasingly subject to definitions that adhere to the belief that texts and talk constitute aspects of reality within a framework that does not reduce everything to discourse. Mills (1997: 11) also suggests that 'institutions and social context therefore play an important determining role in the development, or maintenance and circulation of discourse'. One remaining problem area is, however, that there is still a strong emphasis on privileging discourse as a causal force for social change (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000: 448).

Four important features characterise the field of discourse analysis:

1. Discourses are particular ways of talking about the world that encompass broad sets of assumptions, rules, values, norms and beliefs.
2. Discourse analysis studies the use of language, meanings, symbols and images.
3. The realist perspective suggests that discourses are structured, differentiated and changing (Bhaskar 1999). This also links discourses with broader hegemonic relations of power and ideology.
4. Discourse operates at different levels and these interact across a range of economic, social and political structures. These play a constituting role in marking the boundaries of meanings and action.

2.3. Discourse as a General Concept Linked to 'Traditional' Theories and/or Methods

2.3.1. The Political Economy of Business Environmental Discourses

The communication of beliefs is an approach of great interest to environmental researchers. This is due to the increasingly significant role that information construction and its application play within contemporary environmental politics. This body of work broadly leans towards a political economy perspective on the role of discourse. In effect, this means that a more structural orientation is favoured that looks at the systematic use of language and symbols by powerful economic actors, such as corporations, to construct false ideological relations through the conscious

misrepresentation and manipulation of environmental knowledge (Chomsky 1989; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Herman 1998). This approach has been classified within the communication of beliefs, and discourse analysis, when explicitly used, is treated as a generic all-purpose tool and tends to serve as a method for linking the research to more traditional concepts and methods. At face value, this would appear to be at odds with most contemporary discourse theory, which rejects the political economy emphasis on linking interests with structural laws and mechanisms. What is worth remembering is that such work also focuses on the corpus of material that discourse analysis considers empirically relevant.

The political economy approach can be applied to discourse research, if we accept the following four assumptions:

1. Discourse is primarily about communication and interpretation. Therefore, it is essential to provide a context that takes into account the nature and status of the (often-assumed) background structures and processes associated with discourse production.
2. The implicit focus within the communications corpus is on language control and deployment in the service of ideology and power.
3. Such work makes available analytically transferable questions that both inform and warrant incorporation into discourse analysis about the environment.
4. Symbolic communication plays an important role in constructing political and material space.

The most significant body of useful work within this field that should inform our approach to the analysis of business environmental discourses is the writings of Herbert Schiller (1974, 1981, 1989, 1996, 2000), Alex Carey (1997) and Murray Edelman (1964, 1971, 1977). These authors do not explicitly employ discourse analysis as a point of reference or critically engage with the discipline. Nevertheless, the research emphasis is squarely on identifying the political, economic and social mechanisms used by business to shape consciousness. For example, Marchand (1998) has documented the significant amount of time and expense contributed by American business to the use of symbols and imagery to build a representation of business as a person with 'soul'-like qualities, such as compassion and selflessness. He also suggests that these are also used to construct and transmit ideological

positions. One valuable insight this perspective offers is that information is subject to concentrated patterns of ownership that relate to the strategic and commercial objectives of business. As Carey (1997) has pointed out, it makes 'good business sense' to try to shift people's interests to those of business, whereas Edelman (1964, 2001) has also highlighted the importance of vested interests deploying symbols and images.

The political economy approach to discourse argues that the various modes associated with corporate communication strategies are organised along class-based lines (Schiller 1981: xvii; cf. also Trumbour 1999, Farnsworth 2004). There is also a large volume of populist literature that suggests business knowingly employs sophisticated public relations strategies as 'propaganda' to preserve its ideological interests by expanding the hegemony of corporations in social life (Monbiot 2000; Hertz 2001; Korten 1999, 1996a, 1996b; *New Internationalist* 1999). Academic researchers, such as Moss and Warnaby (1998: 137), believe that 'communication' strategies should play a more extensive role within companies and should be used to gain the 'understanding and support' of critical groups. Ewen (1996) refers to this as business extending the 'pipeline of persuasion'. This perspective emphasises a two-part relational approach. The first focuses on deconstructing the environmental rhetoric of business in order to show how greening ultimately serves the interests of business elites. This focal point is on identifying information control and symbolic manipulation as instrumental tools of business political strategy. The second part of the relational approach draws its central assumptions from Schiller's critical (i.e. Marxian) perspective and looks for explanations that emphasise the structural features that produce information about the world. Schiller and Edelman broadly suggest that economic imperatives play a significant role in structuring the content of information and point out the consistent way that business relates these to neo-liberal ideology. This also mandates and insulates the 'classic' operational goals of the corporation, including the drives to expand markets, maintaining suitable levels of profits and control over non-market externalities, i.e. crisis tendencies, business cycles, pressure groups, regulation and so forth (Marginson 1994).

An important insight to emerge from Schiller's work is the idea of proactive/reactive 'issue management' by corporations as a way of 'reaching the public effectively with the corporate viewpoint', which has 'become a fundamental requirement of modern business' (Schiller 1981: 81). Although Schiller acknowledges legitimacy as an important component in transferring the norms and values of corporate hegemony, there is little focus on explaining how language structures this legitimacy. Nevertheless, it is possible to locate the work as an example of how the 'circularity' power of business might be expected to function at the discursive level. In order to avoid the charge of systematically subordinating business green communications to the wants and needs of a transnational capitalist class, there is also a stress on emphasising history as a way of contextualising trends and developments within corporate forms of communication (Webster 1995: 75–76). Work by Carey (1997) and Ewen (1996) builds on this important point through developing historical accounts of business communication strategies. These begin with legitimacy as a motivational starting point. Specifically, the central claim is that the imposition of free market rhetoric and neo-liberal ideology within business discourse represents an historical form of persuasive communication. This is oriented towards modifying the economic and social dimensions of cultural practices to accommodate business agendas.

Carey (1997) sets out to substantiate the 'corporate legitimacy' thesis by employing two complementary methods. The first is an historical focus on the actual language used within business sanctioned texts and an analysis of the different ways that these construct social processes. The second relates this documentary record to a theoretical framework. This argues that business proactively engages with shaping public opinion through producing or sanctioning information projects that broadly favour liberalised norms as societal organising principles. Carey (1997) and Ewen (1996) also document an impressive array of activities such as sponsoring research into worker motivation, funding think-tanks and producing reports and documents for public and policy-oriented consumption. Carey's (1997) historical analysis took place before the environment was a serious concern within business elites. However, his arguments suggest that business is actively concerned with communicating pro-

business messages across a variety of different contexts and making use of a wide range of media.

2.3.2. The Language of Business Greening as ‘Greenwash’

The political economy perspective has influenced a new generation of environmental researchers who use the founding assumptions of the political economy approach to dissect the environmental knowledge claims made by corporations and the associated symbolic practices used to transform such claims into ‘common sense’. The generic label for this view of business environmental discourses is ‘greenwash’. Lyon and Maxwell (2004) note that the greenwash literature lacks a specific definition and is often used in a polemical and vague way. Rectifying this, they suggest that greenwash is the ‘selective disclosure of positive information about a company’s environmental or social performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions’ (Lyon and Maxwell 2004). This definition still omits the potent use of symbols, images and rhetoric to convey these disclosures. Additionally, the literature on this also applies greenwash to cover such things as the science and knowledge claims made by business.

For the most part, research undertaken on greenwash remains dominated by advocacy researchers (see Tokar 1997; Rampton and Stauber 2000; Hager and Burton: 2000; Rowell 1996; Stauber and Sheldon 1995; Helvarg 1997; Karliner 1997, Chs. 2 and 6). To date, there have been very few academic attempts to develop the possibilities of a greenwash dimension within business environmental discourses. Notable exceptions include Beder (1997) and Sklair (2002). Beder’s (1997) approach combines a deconstruction of the symbolic and iconographic media with a critical analysis of the science used by corporations to defend their positions. Beder (1997) argues that the discourse of business greening represents a set of largely minor changes heralded as progressive and substantial system-wide shifts. The style used to display these is often self-congratulatory, overstated and relentlessly optimistic (cf. Newton and Harte 1997). There is also a tendency to tout changes attributable to other factors (cost savings, recession, downsizing) as being significant (cf. Doyle 1992). Sklair (2002) adopts a similar approach, although he focuses less on the business use of ‘science’ and more on the annual reports of companies listed in the

Fortune 500 index. Sklair compares some of the claims these companies make in their reports with examples of 'on the ground' environmentally demeaning practices that cast serious doubt on the accuracy and assurance made by business. Both Sklair (2001) and Beder (1997) share the same broad abrasive conclusion: the pace of business greening is over-exaggerated and the claims made about progress towards greening do not correspond to any significant shifts within business practice.

There is therefore one dominant discourse for the greenwash authors. This is predominately concerned with discourse production in the service of the organised social and economic power of business. Greenwash strategies prefer to emphasise changing language and symbols to create the false impression of a benign business environmental discourse. The actual purpose is to help obscure and deflect attention away from business as an environmentally destructive force. The use of terms such as corporate 'greenwash', 'global spin' and 'propaganda' suggests attempts by business to engineer Orwellian forms of 'thought control' (Jowett and O'Donnell 1999). Consequently, and not without controversy, one of the key claims is that certain types of communicative action, i.e. depersonalised, defeatist and politically apathetic cultures, are a direct result of information control strategies and linguistic manipulation. Overall, this view of business greening still lacks an implicit language/discourse-based dimension. However, it is useful to retain the idea of business green discourses as a communication system imbued with business agendas. The ability to manipulate language and symbols is a form of discursive power (Arts 2003). In addition, major business actors should not be underestimated in their resources and ability, in Carey's (1997: Ch. 10) terms, to instigate sustained 'language control programmes' (for example, through advertising, defining the terms and conditions of 'reporting initiatives', and 'paper' lobbying). Business is also the major recipient of the associated material and socio-cultural benefits, i.e. profitability, market expansion and managing and expanding hegemony over the types and forms of language used to portray societal processes and phenomena (Webster 1995: 92–94). As detailed in Chapter 1, it has become increasingly important for business to sustain the belief that the public perceive and accept business as a natural environmental champion.

The strengths of the political economy understanding of business environmental discourses is the potential to identify the material and social power relations that underpin business environmental communication discourses. One suggestion is that business views environmental knowledge/communication as a commercial commodity tied to the strategic diffusion of ideological goals. This is about maintaining hegemony over the regulatory debate by monopolising the information agenda with 'positive' science, progressive statistics and counter claim-making literature. This also makes the corporation part of the solution, using technological and managerial discourses. Here language and power interplay in the definition of a problem and its content, scope and form of any remedial action. Alternatively, business may also define the problem as a non-issue by using iconic and symbolic media or minimising the role of the organisation in the activity. The political economy approach also challenges the view that business is passively or benignly accepting global environmental change. In turn, this opens up a wider context for framing the iconic, symbolic and rhetorical devices used by business.

2.4. Discourse Analysis as an Integral Part of a More Fragmented and Open Methodology

2.4.1. Social Constructionism

The main source of this approach to discourse analysis is located within a social constructionist perspective and is concerned with highlighting the role different meanings play in the formation of social and political action. As Burr (1995: 163) notes, 'researchers who are non social constructionists may discover that they have been doing discourse analysis without labelling it as such'. At its simplest, social constructionism applies basic discourse analysis questions, such as why this issue is important, why it is discussed now, who is making the statements, what kinds of claims and outcomes are associated with these ideas and how will these be realised. The main difference is that here the political arena is pluralised and less structured; this is due to the many contradictions and tensions that surround political issues. Struggles also occur through the discursive interaction of different social forces and over the institutionalisation of different kinds of knowledge. Constructionist

approaches suggest that power does not occupy the same deterministic 'top-down' position as it does within a political economy approach.

Obviously, social construction is not confined to one particular project or discipline, although the main assumptions are attributed to post-modernism. Constructionist perspectives tend to share analytical concerns with locating the 'macro' constitutive component of social phenomena and mapping these across different contexts. Augmenting this is a 'micro' focus that outlines the different ways competing perspectives coalesce around a specific process or event and how these may or may not be legitimated as 'true' knowledge, such as biotechnology, global warming or business greening. To this extent, the focus is on identifying how 'people assign meaning to their world' (Hannigan 1995: 33) and this places social actors within opportunity and bargaining resource structures where discourse is one significant factor in framing different forms of social interaction. The general idea is that looking at the construction of specific events through different 'conceptual frames' (or discourses) yields a more fruitful analysis. By exploring an event from the viewpoint of different interpretations and knowledge, a clearer picture emerges of the interaction between the various layers and dimensions that can both constitute specific actions and set in motion more general processes. The environmental researcher who engages with this perspective must employ anti-foundationalist assumptions that reject the notion of fundamental organising principles. As Burningham (1998: 559–60) points out, the goal is 'not to question the reality of environmental change, but rather to highlight whether and how changes come to be seen and treated as problematic'; this is also an 'inherently social process'.

Constructionist research favours the deconstruction of as many different perspectives as possible. The method hopes to reveal the contradictions and significant concepts and practices driving the formation of issues. This also distinguishes different types of discourses and the power relations that exist between them, and describes how actors use these as resources (as opposed to relatively enduring structures) to make claims.

2.4.2. Strong Social Constructionism

In its more radical version, social constructionism does not see a real world outside discourse. One problem is that this minimises the environment as the central explanatory agent and replaces it with cultural explanations and relativistic arguments (Yearley 2002). Reality is not something ‘out there’ that offers the potential for the identification of causal mechanisms that shape social forms and the organisational processes associated with them. Fox and Miller (1995: 78–79) maintain that reality is not ‘imposed by some impersonal or material force outside of human groups, it is amenable to adjustment by human groups’. The emphasis here is on explaining social formations as the products of discourses that have naturalised descriptive categories with ‘autonomous non-human force’ (Fox and Miller 1995: 8). For these authors, matters such as business ‘organisational goals’ that contribute to the production of green discourse do not automatically reflect mechanisms associated with the workings of capitalist accumulation. Instead, they reflect a process of meaning attribution that accords the discursive construction of routines and practices as conditioning our knowledge of such things. Operational goals formulated around discourse are associated with particular interpretations of historical forms. The workings of capital circuits represent only one possible avenue of interpretative formation among many other important cultural and social variables. Many of these cannot be reduced to an essentialist capitalist logic of accumulation.

One significant assumption driving strong constructionism is that barriers mediate and restrict our knowledge about the world. The critique of political economy approaches to discourse is that these essentially adopt a ‘mainstream’ approach. This takes either behaviour and/or structure as an analytical starting point and focuses on ‘groups’ or ‘individuals’ interpretations of events. This must reduce all behaviour to structural mechanisms, such as the constraints that institutions place on action. The work produced has to accept the relativity of the knowledge produced (the universal nature of structures rules this out). The alternative is to impose a relative judgement, which is a tool to evaluate the analytical worth and validity of looking at different constructions in a number of contexts. For instance, if structure is deterministic, then how can this explain efforts by some companies and states and not others to save the environment? ‘Post-modern’ discourse theory rejects the notion of ideology as a

form of conscious distortion and conceptualises it as a nebulous site of struggle that consists of different 'world views' (Larrain 1996: 57; Redclift and Benton 1994: 10–11). In turn this represents a way of asserting the analytical primacy of differentiated, often culturalist-oriented identities (Burr 1995). The relativist contingency of such positions champions fragmented resistance. Mephram (1994: 17–19) suggests that this approach indicates a systematic transformation of ideology into a 'position that implicitly accepts "end of" arguments about the totality of structure'. These kinds of developments mean that ideology as a critical concept undergoes a conversion from something used to establish the reliability and validity of truth claims or evaluate the content, relations and positions envisioned within discourse into a more prosaic method for *describing* and legitimising different belief systems.

A useful illustration of the problems of a constructionist approach is Douglas's (1992: Ch. 14) interpretation of environmental problems. This begins by dividing 'truths' about the environment into cultural (as opposed to economic or ideological) categories of 'beliefs and non-beliefs': those who believe in the 'reality' of environmental degradation and those who do not. The cultural element appears in the claim that 'human action ... has drastically modified the natural environment' and this is a collective problem. Environmental problems are things that involve 'ongoing, never resolved arguments about rightness of choice' (Douglas 1992: 260) in which the 'strategies of contestants' are more about achieving legitimacy. Ideology and power do not figure prominently within this account; instead the analytical focus is on intellectuals fostering reflexive cultures and battling for 'rhetorical supremacy' about defining nature. According to this approach, greater reflexivity leads to superior knowledge about the actual condition of the environment (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). The ultimate outcomes must be enhanced forms of respect and harmonisation. Douglas, like Hannigan, remains vague as to what constitutes human action beyond the nebulous term 'beliefs'. As Gonzalez (2001) suggests, business can be understood only by relating business actions to modes and conditions of production and the relationships produced by these.

2.4.3. The Role of Ideology and Interests

As Hannigan (1995) has suggested, one contentious implication within a constructive approach to discourse theory is the idea that there is a pre-constituted structural dimension to ecological issues and interests are not reducible to groups of powerful social actors. Hajer (1995: 59) is against relating theories to the 'idea that actions and perceptions should be understood against the backdrop of deeply held beliefs or belief systems', or seeing 'social constructs as the function of the interests of a group of actors'. Instead, interests are constituted through the interplay of various discourses. However, as the previous chapter indicated, discourses are also sustained by institutional structures that reflect the operation of interests and the exercise of structural processes such as power and ideology. This study suggests that business discourse must be understood within a broader context and that interests cannot be fully reduced to moments of discourse. Instead, following Fairclough (1995), it is more productive to explore business environmental discourses using a tripartite approach focusing on texts (in the broadest sense) that also outlines their context and how both of these relate to discourses. In addition to this, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) also suggest that it is possible to identify a range of 'grand' and 'mega' discourses. These consist of deeply held assumptions and beliefs, some of which will reflect the historical functions of structural processes and the interests of powerful groups. It is not entirely possible to separate discourses into grand and mega categories, as discourse components construct each other. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a range of potential features that inform the different types of discourses that business employs to construct their green narrative. Of particular interest is identifying some of the recurring features that may constitute a grand discourse that appeals to a wide range of business actors, despite their many differences and disagreements over strategy. Some of these would include economic growth, consumption, technology, markets and the search for profits and profitability.

2.4.4. Weak Social Constructionism

By looking at things from different perspectives as a starting point, we have the basis for 'weak constructivism'. This is a compromise position that offers a modified version of constructionism. In the terms of Dunlap *et al.* (2002: 31–32), this is 'cautious' constructionism and has characterised American environmental sociology.

Their understanding of this is worth quoting at length as it highlights the contradictory directions within this approach. The difficulty is in

...analysing the important roles played by various actors such as activists, scientists and policy makers in generating societal recognition and definition of environmental conditions as 'problems' – without denying the objective existence of such problems or the possibility of denying the relative validity of competing claims about them. (Dunlap *et al.* 2002: 32)

A significant piece of work within constructionist environmentalism is by Hannigan (1995) who grounds his work in the premise that environmental problems can be better understood by deploying a 'moderate' constructionism to 'understand how' they are 'created, legitimated and contested' (1995: 3). Some of the arguments do mirror relative forms of construction. His approach to 'moderate' construction does not deny the existence of environmental problems. Rather, these highlight the input and possible influence of particular sectional interests, ideologies and power relations.

The social constructionist approach begins with a text (printed papers, etc.) and its textual structure (linguistic styles and structures). The interaction between the processes involved in the actual textual production and interpretation is used to highlight the ways in which the construction of environmental problems produces different meanings. To accomplish this, Hannigan puts forward a conceptual model that takes as its focus the following units. Within each of these three areas, the contextual background to the discourses is crucial for legitimating and joining each of the categories into an integrated discourse.

The first area looks at how environmental claims are assembled. This involves 'naming the problem, distinguishing it from other similar or more encompassing problems, determining the scientific, technical, moral or legal basis of the claim, and gauging who is responsible for taking ameliorative action' (Hannigan 1995: 41). This occurs within a context that is plural, yet is also stratified. As Hannigan (1995: 32) maintains: 'present day environmental claim makers are more likely to take the form of professional social movements with paid administrative and research staffs,

sophisticated fund raising programmes and strong institutional links both to legislators and the mass media'. These factors could easily be applied to the business community.

The second area is organised around identifying the various methods and devices to present environmental claims. Pivotal here is the role of 'issue entrepreneurs', 'policy brokers' who can use symbolic apparatus to convey the urgency or non-urgency of a problem (Hannigan 1995: 45). The central device used by claim-makers is that of discourse put forward by 'environmental pragmatists' who are accepted as legitimated sources of information (Hannigan 1995: 47–48).

The third area involves identifying those who have the capacity to contest environmental claims. Environmental claims also require the sustained action of 'environmental entrepreneurs' 'skilfully [to] guide their proposals through log jams of vested and often conflicting political interest groups, each of which is capable of stalling or sinking the proposals' (Hannigan 1995: 49). Agenda-setting and lobbying are of crucial importance here, as well as the ability to manipulate the language and symbols used to construct the problem. Both features serve as a functional way of dealing with dissension or opposition. Environmental claims are contested within three (controversial) competing and conflicting paradigms, roughly classified as a reform-oriented neo-corporatist derived global managerialism, a liberal capitalist redistributive development and a radical 'third world' new international sustainability paradigm (Hannigan 1995: 51).

Hannigan's (1995) version of social construction contains useful elements that are worth drawing out to illustrate the validity of focusing on discourse as an analytical method. The first is the suggestion that discourses shape how actors and groups associated with environmental issues organise and position their representations of events. The second is the advocacy of a multi-dimensional approach, which includes an appreciation of discursive power by considering language manipulation as a fluid and dynamic process. This is the same argument as in the greenwash perspective, albeit with an added emphasis on language as a relatively open and contested field, suggesting that business needs to reposition itself as an environmental claim-maker,

able to sustain environmental messages. There is the strong possibility of business developing common ground and shared dissemination tactics to sustain and circulate its environmental claims.

Hannigan's framework also suggests that actors representing sectional interests will use discourse to produce knowledge about the status of the real world. This reading of discourse also accepts the fact that humans physically act upon nature through implementing various policy positions and responses. Here, the empirical research asks us to deconstruct a specific discourse linked with a policy issue to its component parts. This looks at the framing of issues through narrative assumptions and truth claims, rhetoric and the symbolic medium. Particularly important is the role of discourses that are embedded and translocated through networks of social interaction. These discursive networks are also mediated by oscillating power relations between interests. Conflicts and compromises also help sustain and reproduce specific claims about the environment. This then accords analytical space for discourse variations between groups (for instance corporate CEOs), and this is a significant causal force in shaping the content of discourses within issue-related networks. The discourses that are constructed around an issue (e.g. a specific way of talking about something) produce quantifiable impacts. For instance, regulatory mechanisms that favour full cost pricing help transform the environment into commodities and tradeable goods by pricing what could be considered as priceless (Belshaw 2001: 58–59).

The previous section indicated that the construction of environmental affairs is realised through the interplay of different types of discourses. This was referred to as weak constructionism and is part of a tradition of discourse analysis that employs discourse alongside a more open and fragmented methodology. Generally, practitioners using social constructionism do not explicitly use discourse analysis as a tool for theoretically navigating the often contradictory, structured, chaotic and complex kinds of environmental policy relationships. Instead, discourse is used both to construct and explain the different positions of actors and sectional interests or as a rhetorical and opportunistic tool deployed in the policy-making process.

2.5. Social Constructionism in Action: Discourse Types

Dryzek (1997) has undertaken one of the seminal studies exploring the construction of environmental discourses. The work begins with the assumption that the environment is a complex interdisciplinary problem, and argues that 'the more complex the situation, the larger the number of plausible perspectives upon it' (Dryzek 1997: 8). Dryzek favours a weak construction view of discourse, where discourses work in conjunction with other structural political and economic processes. When outlining negotiations on ozone depletion, Dryzek suggests that 'rational problem solving, science driven policymaking and discourse shifts' could be used to account for the negotiations. Equally plausible is that discourse analysis could reconstruct these events to show how they reflect the 'material interests of key actors' (Dryzek 1997: 39–40). This approach to discourse incorporates the role of both sectional and material interests and the exercise of power as critical discourse-shaping variables. Depending on the nature of the interests, these may appear to play a more determining role at the policy level, and may result in inertia or action (Dryzek 1997: 11).

Dryzek (1997) uses the analytical concepts derived from a 'loose' Foucauldian approach to identify a range of environmental discourses. These are multilayered, operating at the macro, meso and micro levels of meaning. This is not a bounded and static system of discourse types, as there is also a strong element of fluidity between the different discourses. Overall, these constitute the particular 'order of discourse' associated with environmental/ecological issues (Foucault 1984). Dryzek (1997: 20) also shares Hajer's (1995) assumption that discourse acts as a reformatory vehicle and that rational debate and 'critical comparative scrutiny' through exposure to counter-discourse will eventually weaken and transform dominant discourses.

Dryzek (1997: 8) defines a discourse as 'a shared way of apprehending the world' that is 'embedded in language'. Furthermore, objects of knowledge also represent narrative stories 'that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements and disagreements, in the environmental arena'. As a way of organising the range of discourses within the environmental field, Dryzek begins with a set of analytical criteria. He believes that each discourse inhabits a distinct domain of activities that

characterises their interpretation of ecological problems and the types of solutions preferred. These help distinguish the central features of the basic range of discourses that function at the macro level. Primarily, this approach to discourse analysis focuses on identifying distinct patterns of language and symbols unique to each perspective and distinguishing the foundational assumptions of each discourse.

Dryzek (1997: 16-18) uses the following four elements to delineate a particular environmental discourse:

1. Basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed.
This locates the core assumptions within a discourse and tends to contain distinct positions on the relationships between the environment and human activity.
2. Assumptions about natural relationships.
This refers to perceptions about the correct way to organise the human relationship with nature.
3. Agents and their motives.
Different discourses use varied modes for locating actors and their intentions.
4. Key metaphors and other rhetorical devices.
Here the focus is similar to Boje's (2001) notion of dramatisation through symbolic medium. The overall aim is to 'convince listeners or readers by putting a particular situation in a particular light' (Dryzek 1997:17).

It is worth pointing out that this approach to finding discourses and constructing analytical categories relies on both the researcher's discretionary judgement and an extensive pool of background knowledge. Dryzek (1997) sets out the basic classificatory criteria for identifying the features of a discourse. However, he does not actually explain how to approach the research material or what kind of empirical material will constitute each discourse.

Dryzek identifies a wide range of different discourses associated with framing and solving environmental problems. These operate across a wide spectrum, and include marginal discourses, such as 'green romanticism' and its holistic deep ecological anti-institutional agenda. One of the goals is to redefine and re-imagine the human relationship with nature within a non-exploitative, non-hierarchical and egalitarian framework. Occupying the middle ground is 'green rationalism'. This

attempts to integrate elements of several different discourses (social ecology, environmental justice and eco-feminism) to address the political social and economic shortcomings of capitalism. Their goal is to change the shape and form of institutional structures, primarily through political parties and social movement campaigns. One drawback is that these discourses remain relatively marginal within mainstream environmental discourse, although some elements go through amplification via pressure group actions that specifically target business activities (Rowell 1996).

However, the focus here is on those discourses that identify some of the possible features that characterise the global dimension of business greening. There are two macro discourses framing the responses to environmental problems: survival and the Promethean response. Traditionally, business falls into the latter category, due to the discourse's historical emphasis 'on the unbounded faith in the ability of humans to manipulate the world in human interests in ever more effective fashion' (Dryzek 1997: 53). This discourse frames natural relationships as emerging through competition within a hierarchy that places humans at the top. Motivating business, as the rest of society, is the drive for material self-interest. Some of the basic entities taken as given are markets, prices, technology and energy. Nature is nothing more than the origin of resources. The traditional business view was that these were infinite; as one source nears depletion, then business creativity will harness and develop new resources to provide the same level of goods and services. We can see this logic in the strategy of European and American oil companies that are investing in the development of alternative fuel sources and at the same time continuing to deplete existing fossil fuels (Levy and Newell 2000). Promethean discourse also conceptualises environmental problems as discrete and reversible 'trends'. This favours quantifying current levels of natural resource use and projecting these on to future patterns of consumption. For example, one argument used by industry to advance biotechnology in developing countries employs evidence to show that rising population growth requires increasing crop yields produced with decreasing levels of resources (Newell 2003). Another dimension to Promethean solutions for environmental problems is the use of a mechanistic metaphor. This kind of terminology utilises a system of machine-oriented rhetoric and imagery to organise

business environmental discourses. This holds that business has a variety of ready-made tools and components to solve ecological problems. It is a simple matter of applying skill and ingenuity in designing the proper set of tools for the job.

Table 2.1.: Two Discourse Types Linked with Business Greening (adapted from Dryzek 1997)

Promethean discourse	Survivalism
Pricing and property rights	Business is a benign environmental agent
Growth forever	Idea of impending catastrophe and collapse
Machine metaphors	Elites are environmental guardians
Competition	Population growth
Hierarchy	Technology
Rationalisation	

The second type of discourse that operates at the global level is survivalism. Whilst the Promethean discourse incorporates a set of responses that argue for ‘business as usual’, survivalism originates in the view that there must be limits to economic growth that reflects the carrying capacity of eco-systems. Much of the rhetoric associated with survivalism focuses on the ‘problems’ caused by increases in population and consumption. The prognosis is not good, as these will lead to the depletion of resources in western states and increased poverty and starvation in developing countries.

At first glance, this thesis appears to counter the contemporary business arguments that serious economic growth is essential to halt ecological decline (see World Business Council on Sustainable Development 2002). However, in response to various pressures and structural changes, business has developed a hybridised version of survivalism. Some of the key elements of survivalism discourse have either been incorporated or altered, and they have been re-contextualized within the Promethean response. One of the main lines of reasoning taken from survivalism is that business survival depends on business ensuring the continued existence of eco-systems. However, the business solution to this problem differs significantly from

other interests. In part, this is due to business's desire to articulate the Promethean discourse within the ecological domain.

Another feature of this discourse is the positioning of business as an integral part of the environment and not as a distinct and separate agent. The idea is that resources are integral to the production of goods and services and this places business in a unique position to understand nature best. This assumption reflects the historical idea that business elites are also social and moral advocates of the greater good due to their privileged status as creators of wealth, conferring intellectual and moral leadership. Some of the metaphors associated with survivalism include the idea that eco-systems will overshoot and collapse if not properly regulated. This connects with the premise that control and organisation should remain in the hands of business. Additionally, there is the population explosion and the apparent burden placed on both future resources and the creative ingenuity of business. Finally, an element of impending doom is built into this discourse and the idea that a variety of agents, such as markets, consumers and eco-systems will eventually 'punish' business if it does not adjust its behaviour.

One important feature of the previous two discourse types is the interchangeability of some of the components. This suggests that business actors potentially contribute towards creating new discursive space by referring to or combining elements of other discourses and placing these within a business context. Within the domain of business environmental discourses we need to consider these changes as the result of a mixture of strategic and unintentional actions. Discourse theory offers various ways of approaching this important aspect, which Fairclough (2003) refers to as 'genre mixing'. This takes place when different features of a discourse are combined together to produce novel meanings. The complex webs and linkages that spoken, written and symbolic discourses establish are one valuable factor helping discourse users transmit their discourses. The basic idea is that business appropriates and attempts to colonise other discourses by transplanting these within a pro-business framework. This suggests that business also exercises continuous efforts to limit the influence that other discourses have on the formation of business environmental discourses. The classificatory framework used by Dryzek (1997) is also important if

we are to develop a theoretical base from which to relate discourse in general with particular forms of business discourse. Dryzek's (1997) moderate constructionist position suggests that things that are socially interpreted need not be trivialised. This is attempting to place a constructionist approach within a non-reductionist framework (where all social practices are reducible to 'moments of discourse').

Dryzek (1997) also incorporates interests and the role of structural power over discourse as critical variables. Depending on the nature of the interests, these may appear to play a more determining role at the policy level, and may result in inertia or action (Dryzek 1997: 11). Discussing negotiations on the ozone issue, Dryzek suggests that 'rational problem solving, science driven policy making and discourse shifts' could be used to account for the negotiations. Equally plausible is that discourse analysis could reconstruct these events to show how they reflect the 'material interests of key actors' such as business (Dryzek 1997: 39-40).

To recap, the discourse researcher approaching business must be aware that elements of different environmental discourses are interchangeable and that different discourses are used by business within different contexts. This does not necessarily mean that there will be automatic transformations in the kinds of activities undertaken. It is also essential to add contextual depth to a discourse by considering the background. This raises questions about the extent to which new orders of discourse are being developed by business at the global level, and the extent that the global environmental debate has forced business to synthesise and re-contextualize various national discourses into a more coherent global outlook. Doing this includes identifying the interests of business actors through exploring their 'core' or 'macro' discourses. When studying business environmental discourses, we would need, first, to form a picture of the general material and ideological interests, and then consider how other environmental discourses help organise these. Core discourses also help organise social reality, and these will ultimately reflect the particular norms and values in its basic assumptions, and so forth. Moreover, other discourses attempting to absorb components of a rival discourse may not automatically be modified. Instead, it is more likely that strategic elements merely help justify, explain and

strengthen the core assumptions. Depending on the power relationship, a dominant discourse will seek to colonise weaker discourses.

2.6. Social Constructionism in Action: Ecological Modernisation

One of the most popular discourses associated with business greening is ecological modernisation. As Young (2000: 15) notes, ecological modernisation ‘has created new opportunities for the private sector to influence policy-making’. This favours a relatively mainstream interpretation of the impact that the rise of environmental issues has had on the shape and form of business environmental discourses. Before discussing this approach to discourse, it has to be understood that ecological modernisation is a perspective that has its origins in several disciplines and was initially far removed from its current orthodox status (Blowers 1997). Unsurprisingly, this has produced several competing interpretations that offer differing accounts of why the concept emerged and what the discourse attempts to explain. Generally, these are divided into ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ versions. Within environmental political science, the discourse was originally developed to question the impact that environmental problems were having on the capitalist trajectory of development. One feature of this was the idea that there have to be limits to growth in order to achieve equilibrium between ecological concerns and capitalist accumulation. Jänicke (1985) suggested that remedial measures should eventually be superseded by the holistic integration of technology, although even this would be insufficient if pursued alongside economic growth. These fundamental dilemmas have been effectively airbrushed out of the contemporary modernisation literature. The basic premise is that processes of capitalist accumulation place restrictions on the development of environmental policies that undermined the accumulation of capital and economic growth. Because of this, some of the available options would have to include more of a focus on the cultural dimension, as well as weighted emphasis on institutional learning and technocratic politics (Thayer-Robbins 2001: 23–29). Contemporary authors have essentially abandoned the idea that there are

limits to growth and that modernising is only a short-term fix that does not lessen the overall impact that growth has on environmental degradation. Instead, this argument is reversed and many now believe that ‘balanced’ and ‘managed’ growth is an essential component for moving towards environmental protection and ecological progress.

Within its contemporary formation, ecological modernisation describes a loose collection of reformist ideas and concepts that are associated with ‘anti-ideological policy oriented approaches to the environmental problem’ (Blühdorn 2000: 210). One of its main claims is that ‘environmental considerations have been in global economic practices and institutions to some extent and consequently changed those institutions and practices’ (Mol 2000: 137). Another assertion is that companies are both adopting long-term ‘win-win’ perspectives and are willing to experiment with different policy strategies, such as prevention that goes ‘beyond compliance’ (Young 2000). Obviously, these forms of change also encompass business and there is an explicit emphasis on positioning business as an important environmental player. For example, Mol (2000: 137) accords policy equivalence to the strategic importance of business, arguing that ‘multinational enterprises and global economic institutions’ are the ‘two main global economic mechanisms that propel innovations in institutional arrangements for the environment’.

There are also some important assumptions within ‘weak’ ecological modernisation that are very attractive to business. The first is that current environmental problems are reversible and that economic growth and environmental sustainability are compatible with capitalist models of production and economic growth. In addition, existing institutional frameworks and organisational relations provide an adequate means for realising sustainability. Deficiencies are therefore a result of organisational failures and a lack of institutional and technological innovation. Similar to cultural rational explanations, business is seen as having attained a ‘new corporate environmental activism’ substantively different from previous ‘fix it’ approaches.

Ecological modernisation also holds that elements of the business community consider environmental issues as ‘serious challenges’ that require the judicious

application of mainly pragmatic responses. The overall arguments also stress cultural change and the role of managers as environmental champions. The first step towards change is allowing progressive business leaders a greater part in policy-making. This will tie them into consensus-based and pragmatic forms of governance and will help generate the necessary discursive momentum within the ranks of business.

Hajer's (1995) study is one of the notable attempts to use discourse theory to map the evolution of ecological modernisation from a relatively marginal concern among capitalist state actors into an institutionalised mainstream discourse. Hajer believes that business is less antagonistic towards the environment, and that ecological modernisation is now a powerful discursive metaphor that allows business actors to link environmental concern and technological innovation as factors stimulating the modernisation of economic activity (e.g. more of a qualitative consideration of the impact that economic activity has on the use and consumption of resources). His findings suggest that north European business actors and states generally share a progressive approach, labelled as ecological modernisation. This is the main discourse used to describe shifts associated with attempts to tackle pollution, climate change, waste and so forth. Hajer concludes that ecological modernisation is now a powerful discursive tool that allows business actors to link environmental concern, economic growth and technological innovation with the modernisation of economic activity (e.g. more consideration of the impact economic activity has on the use and consumption of resources). Hajer (1995: 24–30) identifies five features and functions associated with the ecological modernisation discourse. These are:

1. A move from seeing environmental problems as entailing additional costs and difficulties to saving and opportunities.
2. Using technology to develop cleaner and more efficient production systems.
3. A general shift towards a life-cycle approach to the production of goods and services and making additional cost savings through recycling.
4. Viewing environmental and social issues as company-wide concerns.
5. Injecting greater openness and transparency into business practices. The increased involvement of other non-state actors in business environmental decision-making processes.

Utting (2002a) points out that there are some important ideas within the 'weak' version of ecological modernisation that appeal to international business. The main assumption is that all environmental problems are reversible and that economic growth and environmental sustainability are compatible with a capitalist mode of production and unfettered economic growth. In addition, existing institutional frameworks and organisational relations provide an adequate means of realising sustainability. Any deficiencies are a result of organisational failures and a lack of institutional and technological innovation. Finally, there is a tendency to place less emphasis on business with a generally antagonistic relationship towards environmental regulation. As Utting (2002a) suggests, this version of ecological modernisation discourse has moved the theoretical focus towards constructing categories that attribute business with a 'new corporate environmental activism' and this differs substantively from the earlier reactive 'fix it' approaches. Ecological modernisation discourse asserts that the rise of environmental issues has produced a set of 'win-win' benefits for business. 'Win-win' gains also encompass the strategic areas of cost savings and reputation issues.

Ecological modernisation discourse has also received a substantial amount of criticism. Critics claim that the version of ecological modernisation applied to business offers a description that is 'shallow' and amounts to 'little more than a cost minimisation for industry' (Eckersley 2004: 85). Whilst Hajer (1995) believes that ecological modernisation discourse offers the prospect of reflexivity and deeper structural changes, these amount to liberal reform due to the retention of economic growth (Eckersley 2004: 85). Ecological modernisation also considers reflexivity and institutional learning as drivers of progressive change. This suggests that enhancing forms of international co-operation among state and non-state actors achieves results – so long as these emphasise realistic and feasible objectives. The diffuse range of states and actors on the international scene may well mean, however, that obtaining a consensus over what will constitute common ground may well be achieved only within very restrictive areas.

To recapitulate, within the ecological modernisation discourse, business engages with environmental issues through a seemingly unproblematic mixture of self-interest and genuine concern. Institutional learning is crucial, as business channels wider environmental concerns into their operating practices. Thayer-Robbins (2001: 29) neatly summarises this form of learning as a ‘type of incremental shift associated with overall societal process of “greening”’. Ecological modernisation also appeals to business as companies can claim that greening technological innovation implicitly creates new avenues for realising profitability through cost savings or finding new markets. Finally, ecological modernisation joins neatly with the idea that change occurs through the role of environmental champions and policy entrepreneurs. A useful example: in 1998 the then head of British Petroleum John Browne (partially) acknowledged that business produced greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming and that governments and business should sign up to the Kyoto protocols (Bakan 2004: 40). This cultural snowball effect was also evident at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit, where Greenpeace and the WBCSD held a joint press conference to call on governments to move more quickly on Kyoto.³

One final criticism of ecological modernisation is that such approaches obscure and underestimate the routine, necessary and systematic role of business in imposing substantial long-term social and environmental costs on third parties (cf. Kapp 1950). Obviously, some of these environmental costs include the many health-related problems and climatic shifts associated with pollution, the general depletion of resources and the loss of biodiversity. Finally, Blowers (1997) reminds us that ecological modernisation may have underestimated the scale and significance of the impact that private interests have played in the development of environmental discourse and altering the environment.

³ Some members of the WBCSD privately expressed reservations about the usefulness of such a move, whilst other sectors such as chemicals hailed this as a ‘major show of unity between business and the environmentalists’ (Schmitt 2002). The joint declaration is also part of a wider Greenpeace strategy of ‘working with’ business on some mutually beneficial issues, such as climate change (Tindale 2002).

2.7. Language as the Unit of Analysis

2.7.1. Managerial Approaches

Organisational studies have produced a huge body of literature on the greening of business. However, this lacks an identifiable body of research that specifically employs discourse analysis to explore the green language used by business. Newton and Harte (1997) and Banerjee (2000, 2003a, b) have undertaken a selection of the more notable 'critical' work, showing how a social constructionist perspective could be applied to the study of business environmental discourses. The most prominent author working in this area is Sharon Livesey (cf. Livesey 1999, 2002a, b; Livesey and Kearins 2002). Livesey's source material includes: advertorials used by ExxonMobil to highlight the oil company's stance on global warming; sustainability reporting initiatives published by Royal Dutch/Shell; environmental audits by the Body Shop; and the literature produced by the McDonalds fast food chain on its alliance with the US Environmental Defense Fund. The approach is similar to social constructionism due to the emphasis placed on surveying different forms of rhetoric, symbols, metaphors and linguistic devices to deconstruct the normative and prescriptive intentions of individual corporations. Newton and Harte (1997) focused on the public speeches of CEOs, particularly those linked with high-profile companies such as Shell and BP.

Livesey is interested in applying Foucauldian discourse theory complemented by rhetorical analysis which considers discourses as having causal powers that are both constitutive of and constituting wider processes of political change. This means that the primary components of business environmental discourses also represent political instruments that can define and shape particular meanings and courses of action. The broad purpose is to show how the 'sustainability' discourse has produced an array of contradictory communication strategies within business. Livesey (2002a: 159–160) concludes that business environmental discourses have several important functions. The first is the *purposive use* of language to 'shape attitudes that predispose audiences towards action of particular types' and to frame action on environmental issues in a certain direction (Livesey 2002a: 160). This refers to the broad functions of discourse and reflects business responses to the wider modifications in discourses from other domains, such as economic liberalisation. The second is that business environmental discourses feature an *agentic function*, where users attempt to control and reconstruct the meanings attached to specific concepts. These include a central narrative that constructs the market as an omniscient 'god term' and the portrayal of business as a caring and responsible force for change, whereas governments represent a source of constant intrusion and obstruction.

This second aspect focuses on the rhetoric of business and complements the work of other business researchers, such as Newton and Harte (1997), who studied the environmental speeches of CEOs and concluded that the rhetoric had an 'evangelical bent'. One defining feature of this was the overuse of transitive phrasing such as 'ought' and 'must'. Yet, there was little or no attempt in business discourse to move away from imploratory argumentation and outline any concrete long-term planning for environmental change. More generally, Newton and Harte (1997) suggest that the environmental discourse of business displays the rhetorical appearance of commitment and at the same time offers no substantive actions. They found that one of the pivotal arguments used by business to justify its engagement with sustainable development is that 'we are in it together' and that ecological degradation eventually affects everyone, including business. Instead, the rhetoric is oriented towards legitimating the continuation of 'business as usual'. This assumes that business has a vested interest in perpetuating the 'environmental crisis' due to the profit dimension

(Newton 2002). Livesey (2002a) also notes that business environmental discourses display a tendency to 'preserve fundamental aspects of the discourses and practices of economic development' and at the same time attempt to accommodate ecological issues. For Livesey this does not present an insurmountable problem. Yet, for Newton and Harte (1997), there is a fundamental dichotomy between these two issues, and business environmental discourses display no sign of having resolved the conflict. Instead, the business discourse is attempting to reinvent the environment within a rational management discourse (Sachs 1999; Banerjee 2003a).

Alternatively, Milne, *et al.* (n.d.) use discourse analysis to deconstruct the public communication material of a wide range of European, Oceanic and American companies. They suggest that the business version of sustainable development relies on portraying this through the overuse of the vague and non-specific 'journey' metaphor. Complementing this are other metaphors that advocate the 'promotion' of 'transparency' and 'stakeholder participation'. These have the effect of creating the appearance of a comprehensive and detailed business commitment to sustainable development. At the same time, such metaphors also help business avoid discussing 'where business is headed on its journey' and the impact that transparency measures have on the general direction of business activity.

For authors such as Banerjee (2003a) this is something of a worrying trend, as definitional power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of technocrats. However, Livesey (2002a, b) disagrees, arguing that this is not always a successful strategy and is routinely prone to implementation gaps and manifest tensions (Utting 2002a). Livesey (2002a: 141) also emphasises the 'circular link between knowledge and power' and uses this to illustrate the dynamic nature of the political effects that language has on the development of business environmental discourses. One feature of this is that business has continually to stabilise and legitimate its discourse on the social and economic order, and de-legitimate other forms of knowledge. Livesey (2002a: 138–142) considers the various attempts by business to construct a responsible green image as something that 'represents concessions to environmental interests' and 'knowledge produced by environmentalists'. This is partly due to sustainable development 'offering a 'space of dissension' that allows other interests

to contest and possibly influence the trajectory of business greening' (Livesey 2002a: 138–142).

Generally, Livesey and Kearins (2002: 235) see the discourse of sustainable development as a good thing, as the 'ontological effects of corporate sustainability talk are not unidirectional or entirely within the control of corporations'. Despite the lack of enthusiasm among many companies for environmental issues, the sustainable development discourse still shows 'promise of change' in business activity (Commoner 1990). The main example of this, threaded through Livesey's work, is the extension of social responsibility to encompass an environmental dimension and the evolution of a discourse of care towards the environment. This 'environmentally responsible care' discourse is epitomised by an analysis of Royal Dutch/Shell's desire to be more open in how the company communicates its progress on environmental issues (Livesey and Kearins 2002). Livesey and Kearins differ from some of the critical literature, due to the focus on the assumed benefits linked with the different ways that business implements 'stakeholder participation'.

Livesey and Kearins (2002: 7) also found that the Shell discourse does not question 'taken for granted truths about the nature of markets, competition, and economic actors'. However, rather than seeing this as an indication that companies lack a 'vision' of a sustainable future (Newton and Harte 1997; Milne *et al.* n.d.), they suggest that Shell (and by implication other corporations who follows Shell's 'vision') 'embodied commitments to action, at least some of which are *tangible* and *radical*' (Livesey and Kearins 2002: 250, emphasis added). Clearly, this supports the view that the discourses, linked with environmental campaigners and other regulatory bodies, have produced significant changes in the way some companies conceptualise their long-term relationship with nature and environmental interest groups. One of the main findings supporting this claim is that 'stakeholder dialogue' has a 'far reaching potential' (Livesey and Kearins 2002). One facet of this is the use of voluntary reporting initiatives by companies such as Shell to 'report their progress' towards the 'triple bottom line' of 'environmental, social and economic development' (Elkington 1999: Ch. 1). Although Livesey and Kearins point out that voluntary reporting and adhering to non-binding codes produces superficial

reporting, they also believe that such endeavours establish ‘precedents and thresholds’ that ‘push firms to adopt more systematic practices and diminish their propriety hold on information’ (2002: 250). Put another way, the different ecological, social and political themes attached to the sustainable development discourse⁴ force some compromises from business. They believe that the solution is to ensure that other stakeholder groups play a significant role in institutionalising this ‘triple bottom line’ of business reporting on their environmental actions (Livesey and Kearins 2002: 252–254). The problem is that, at present, there is a tendency for such reporting to remain in the hands of business actors and associated interests. This circumvents both the role of power and the relative position of a stakeholder’s ability to influence business policy. As Arts (2000: 145) has pointed out, there is a sharp distinction between the ability to *influence* policy and the ability to exert *power* over policy, as influence often entails ‘success that involves weak forms of outcomes’ and environmental interest groups often lack the ‘permanent ability to influence ... policies’.

2.7.2. Greenspeak and the Limits of Business Green Language

Paul Chilton (1985) was part of a group of researchers who suggested that nuclear arms debates in the 1980s were organised around a set of discourses labelled as ‘nukespeak’. Nukespeak refers to the various ways that the proponents of nuclear arms used language and symbols to manipulate debates. The broad aim was to construct a discourse about nuclear arms that routinely minimised their negative aspects and justified their existence. These discourses included elaborate justifications that attempted to ascribe new meanings to common terms such as ‘deter’ and ‘protect’. One of the general assumptions that this perspective worked on is that groups of actors need to develop discourses that sanitise the broader consequences of the issues at stake. A part of this involves sharing specific terms and phrases that become commonly understood by the defenders. Harré et al. (1999) expand on this idea and claim that ecological problems have now given rise to a similar set of discourses known as greenspeak. Goldman (1998: 33–38) sees the

⁴ Banerjee (2003a: 153) identifies the most prominent themes as human development, inclusiveness, connectivity, equity, prudence and security.

trend towards the green language of Global Resource Management as transferring the destructive power of capital into every aspect of the global commons.

Eco-linguistics is the purest form of discourse analysis, as the focus is on identifying the structure and characteristics of texts and various linguistic devices (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001). The possibility of explanatory power is realised at the level of the discourses generated by specific linguistic formations within texts. In general, those concerned with studying the use of ecological language still refer to other concepts and theories, although the extent of this is variable and sometimes applied in a generalised manner to illustrate the explanatory power of the claims made about the usefulness of linguistic analysis.

The general term for this school of thought is 'eco-linguistics' and one important concept to emerge from this is 'greenspeak'. There are three general features of greenspeak discourses. The first is that discursive talk about the environment is organised around historically evolving frames that reflect different communication styles and types of knowledge. This suggests that there are many different discourses organised around an issue and that the origins of a discourse may have little or nothing to do with the environment. This also establishes representations built on factors such as scientific knowledge, definitions (metaphorical, iconic and symbolic) and cultural practices. In this case, this has produced specific ways of talking about and imagining the natural world that reflect the evolution of environmental frames with capitalist discourses, and these lack the ability adequately to conceptualise the 'natural'. Therefore, business protecting the natural is about harnessing its resources for business self-interest. Controversially, the lack of conceptual understanding also points out that a form of linguistic imperialism over nature characterises both the reformist and the radical rhetoric associated with the environment. Much of this is argued in abstract form. Nevertheless, the point is clear: we are asked to reconsider the implications and the meanings of the words used by environmental advocates.

Despite such limitations, the increasing use of subtle and sophisticated communication techniques suggests that it is possible for economic actors to offer a believable (although largely interpretative) environmental narrative. One implication is that business relies on a set of master frames to organise its discourses (Gamson

1992). This is similar to Dryzek's (1997) idea that there are a limited number of discourse types that can be attributed to business actors. This presents problems for a dominant discourse fully to incorporate or accommodate the knowledge claims of other discourses. The discourse is used to construct knowledge that has developed around a 'cluster of loosely related dialects and rhetorical practices' that is an 'exemplar for persuasive discourse in general' (Harré *et al.* 1999: 3). One of the main objectives of greenspeak is to use communication media to 'sell' a discourse whilst delegitimizing the status of the knowledge provided by other discourses.

The second aspect is the claim that the empirical deconstruction of green discourse highlights the ingrained and restrictive natures of contemporary environmental discourse. Greenspeak also sees contemporary discourses as 'boxed in'. This means that the greening of popular discourse has merely resulted in achieving a ritualised status for environmental concepts and ideas within existing institutional practices. These are pseudo discourses of the environment and are unable to reflect the full scope and diversity of green language. Paradoxically, this has also resulted in an apparent expansion of green language and an increasing importance accorded to the green discursive strategies of both environmental 'conservationists' and 'conservatives' (Harré *et al.* 1999: 176–178). It is the quality and depth of these new-found commitments to general environmental discourse that Harré *et al.* (1999) question. This focus shares the greenwash perspective that 'big talk' is used to justify an assortment of relatively small-scale changes.

The third aspect is that greenspeak is a heuristic device, used to study the linguistic dimension of how we talk about and represent the environment. Greenspeak also suggests looking at the impact that different temporal and spatial dimensions have in producing distinct discourses about the environment (Teymur 1982). The focus is on looking at the metaphorical, symbolic and linguistic properties of texts used within different cultural contexts and traditions. Underscoring this are concerns with how the poverty of environmental language is more malleable in the hands of environmental 'experts', including scientists, policy-makers and other self-appointed authorities, including business. This is a relativistic approach to language that is

primarily concerned with the general decline in ecologically oriented cultural representations about nature–society relationships.

Harré *et al.* (1999) base their approach on the assumption that discourses about the environment are constituted through linguistic structures and practices referred to as greenspeak. This approach to discourse shares a common assumption that how we construct talk about the environment contradictorily constrains and expands the scope of the environmental agenda. The aim is to deconstruct language through highlighting the ingrained and restrictive natures of contemporary greenspeak.

Despite its insistence on using detailed linguistic analysis, greenspeak provides a range of transferable insights that aid the study of business environmental discourses. The most analytically productive is the suggestion that business has developed its own greenspeak discourse. This allows for the thought-provoking possibility that the various discourses associated with business, such as ecological modernisation, survivalism and Promethean growth are facets of a wider greenspeak discourse. In effect, business discourse on the environment displays more coherence and encompasses a substantial range of issues. Another way of putting this is that business has developed a system of language and symbols to talk about the environment that draws on pro-business discourses. Glenn (2004), who studied factory farm industry discourses on the environment, provides one example of greenspeak. This highlights the widespread use of ‘doublespeak’, which takes the processes of factory farming and links these to positive environmental benefits and the use of advertorials to give animals a ‘voice’ with which to present the factory farming view of the environment.

Greenspeak is therefore a system of functional language and symbols, primarily used for instrumentalist purposes as a ‘persuasive medium’ (Harré *et al.* 1999: 2). They locate the ecological aspects of language as being ‘personal, cultural, social, temporal, that is located within systems of normative and intentional practices that both constitute existence and determine the nature of nature’ (Harré *et al.* 1999: 6). Integral to this perspective is the belief that the linguistic construction of discourses about environmental problems must first consider the inseparability of cultural

discourse from 'other material and symbolic practices' (Harré *et al.* 1999: 4). Herndl and Brown also note (1993: 1–2) the emergence of the environment as a concept and a problem which has an 'associated set of cultural values that we have constructed through the way we use language'.

Herndl and Brown (1993: 10–12) outline a slightly different approach to greenspeak. Although they do not use this specific term, their arguments are very similar to Harré *et al.* Their approach begins with a capitalist regulatory discourse where nature is treated as an infinite resource. This represents the 'discourse of the powerful institutions that make decisions and set environmental policy'. Following from this is a scientific discourse, normally derived from anthropocentric assumptions about the superiority of science over nature. Finally, a 'poetic' discourse forms a third component to capture 'the beauty, the value, and the emotional power of nature'. This model operates as a heuristic device with which to identify 'dominant tendencies' and orientations within environmental discourse. The aim is to link rhetorical styles and devices with an exploratory method for separating competing and interwoven discourses that characterise environmental rhetoric. This approach also suggests that there are symbolic, linguistic and rhetorical limitations to discourse used by powerful groups to talk about the environment. Howlett and Raglon (2001: 245–257), in their study of environmental imagery in business advertising, suggest that business has significantly increased the use of pastoral imagery and 'ecological' symbols. They go on to suggest that 'companies have always attempted to associate their products with whatever positive attributes of nature existed in consumers' minds' (Howlett and Raglon 2001: 254).

2.7.3. Environmental Narratives

One of the key ways that greenspeak is transmitted into popular discourse is using environmental narratives. This aspect of discourse analysis looks at various ways that texts convey certain assumptions, claims and messages. Narrative analysis employs a variety of devices that include the use of shorthand simplifications or elaborate descriptions and clarifications of the causes and consequences of particular issues of wider processes (Czarniawska-Joerges 1998). By deploying symbolic and linguistic

devices, narrators are able to construct a version of reality that offers a coherent description of the problem and a set of solutions, and to prescribe a list of actors and groupings associated with the claims made (Boje 2001). This is also about imposing order on events that may appear to be outside the control of the storytellers.

A narrative is also a means of linking the language user with both the historical and contemporary contexts of his or her actions. This is also an individual story line or a collection of accounts that contain enough symbols, imagery and rhetorical devices to make sense to the intended audience. Environmental discourses have produced many different narrative accounts, with the spread ranging from alarmism that emphasises the environment as a series of interlinked crises to the issue-by-issue reform of mainstream institutions.

For our purposes, environmental narratives are concerned with the politics of persuasion. Harré *et al.* (1999: 83) consider 'speaking positions' as crucial in signifying the legitimacy of the 'voice' present in environmental texts. Positions are defined as 'a set of rights, duties and obligations with respect to the kind of statements a person occupying a position can legitimately or properly make'. Accordingly, the more status and influence an actor has, then the more likely it is that this narrative will 'make sense'. Authors wish to ground their texts within a concrete framework that appears to offer plans of actions and noble outcomes as integral plot lines (Harré *et al.* 1999: 70). Harré *et al.* (1999: 71) make two important claims about the powerful significance of deploying narratives as persuasive devices. The first is that narratives represent 'forms inherent in our getting knowledge and that structure experience about the world and ourselves'. Secondly, narratives signify 'not only a mode of representing' but also a 'mode of constructing and constituting reality'. Harré *et al.* relate these two points to environmental texts in a variety of ways in order to establish their claim about the limits of environmental language.

2.8. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has highlighted three different approaches to the discourse of business greening. Each offers a specific view of discourse that forms part of a wider conceptual approach to the green language used by business actors. All of these approaches make substantive claims about the discursive dimension of business greening. It appears that contemporary business discourse on the environment has moved from a fixed view about green issues to take on more asymmetrical characteristics. This suggests that it is possible to argue that business greening consists of contradictory discourses that operate in tandem with each other. Business environmental discourses include denying the negative consequences of collective business action, and at the same time promoting the ability of business to instil modernisation practices and the rhetoric of environmental responsibility into all parts of their operations.

The first important consequence that we should draw from this review is to define the focus of our analysis – business discourses on the environment – more precisely. Is there one business environmental discourse or several? A Foucauldian approach would start with the notion of several discourses that might be contradictory but interact with each other. However, at any one time, one discourse tends to be more important than others. Such a dominating discourse could be called a ‘master’ discourse.⁵ Has such a master business environmental discourse emerged?

Essentially, this is not a question that can be resolved at the theoretical level. In fact, it emerges as one of the key empirical questions that will be addressed in the data analysis: did business develop a master discourse at either Rio or Johannesburg, or were there several business environmental discourses that were present at the same time without any one reaching a dominant position? Certainly, the notion of a

⁵ The term ‘master discourse’ is fairly widely used in the literature, but it does not appear that Foucault ever used it. The earliest use of such a term appears to have been made by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Addressing radical students in 1969, he stated that revolutionary aspirations always ended up in the ‘discourse of the master’ (Stavrakakis 1999: 12). He then went on to develop a theory of ‘four discourses’, consisting of the ‘discourse of the master’, the ‘discourse of the university’, the ‘discourse of the hysteric’ and the ‘discourse of the analyst’. The ‘discourse of the master’ was characterised by the struggle for domination. Lacan developed these concepts within his complex psychoanalytic framework (Verhaeghe 1995). His theory of the ‘four discourses’ does not appear to have found much resonance within discourse analysis as practised by social scientists.

hegemonic project on global environmental politics being pursued by the business community on the basis of the theory of a new transnational business elite promoting a unified global business discourse (discussed in Chapter 1) would lead to the expectation of a master discourse emerging. If we were to find that Johannesburg saw the development of a business environmental master discourse that was absent in Rio, then this finding would strongly support this theory. If we find master business environmental discourses present at both Rio and Johannesburg, then this would suggest that the changes in these ten years were perhaps not as dramatic as some authors have suggested. On the other hand, if we were to find no evidence of such a master discourse at either Rio or Johannesburg, this would shed some doubt on the idea of the emergence of a global business discourse with hegemonic quality. For these reasons, business environmental discourses will normally be referred to in the plural and cases will be highlighted specifically where the idea of one, unified master discourse is discussed.

Beyond the question of the existence of one or more business environmental discourses, the literature discussed in this chapter has drawn our attention to the possible range of discursive options that could be available to business actors. If there is one master discourse, what exactly does it involve? How is it constructed, what are its contents? If there is a multitude of business environmental discourses, on what grounds could we define them? Have they changed from Rio to Johannesburg, and how?

The literature has produced competing explanations of the many discourses linked with business greening. Generally, the variability may reflect the increasing range of functions served by each discourse. This raises some interesting questions that highlight the various ways that discourses change over time and whether it is possible to attribute to business a relatively stable and enduring generic set of discursive themes and patterns. Alternatively, do business environmental discourses, as greenspeak and greenwash perspectives suggest, adopt a 'pick and mix' approach? Furthermore, has business merely reworked elements of other discourses to fit with an economic reductionism or have there been significant modifications? Are the social constructionist approaches to discourse accurate in seeing business

environmental discourses as moving towards a more accommodating, environmentally friendly and less antagonistic view of environmental issues? Answering such questions must involve locating regularities and internal consistency. Identifying if these exist in the statements or documents of business actors will be part of our empirical project.

CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

While it has been established that business greening is an important discursive process, the empirical analysis of such discourses poses a number of methodological challenges. To date, there has been no sustained attempt to compare the content of the substantial body of environmental documents produced by a wide array of business actors. One objective of this thesis is to fill the gap, at least as far as business discourses at major international environmental conferences is concerned. It is the contention of this study that such a task is best approached using a variety of methods. Here, we are moving on to new methodological ground by seeking to combine the best aspects of qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative content analysis. This method should be capable of mapping out the broad contours of business environmental discourse whilst retaining attention to discursive detail. Discourse analysis provides a range of tools and concepts that are extremely useful for drawing out the discursive features of texts. However, discourse analysis also lacks the tools systematically to analyse a wide range of different material. Content analysis offers a method of identifying and cataloguing the key features of a large number of texts. Combining the best of the two approaches also means that the findings can be presented as a rich description and statistical analysis. The methodological innovation of this thesis thus consists of the choice of a mixed method approach combining inductive and deductive approaches (cf. Read and Marsh 2002: 240)

The material in this chapter is organised into three broad areas. The first sets out the theoretical background of discourse and content analysis, with specific emphasis on combining the two approaches. The second part provides a detailed discussion of the methods of data collection used. The third part is devoted to the development of the discourse content coding frame.

3.2. Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

3.2.1. Rationale for Choosing the Research Methodology

The method employed to analyse the research material adopts a distinctive combination of discourse and content analysis. This combination has two elements: first, there is the use of both discourse and content analysis in two separate processes; secondly, the use of content analysis as presented here involves discourse analytical tools to inform the data coding process; this novel method involves what is called the construction of a discourse content coding frame.

The use of a coding frame that reflects the discourse content of a text, rather than just counting the occurrence of specific words or patterns as defined by linguistic analysis, is the key innovative element of this study. It involves a qualitative discourse analysis dimension at two different junctures. The first is exploratory and adopts a discourse reading of a representative sample of the material. This generates the main thematic components used in the actual data coding. The second qualitative element occurs after the completion of the initial data coding and the setting out of the basic description of the business environmental discourses. Its aim is to construct the different types of discourses that underpin the numerical data results. Finally, the quantitative aspect of the methodology is undertaken during the processing of the coded material and the descriptive summary of the results. This organises the data within a structured framework that allows for the coding of frequencies across a substantial number of documents. The latter encourages a focus on classifying the content by counting the thematic components of a paragraph or larger section of text and matching this with a pre-prepared grid.

This approach was necessary for a variety of reasons. Generally, discourse analysis shies away from adopting a systematic approach to research material. Instead, it prefers to look at relatively small samples of text and assume these contain significant features characteristic of the discursive field. One implication is that making generalisations about the dominance of particular discourses emerges from limited empirical material. What these approaches to discourse analysis cannot do is systematically to map out and evaluate the extent to which a particular set of

discourses dominates a particular discursive field. By using content analysis the researcher is able to arrive at a judgement on how frequent and dominant particular elements are in a discourse tied to a specific arena, such as an environmental conference.

Discourse researchers have claimed that content analysis is unable to distinguish between important textual details or identify linguistic devices. In the view of the critics, content analysis sacrifices rich detail in the name of generalisation (cf. Fairclough 2003). This is potentially a valid criticism as an emphasis on counting frequencies depends crucially on the meaningfulness of what is to be counted. This is why the identification of discourse elements that have meaning within the discourse as a whole is such an important step: the quality of the content analysis depends crucially on the identification and selection of the appropriate and pertinent textual elements that can be counted. It is exactly in this way that the benefits of discourse analysis and content analysis are to be combined.

A further element of the research design is that the empirical analysis starts with a comparison of two key texts using traditional discourse analysis. A strong argument can be made that the two documents selected constitute the most advanced attempt to formulate the terms of a master business discourse on the environment: they are two books that were published by the key business groups pushing business greening to coincide with the 1992 and 2002 Earth Summits. This comparison will provide a first set of results on the nature of business environmental discourses and possible changes in these discourses between the two conferences. The results will provide a reference point for the content analysis to follow. The focus of both analyses is, however, slightly different: while the discourse analysis presented in Chapter 4 will be concerned only with the discourse of the 'lead' global business organisation promoting a green agenda, the content analysis will involve texts from all business organisations that made statements on the summits. This will provide an opportunity to assess to what extent key elements of the business environmental discourse are shared by the wider business community, and to what degree the texts could claim to fulfil the conditions for being classified as a master discourse.

Before discussing the details of the construction of the coding frame, it is important to have a closer look at the more traditional qualitative discourse reading of business environmental discourses. This will compare the various themes, assumptions, metaphors and symbols used by a section of the business community to talk about the global environment.

3.2.2. Discourse Analysis as a Method

At its most basic level, discourse analysis tends to consider ‘talk and texts as social practices’ and focuses on the ‘resources that are drawn on to enable those practices’ (Potter 1996: 129). It shows how language, at various levels and junctures, connects with social processes to produce social and cultural change (Fairclough 1995: 96–97). The discourse analyst is, in the Foucauldian metaphor, the ‘archaeologist’ uncovering and reassembling ‘meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events’ (Burr 1995: 48). These basic assumptions point to a different analytic tool kit that diverges from quantitative approaches to research.

Discourse analysis methods consider language as a pivotal process in understanding the construction of social practices. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002: 12) set out four areas that define the importance of language within the political field:

1. ‘Language is not a reflection of a pre-existing reality’.
2. ‘Language is structured in patterns or discourses’... there is a ‘series of systems or discourses’ where ‘meanings change from discourse to discourse’.
3. ‘Discursive patterns are maintained and transformed through discursive practices’.
4. Discourse analysis should focus on the specific ‘contexts in which language is in action’.

(Adapted from Phillips and Jorgensen 2002: 12)

There are several advantages to adapting these assumptions within a discourse analysis approach. It allows for a detailed description of the most important discourse concepts and themes, and the frequency and intensity of their consistency. Provided that the same set of criteria is used across different kinds of material, the findings

should be easier to generalise. According to some proponents of this method, one way of avoiding the spectre of the qualitative vs. quantitative debate is for the researcher to ‘stay at one level of analysis and to see what you can say about the data at that level, without seeking to resolve philosophical questions or occasionally participants’ questions about the “essential” character of “reality”’ (Silverman 1993: 198). However, this appears to be a rather narrow approach. While we do need to bear in mind that favouring an understanding of ‘what’s going on’ at one level may lead to a limited interpretation, there is no convincing reason why a researcher cannot say something about the data at one level and then relate this to different layers of discourse.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that discourse researchers do not look for laws; instead, they use the more neutral term ‘rules’. This follows Foucault’s early idea that discourses are understood as ‘relatively rule bound sets of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning’ (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002: 13). Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that there are two types of rules, regulative and interpretative. Regulative rules ‘guide behaviour down appropriate pathways’. On the other hand, interpretative rules ‘allow people to assign meaning to movements and events’ (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 58). For our purposes, the idea that business is governed by certain rule-like tendencies (e.g. the search for profitability) is combined with scope for individuals to construct contradictory interpretations and meanings.

Power is also an important element in discourse analysis. This locates the role of power *within* and *behind* discourse (Fairclough 2001: Ch. 3). The former refers to ‘powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants’ access to and control over discourse production (Fairclough 2001: 38–39). Three guiding criteria underpin the empirical investigation of power within discourse:

1. Content – what is said or done within the discourse.
2. Relations – the nature of social relations constructed around a discourse.
3. Subjects – what positions, i.e. defining roles and responsibilities, people are occupying.

(Adapted from Fairclough 2001: 39)

Within discourse analysis, data collection and analysis are two intertwined concepts. With regard to applying discourse analysis and its relationship to data collection methods, two related areas need to be addressed. The first is the implementation problem associated with there being 'no typical ... way of collecting data', which reflects the fact that '[critical] discourse analysis does not constitute a well-defined empirical method but rather a cluster of approaches with a similar theoretical base and similar research questions' (Meyer *et al.* 2001: 23). Paradoxically this acts as both a constraining mechanism and an unconventional way of choosing and selecting material. It claims to avoid the potential pitfalls associated with employing 'hard' quantitative analysis or indeed 'restricted' forms of qualitative approaches. This is because positivistic cause and effect relationships produced through orthodox quantitative analysis and, to a certain extent, qualitative analysis are minimised in favour of privileging the development of a strong theoretical base as a method for empirical selection.

A second and interrelated point is that the implementation of discourse analysis data collection methods depends on the use of linguistic categories and concepts to address questions of 'how', 'why' and 'what'. This raises the question of whether the material constitutes sufficient data from which to make generalised statements. Restricting the analysis to small samples of text tends to leave the research open to criticism that highlights the privileging of linguistic categories as an analytical method to establish general statements about the operation of various types of ideological and power relations. Putting this another way, where does the discursive construction of environmental realities end and the operation of wider structures begin? Jung (2001: 272) has captured elements of this argument by pointing out that the 'metaphorical transfer of ecological terminology may ... bring about the danger of being carried away to the wrong conclusions'. The more general point is that as 'soon as a linguistic sign has entered public use, its further development is no longer subject to the influence of its inventors' (Jung 2001: 281). Alvesson and Kärreman (2000: 1134) also note that there are tensions between investigating discourse as 'an emergent and locally constructed phenomenon' and linking this with a notion of

macro discourse that relies on 'a priori understandings of the phenomenon in question'.

A separate problem exists in the interpretative emphasis within discourse analysis (Hoenisch 1998). One frequently made objection is that the interpretative method does not sufficiently protect itself from the possibility of undertaking different readings from the same material. This occurs at several levels, specifically the use of theoretical description to establish the operational context for discourses, and the subsequent claims about the influence/pervasiveness of discourse through textual readings. A useful example is the infusion of neo-liberal ideology within social practices as this represents a favoured research theme for discourse analysis. Armstrong (2001) contends that approaches that apply discourse theory as an empirical method do so in an impressionistic and uncritical manner. Empirically this produces a 'self-fulfilling prophecy for whatever presuppositions can be constructed from its treatment of the literature' (Armstrong 2001: 156). The basic point made here is that 'reading off' a correspondence about the existence and effects of discourse from the application of linguistic concepts and categories is not straightforward, and in turn much of the correspondences established are derived from background reference to theoretical literature that also relies on assumptions.

An easier way of addressing and in some instances circumnavigating these difficulties is to follow the recommendations of Hoenisch (1998), Blaikie (2000) and Silverman (1993). In essence, empirical research should be motivated by the guiding principles of the researcher's questions and objectives and should adopt a method that produces the most satisfactory description or explanation. Silverman (1993: Ch. 9) highlights two points that are worth bearing in mind: never appeal to a single element of an explanation and avoid treating the actor's point of view as an explanation. These points suggest that an adherence to the following four generalised principles should inform a discourse-based research design:

1. Acknowledge that different methods produce different interpretative readings of the function and content of discourse. Work to minimise this should take place through a research design capable of answering the research questions.

2. A robust theoretical framework needs to be developed that considers a wide range of constitutive elements to provide a good theoretical description and empirical material.
3. Comprehend the perspectives of different groupings within the field of discourse production and consumption.
4. Contradictory evidence requires serious consideration and should be followed up or addressed through the theoretical description and post-empirical analysis.

As already mentioned, some of the key aspects identified in this review of traditional, qualitative forms of discourse analysis will be employed in the analysis of two book-length texts from 1992 and 2002 presented in Chapter 4.

3.2.3. Content Analysis as a Method

Neuendorf (2002: 1) defines content analysis as ‘the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics’. This approach aims to extract the key thematic preoccupations and biases within a substantial body of documents. The basic idea is that counting the number of frequencies across a range of different documentary sources will reveal the salience of particular ideologies, assumptions, beliefs and values attributable to specific groups of actors (Krippendorff 2004). Most approaches to content analysis also place a strong emphasis on understanding the particular definitions and techniques involved in the construction of texts.

There are many different varieties of content analysis. One simplistic misconception is that it arrives at its findings by merely reading literal surface meanings. Some of the more sophisticated versions of content analysis share the concerns of discourse researchers about distinguishing between different levels and depths of meaning and linking these with the wider political, social and economic context. For instance, content analysis studies of media bias may look at the slant of news by counting the number of neutral, positive or negative references to a particular topic and relating these to concepts such as power and ideology. Different approaches help achieve this goal. The research could focus on how the contentious activities of certain agents end up being omitted or downplayed, and code the key ‘trigger’ terms and phrases that mention agency and those that do not (Holsti 1969). Alternatively, there is no reason why large-scale organising frames, such as environmental protection vs. economic growth, could not be coded (Gamson 1992).

Common to all content analysis approaches is an emphasis on breaking the material down into readily identifiable classification patterns. These also identify the constituent components that make up the practice under investigation. Although there are some epistemological differences, the outcome is often very similar to the overall approach of some of the non-linguistic approaches to discourse analysis.

The rationale for undertaking content analysis is relatively flexible and less rigid than is often assumed. The major proviso is that sets of robust and rigorous classification categories are developed and the relationships are specified between them. We can distinguish between two basic approaches here. On the one hand, there are the fixed approaches to content analysis that favour a more rigorous method, relying on using research questions to generate category rules. On the other hand, there are those researchers who are not averse to employing content analysis on 'fishing trips' (Robson 2002: 353). A certain degree of empirical flexibility may be acceptable if the researcher has to familiarise her/himself with the data in order to enhance the development of the research questions. The aim of this study is to move beyond 'fishing trips' and actually combine a modified version of content analysis with elements of discourse analysis.

Content analysis is an approach that apparently diminished in status during the late 1970s. However, the advent of sophisticated computer packages has entailed a renaissance in content analysis. There is a rich legacy of research that suggests that content analysis is applicable across a range of different sources and research contexts. Early political science uses of this method included a focus on identifying the bias of mass communication, particularly the different types of rhetoric used to construct policy documents. Work that is more contemporary has focused on the historical study of party election manifestos across different periods and between countries (Budge *et al.* 2001). Here the analytical emphasis is on distinguishing the different types of shifts in the ideological assumptions of parties, and evaluating the extent to which there has been a decline in manifestos detailing substantive policy positions. In addition, this method is also used to explore how political actors formulate their policy preferences in the light of various institutional and cultural

constraints (Laver 2001). Another important area of research using content analysis is the analysis of media discourses (e.g. Philo 1995; Riffe *et al.* 1998; Ferec *et al.* 2002).

Robson (2002: 358) highlights the main methodological advantages of content analysis. Generally, the method focuses on exploring publicly available material. This makes it unobtrusive, and the research process is less likely to interfere with the actors involved. This form of data is naturalistic and provides excellent examples of actors attempting to represent their own meanings. The substantial body of readily available material also makes things easier for other researchers to replicate the results and apply reliability measures. An additional advantage is that coding requires the application of a consistent set of criteria to explore different types of documents. This allows for the extraction of specific information that covers a relatively wide range of sources. The larger sample size also bypasses the discourse analysis problem of making major generalisations about the workings of wider social structures from relatively small samples of text. Finally, content analysis is relatively simple and easy to use, and the coding manual sets out a detailed description of what the categories cover.

Content analysis has, however, been much criticised in the past, and some of these criticisms may also apply to more recent approaches. One of the most commonly levelled criticisms is that the exploration of meaning can be only relatively superficial and is restricted to understanding surface meanings. This also suggests that there is a tendency to detach the research findings from their relationship with the wider social context. The charge is that content analysis ultimately reduces meanings to easily defined categories subject to numerical quantification. As John (2002: 218) points out, the tendency is for researchers to reduce the complexity of the political world to a 'series of repeated and identical experiences or events'. Therefore, there is some merit to critiques of content analysis from a discourse analysis point of view. Content analysis arguably cannot capture the richness, the functions and the true essence of texts and these are often lost or obscured through statistical analysis. However, this criticism tends to overstate the inability of content analysis to explore beyond surface meanings. Linguistic forms of discourse analysis

already make use of detailed content matrices to study discourses across large samples. One solution to this problem is to adopt a more flexible approach in applying content analysis. This involves combining count-based statistical analysis with a more open approach to the initial data collection and analysis.

Any attempt to use content analysis in such a way has to overcome a number of obstacles. A first limitation associated with content analysis is that 'the documents available may be limited or partial' (Robson 2002: 358). This applies directly to the material used in this sample. Business actors could be expected to engage with the environment differently 'behind the scenes', producing a 'real' discourse that is different from the discourse laid on for public consumption. Nevertheless, the specific purpose here is to use openly available documents to examine how business constructs its public environmental discourses at global environmental conferences, although we do need to appreciate that there may be significant differences in emphasis away from the public gaze. The second problem is the issue of bias and distortion imposed on documents produced for 'some purpose other than the research' (Robson 2002: 358), although this is also a difficulty associated with documentary research in general. Minimising this involves devising coding categories that outline the background functions of the documents, such as the intended purpose and audience. A further potential problem focuses on the process of identifying the level of cause and effect attributable to documents. Again, this is a valid criticism if content analysis is applied as a stand-alone method of data collection. Another problem with content analysis lies with coding beyond surface meanings and moving the method to a level that looks at the more complex and subtle features of the research material. For example, coding for metaphors, symbols and discursive devices is difficult as these are not easily placed within count-based categories. It is for these reasons that the use of content analysis needs to be modified by employing discourse analytical techniques to devise a count-oriented frame able to deal with a broad range of different textual features across a substantial number of documents.

Silverman (1993: 203–204) suggests that quantitative analysis has an important role to play in the qualitative field. One such quantitative method is content analysis

which is a valuable heuristic tool for surveying discourses. To recap, one of the main advantages of content analysis is that it can systematically focus on detailing the substance of either latent or manifest messages (Neuendorf 2002: 23–24). In addition, one of the main advantages of discourse analysis is its ability to reveal different styles and strategies of language use within specific socio-economic contexts. This study goes beyond traditional forms of discourse and content analysis by combining both approaches. In the literature, there are some calls to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis, but this is left at a rather abstract level (cf. Silverman 1993; Dick 2004). The challenge is to make it work in practice.

3.3. Data

3.3.1. General Principles

Given the objective to link discourse analysis with content analysis, what are the implications for the data collection process? Traditionally discourse analysis studies smaller samples of text and (often arbitrarily) identifies certain features that relate to the discourse. This method often lacks specific details about selection criteria and how the chosen text is representative of the discourse. For the traditional discourse analysis presented in Chapter 4, a convincing justification can be provided for the selection of the text concerned. To extend this approach to all actors taking part in the discourse would be far more difficult, particularly if we want to capture changes in discourses over time.

As we have seen, content analysis is not without its problems either. Content analysis tends to take a larger volume of texts and restrict the analysis to a quantitative reading. Unless the texts to be included are representative of the discourse to be studied, the results of any content analysis may be misleading (Wilson 1993). This raises important points about the selection of texts and how representative they are. Ideally, any such objections would be made groundless if the researcher were able to collect all the texts that make up the discourse to be studied. For example, Budge *et al.* (2001), in their comparative study of the changing content of election manifestos, collected all of the major political party manifestos across a range of countries. This ensures that the texts are fully representative of the research

subject. If not all the texts can be obtained, then some form of random sampling would need to be employed to ensure they are representative.

A further assumption underlying a content analysis approach is that each unit of analysis, i.e. each text to be processed, has to be of the same value. The discourse to be mapped depends on such an assumption, otherwise findings about the frequencies of specific textual features could not be used to characterise a particular discourse. In contrast, discourse analysis does not involve techniques where all or representative samples of texts are chosen. On the contrary, discourse analysis researchers favour an approach where texts are chosen for their ability to reflect a specific discourse. In other words, discourse analysts select texts as particularly pertinent or significant for the characterisation of a discourse. Unless the grounds on which such selections are made are totally transparent, there is the danger that the choice of document introduces a bias that remains hidden.

It is important to emphasise that the analysis presented in this study does not claim to be representative of global-level business environmental discourse as a whole. Instead, the focus is limited to business environmental discourses within a specific institutional setting, namely the Earth Summits at Rio and Johannesburg. The assumption is that business texts related to the Rio and Johannesburg Summits constitute a specific discursive field. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002: 141–143) define this as a ‘complex configuration of discourses and genres within the same social field or institution’. This suggests that, within any given set of organisational arrangements, there is a multitude of competing and networked discourses. As the literature review has suggested, by focusing on one specific domain (e.g. business environmental discourse at the Rio and Johannesburg Summits), it is possible to explore how a specific ‘order of discourse’ (cf. Foucault 1984) is constituted through the discursive dimension of hegemony (Fairclough 1992). There are several ways of delineating an order of discourse. These begin by identifying what passes as shared knowledge within groups of actors and what is specified as a ‘normal’ environmental relationship within the discourse. After this, it is possible to consider which other discourses are attempting to compete and what the dominant discourses are. The

point here is that it is too simplistic to set limits that portray texts as either a cause or a reflection of social phenomena.

The selection policy chosen also has important implications for the validity of the design of the discourse content coding frame. Although the approach is set out in a linear framework, it is worth bearing in mind that the stages of the procedures were circular, and early data-gathering and piloting stages required continuous modification. One of main challenges involved in designing a discourse content coding frame was to develop an approach that could explore patterns and differences that occur across and between different business discourses. This includes material produced by different sectors, individual companies and association/lobbying groups. Overall, this is a large amount of material that could initially appear disjointed and inconsistent.

One of the main tasks was to draw up criteria about what qualifies as business environmental discourses and which texts would qualify as representing such discourses (cf. Phillips and Hardy 2002: 70–74). Some business actors may be more prolific in producing texts than others, so this could lead to an over-representation of texts drawn from specific sectors or companies. Conversely, sampling a limited range of material from key business actors may lead to relatively few documents that may be unrepresentative of the business environmental discourse as a whole. Criteria about which actors could be considered important and which are not could be difficult to justify.

The approach that was eventually chosen was to collect and process all documents that could be obtained that fulfilled specific selection criteria. This method was particularly appropriate as the total number of texts was limited. Every effort was made to obtain all texts that fulfilled the selection criteria and thus come close to a full survey. Even with a personal presence at Johannesburg and a remit to collect every possible text contributing to the business environmental discourse, it cannot be ruled out that some texts eluded the vigorous collection efforts of the researcher. As far as Rio was concerned, only texts that had survived in some recoverable form could be included. Overall, however, with maximum efforts devoted to collecting all

the texts that could be collected for both Earth Summits, there is no reason to assume that the collection of texts was subject to any substantive bias. A 'full survey' analysis logic could thus be applied here which means that tests of statistical significance which assume a random survey of units that are a part of a much larger population would not be appropriate.

What rules were established to decide whether or not a specific text qualified for inclusion? The first criterion was that the text had to be attributable to a business source. This encompassed individual companies, groups representing particular business sectors and business lobbying groups. Secondly, the text had to be generated as a specific contribution to the Rio and Johannesburg Summits. Only texts that were especially produced for the Earth Summits were to be included; most of these were presented and/or circulated at the summits; in some cases, texts that had been distributed and published beforehand were included, but only if they were intrinsically linked to the summit. Thirdly, all texts to be included had to be in the public domain. Other sources that discussed the environmental role of business, such as material produced by NGOs, regulatory institutions including the World Bank and UN documentation, were excluded. This material contained no specific texts that claimed to represent the views of business. Even if many of the documents discussed the role of business, business actors did not produce them. Also some material produced by business sources collected at Johannesburg had to be rejected as it did not focus specifically on the summit. Some of this included company evaluation reports, policy-related documents and general position papers. Including the rejected material in the selection and coding process would have entailed moving away from its focus on the Earth Summit and into general business discourses on the environment.

For the quantitative part of the analysis, no judgement is thus assumed that some documents are more important than others. The research data include written and spoken material produced by a variety of business sources for the summits. Traditionally, the analysis of this kind of populist material has been dismissed as largely consisting of shallow promotional rhetoric, which yields very little hard data. Yet, as Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) note, such business texts are also important

as they still convey the basic assumptions and ideologies within business orders of discourse. Publicly available documents are also rich in descriptive devices, images, metaphors and symbols. They contain messages that members of the business community wish to convey to the external world which, incidentally, also involves other business actors.

3.3.2. Data Collection: Johannesburg and Rio

With these selection rules in mind, the practicalities involved in the document selection process can be broken down into four stages. The first began a year before the Johannesburg Summit and focused on identifying the major groups producing material that contributed to the forthcoming summit. The literature review helped generate a list of the main active groups and companies. These were the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the Business Action on Sustainable Development (BASD). As the previous chapter pointed out, the WBCSD is of particular importance due to United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) accreditation as the official business representative. The BASD was formed by the WBCSD a year before the summit as a special lobbying initiative to provide a collective voice for business. Only the Earth Summit-related material produced by these three groups and available on their respective websites was collected. As the objective was not to gather material produced on the environment by every business, the criterion was to select those companies that produced specific statements or reports relating to the Johannesburg Summit. This was carried out by a combination of key term internet searches and use of the UN website's list of companies who are members of the Global Compact and UN Millennium Development Goals. The membership lists of organisations such as the WBCSD also yielded a further range of companies. However, a visit to the websites of individual companies revealed that most had no specific material oriented towards Johannesburg. Instead, during the pre-conference build-up there was a tendency for most of the material to be produced by the main business lobbying groups, such as the ICC and WBCSD.

The second stage involved collecting material in person at Johannesburg. I attended the summit for its entire duration as an accredited delegate and had access to the main plenary panel meetings and open meetings held by governments, business and NGOs. Here my strategy was to attend as many meetings as possible in which business actors participated. Over a seven-day period, I managed to attend 19 different business presentations. These varied from business-sponsored workshops, primarily designed to instruct other business representatives on best practice, to more detailed policy discussion fora which outlined the vision of sustainable development and general promotional events. I collected promotional literature and made detailed handwritten notes during the speeches and workshops. These covered the content of the actual speech and the question and answer sessions. The notes recorded my initial observations based on discourse types and the key words/themes. More documentation was obtained by visiting the separate 'sustainable development showcase' at the 'Ubuntu village'. This was a sustainable development 'best practice' exhibition that ran from 10 August to 10 September 2002 and featured concessions by the major accredited groups; some individual companies were also present. Generally, there was less business activity at the Ubuntu village.

Another important source of data was the UN Division of Technology, Industry and Economics that had asked 22 international trade associations to produce special reports detailing their sector's progress towards releasing sustainable development objectives since Rio. These reports were produced by the leading associations within each sector and encompassed all of the major operating sectors, which included mining and minerals, aviation, building, food, insurance, advertising, oil and petrochemicals (United Nations Division of Technology Industry and Economics 2002). Each detailed report outlined how the companies in their respective sectors were making progress towards the Agenda 21 principles agreed at Rio in 1992. Altogether, a total of 150 texts were identified and processed with reference to the Johannesburg Summit.

The second phase of the data collection involved gathering material produced by business for the UNCED 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Initially this proved more difficult as there was lack of available material produced by business. One solution was to

collect all of the known texts from Rio in the same way as Johannesburg. The initial document acquisition process began with a keyword search of the UNCED Earth Summit CD-ROM archive. This includes all the major actors, including business, governments, supranational organisations and NGOs. It holds every official document submitted during the conference preparatory committees, as well as all the documents, position statements, press releases, daily briefings and speeches delivered at the conference. The CD-ROM search yielded only a limited amount of business-produced material. Other material was also gained from the ICC archives; this yielded a series of 16 position statements produced specifically for the Rio Summit. An additional source of material was the UNCED conference handbook, which featured a mixture of advertorials, position statements and evaluation reviews of individual companies. Altogether, this process yielded 63 texts.

There was thus a marked difference in the number of documents available from each summit. One possible interpretation of this difference could be that fewer texts were produced for Rio, indicating a lower degree of activity by the business community. As will be outlined in Chapter 4, there are good reasons to assume that the level and nature of business activities have, indeed, changed between the two conferences. In 2002, business groups were keener to use documents and speeches to convey their position and engage in public debate. At Rio, business generally eschewed a visible presence and did not organise meetings. On the other hand, we have to consider other factors, in particular the substantial time difference between the event and the data collection process in the case of Rio. I obviously did not attend the Rio Summit and was unable to gather material during the conference. In order to ensure that the comparability of the data is not compromised, any interpretation must incorporate changes in business discursive strategy by including other forms of communication such as speeches at Johannesburg and promotional advertising at Rio.

3.4. Developing a Coding Frame

In order to carry out any form of quantitative analysis, the texts that had been collected on business environmental discourses at Rio and Johannesburg had to be

processed. Each text was coded and the data were entered into a dataset using a statistical package (SPSS) to facilitate analysis.

First, there was information relating to the type and origin of the text. This covered the material collected, which ranged from speeches, policy papers, advertorials, position statements, fact sheets and in-house evaluation reports. The length ranged from a straightforward one-page statement to 100+ page evaluation and policy reviews. Also relevant were such background factors as the group that produced the text, the sector or group affiliation, the type of business and the intended audience.

Far more challenging and crucial to the success of the project was the coding of variables that related to the substance of the text. The coding was a fairly lengthy process, starting with the development of a strategy that could identify the key thematic content within the material. This dimension was qualitative and involved applying an exploratory discourse approach, which relied on using a series of broad questions.⁶ These proved to be useful in developing an exploratory framework that could identify the most significant discursive frames and the major themes and debates (Gamson 1992). The guiding principle was to look at what business is *saying* and *doing* about the environment, and to which aspects of the debate does business ascribe meaning. Additionally, I was concerned with looking at how business defined its relationship with the broader contours of the environmental debate and any areas of tension within the discourse. However, adding substance to these general starting principles also entailed drawing up more detailed sets of questions (see Table 3.1).

⁶ These questions were adapted from Phillips and Jorgensen (2002: 144–146).

Table 3.1: Preliminary Questions Used to Identify the Content of Business Environmental Discourses

<p>1. To which aspects of the debate does business ascribe meaning?</p> <p>What are the overarching social and economic preoccupations that characterise business environmental discourse(s)?</p> <p>What kinds of environmental language and concepts does business utilise within its discourse?</p>
<p>2. What are the areas of tension within the discourse?</p> <p>What are the core motivations for business engagement with environmental issues?</p> <p>Why is business getting involved in contemporary environmental politics?</p>
<p>3. What is business saying and doing about the environment?</p> <p>Does the business environmental message contain sets of standardised policy criteria?</p> <p>How does business place itself in the processes and outcomes associated with environmental change?</p> <p>What are the kinds of certification mechanisms, policy instruments and political frameworks within which business organises its environmental strategies?</p>
<p>4. How does business define its relationship with the broader contours of the environmental debate?</p> <p>What are the main descriptive features used to convey environmental messages?</p> <p>What kinds of metaphors does business use to convey environmental messages?</p>

Applying this aspect of the discourse method initially involved reading and re-reading a cross-section of material from the Rio and Johannesburg Summits and making descriptive notes under each category type. The selection of material at this stage took account of the type of document (e.g. speech, report, position paper, the

sector represented and organisations involved). Whilst this aspect of the method produced a relatively complex array of discursive material, there were key areas, issues and clusters that influenced the recording units and framework.

The initial exploratory readings of the material were subsequently used to generate the quantitative coding categories. At this stage, the aim was to organise the raw data into broad categories which meant establishing a clear list of the different types of objects and concepts associated with the business approach to the environment. At this point the exploratory discourse approach still resembled a long list of key words and phrases, which on closer reading could be placed within four very broad organising categories. These were:

- Key topics
- Thematic structures
- Subject matter
- Kinds of solutions offered

Four categories were used initially to regroup the material. Introducing a range of sub-categories further helped expand their scope. One problem is that using four stand-alone categories means that detail is sacrificed in favour of 'empty categories'. This is one drawback of the content analysis approach as this generally advocates studying a limited range of key words or phrases. To rectify this problem, the discourse-oriented work of Dryzek (1997) was adapted and used to construct a set of detailed descriptive categories that could be subdivided into a number of different variables.

Dryzek (1997: 15–18) sets out the basic analytical components with which to explore any discourse on the environment. This begins with identifying the essential building blocks, the different kinds of agents and their motives, and the main processes. Although broad, these categories allowed for the incorporation of a substantive range of material. A list of the categories is summarised in Table 3.2. Additional emphasis on the background to each of the documents was required. This was included to cover the various organisational constellations involved in the construction of business environmental discourses. It was also necessary to add an additional coding category that covered the 'outcomes' of business environmental discourses. This was

due to the initial data indicating that business devotes a significant proportion of its discourses to making prescriptive claims linked to a discussion of processes.

Table 3.2.: Key Variables and Questions Used to Construct the Sub-categories

(Adapted from Dryzek 1997)

<p>Background</p> <p>Who produced the document, their geographic location, and company sector? Which associations and what kind of document?</p> <p>Agents</p> <p>This covers the range of actors business deems important and includes NGOs, consumers, the UN, other companies, investors and political authority.</p> <p>Business Agents' Motives</p> <p>The focus is on identifying why business is interested in the environment and includes legitimacy, self-interest, sustainable development, environmental concern, environmental harmony and environmental protection.</p> <p>Processes</p> <p>The emphasis is on identifying different kinds of environmental change and includes a range of environmental issues.</p> <p>Outcomes</p> <p>The different courses of action business will undertake and includes where action will occur, delivery mechanisms and levels of commitment.</p>
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Ensuring that the categories and the coding rules were understandable, accurate and as explicit as possible involved a series of post-design pilots. One way of undertaking this would be to allow several other coders to test the grid on the same documents and compare their results. However, limited time and resources prevented this. Instead, the final grid was piloted to a document and minor adjustments were then made to the categories. This was undertaken until a satisfactory level of detail and comprehension was obtained in the coding rules. Obviously, there are limits to how exhaustive any category can be. However, one useful way of adding depth and

clarity was to incorporate as many specific examples as possible of the kinds of items that could be included in a broad category.

Table 3.3. outlines the basic coding rule sheet. Starting from the full version of the discourse content coding frame,⁷ a simplified working version was constructed and each document was then coded using this version, although the full version of the coding frame was always available for consultation and clarification. In order to combat coder fatigue, the relevant material in the larger documents was highlighted and the readings carried out in stages. This allowed the coder to go back and re-evaluate any relevant passages. SPSS software was used to enter the data and construct a dataset used for the content analysis. Normally, the reliability of the coding would be cross-checked, designed to ensure that there is high level of consistency in the coding units identified. Given the practical constraints on this thesis, it was not possible to fulfil this part of content analysis.

Table 3.3.: Summary of Final Discourse Coding Frame

<u>1 Background</u>	
101	Region
102	Principal operating sector
103	Form of communication
104	Affiliation
105	Organisation
106	Who is text being addressed to?
<u>2 Agents</u>	
201	Consolidated agency
202	Individual business agency
203	NGO evaluation
204	Political authority evaluation

⁷ The complete version of the coding frame is documented in the Appendix.

3 Agents Motives

- 301 Environmental concern: general
- 302 Sustainable development
- 303 Environmental harmony
- 304 Self-interest
- 305 Legitimation and legitimacy
- 306 Environmental protection
- 307 Environmental social responsibility
- 308 Internationalisation

4 Processes

- 401 Specific environmental issues broached
- 402 Types of evidence utilised
- 403 Free enterprise and the environment
- 404 Regulation
- 405 Protectionist measures evaluation
- 406 Specific reference to international policy-making bodies
- 407 Market regulation
- 408 Environmental incentives
- 409 Partnership working

5 Outcomes

- 501 Specified time scales for outcomes
- 502 Where will business external environmental action occur?
- 503 Social outcomes: environmental dimensions
- 504 Social outcomes: general
- 505 Indirect references to environmentally desirable state of affairs
- 506 Direct reference to environmentally desirable state of affairs
- 507 Shifts in business practices specific commitments
- 508 Shifts in business practices general commitments
- 509 Traditional business values deployed as solutions to environmental issues
- 509 Growth in productivity
- 510 Technology
- 511 Environmental management

3.5. Discussion

This chapter has detailed the procedures and the rationale involved in the design of the research strategy from initial piloting to the final framework design. The main rationale for the research strategy is that the documents collected were representative of the business environmental discourses produced for the 1992 Rio and 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits. These documents are analysed using a variety of methods that can at the same time identify different discourses across a large range of diverse material and retain attention to detail.

First, two key manuscripts which could be seen as representative of a potential master discourse will be analysed and compared, using traditional discourse analysis (Chapter 4). This will be followed by an analysis with a more quantitative element. The design of this survey involves some aspects of content analysis supplemented with insights and processes taken from the discourse analysis tradition.

CHAPTER 4: COMPARING RIO AND JOHANNESBURG I: THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

4.1. Introduction

In June 1992, just in time for the Rio Earth Summit, MIT Press published *Changing Course: A Global Business Perspective on Development and the Environment*, authored by 'Stephan Schmidheiny with the Business Council for Sustainable Development'. A little more than ten years later, in August 2002, Greenleaf Publishing (Sheffield, England) and Berrett-Koehler Publishers (San Francisco, California) brought out *Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development* to coincide with the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. Again, Stephan Schmidheiny was one of the authors, this time joined by Chad Holliday and Philip Watts. Both books were associated with business groups that sought to sponsor a green business view at global level: the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) in 1992 and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) in 2002.

The existence of these two books is rather fortuitous for the purposes of this study. Here are two book-length expositions of a business view of sustainable development specifically written for both Earth Summits. These documents thus provide a unique opportunity to analyse the structure of particular business environmental discourses in 1992 and 2002 and to compare these discourses.

Before entering into a detailed textual examination using methods informed by discourse analysis, the two texts must be placed in context. What claims can be made about the importance of the two books? Who are the authors, and who are the business associations with whom the books are associated? How comparable is the status of both books within the context of UNCED and WSSD respectively? Of particular importance in this context is an account of the genesis and development of the key business organisations promoting a business case on sustainable development. Where do these organisations come from, and whom do they represent? The case for the importance of the two books and for the possible function

of the discourses contained therein as master business discourses of the environment can be made only by looking at the contexts in which the texts were produced.

Having examined the argument that these are key texts setting out the case for a significant part of the business community, and that the status of both texts is such that a comparison of the discourses provides a reliable tool to analyse possible changes in business environmental discourses between 1992 and 2002, the chapter engages in a detailed comparison of the texts to analyse change. The results will then provide a reference point for the subsequent examination of the business environmental discourse at each summit, using a different methodology to analyse a wider set of documents.

4.2. Context: A Brief History of Global Business Greening

The genesis of *Changing Course* and its successor *Walking the Talk* has to be seen within a wider historical context. The story of the way business actors sought to develop a presence and, ultimately, influence the proceedings of international environmental conferences does not start with Rio. After a review of the ‘pre-history’ of business mobilisation, the organisation of business representation at both the 1992 and 2002 Earth Summits is described.

The literature on the genesis and development of international business groups and their operation in relation to the Rio and Johannesburg conferences is patchy, and there are many unanswered questions. It is not the intention here to provide a comprehensive account of these developments which would have required substantial primary research that was not possible in this project. Using both secondary and primary sources, such as the texts generated by the various business organisations, we can nevertheless try to paint a picture of how business groups operated at these mega summits and draw some conclusions that should be of value for the empirical project. For the Johannesburg meeting, it is also possible to draw on personal recollections of attending the summit with the specific remit of observing the activities of business representatives.

4.2.1. The Early Years

Before the 1970s, there were very few attempts by business to produce a globally focused environmental discourse. This tended to reflect states' ad hoc and inconsistent attempts to address environmental problems at the global level. Generally, business either chose to ignore its role in environmental damage, or when necessary, resorted to begrudging and often localised compliance. The varied character of national regulatory policy styles tended to result in different responses on the part of business. Common to most countries was the use of a policy mixture of negotiated compromises, voluntary compliance and regulatory legislation. Generally, business responses to environmental issues were negative and, when necessary, benefited from a pragmatic approach. Here, the sector and association-driven structure of business lobbying organisations also played an important role in creating distinct regional variations.

As far as the business community was concerned, the focal point of initiatives to address global environmental issues was the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. This meeting saw the formulation of a distinctive global focus on the environment and the establishment of the UN as a co-ordination agency. However, the conference lacked a direct policy-making role and was restricted to making broad recommendations. Nevertheless, these were important in establishing a general framework that directly influenced business, and set in motion the idea of co-ordinating an international response to the environment. The eventual product of this conference was the 26-point general declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (United Nations Environment Programme 1972). Supplementing this were two lengthy strategy documents that made recommendations for better management and planning of approaches to environmental policy designed to 'promote' environmental protection/conservation as an economic, social and cultural objective.

The basic framework of this conference established a growth and technology-oriented approach. Whilst this broadly favoured business objectives, there was also an emphasis on improving international co-ordination, planning, evaluation and

objective-setting. These had the potential to introduce unwelcome targets and external evaluation mechanisms into industry.

Caldwell (2000: 68) notes that 'in retrospect the primary accomplishment of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was the identification and legitimisation of the biosphere as an object of national and international policy'. Caldwell also outlines some wider implications shaped by this conference. These included helping to define how and where environmental issues are co-ordinated and addressed; altering the status of environmental issues from exclusive national problems to interconnected and complex trans-boundary issues; and recognising that these newly defined global dilemmas required a greater role for international institutions. It also placed more emphasis on organisational relationships, for example the role of the west in the development of the south. Given business involvement in global sourcing and production and its fundamental contribution to trans-boundary pollution and resource depletion, these discursive shifts also implied that business actions would ultimately fall within all of these arrangements.

Following the 1972 Stockholm conference, it was the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) that took the initiative to formulate a global business view. This led to the publication of the *Environmental Guidelines for World Industry* in 1974 (subsequently revised in 1989). The main message of this document was that industry should formulate and abide by a standardised set of voluntary principles. At that time, business increasingly contributed to a series of globally-oriented reports and strategy meetings. On the agenda was the need to increase both state and business co-operation to address global ecological problems (Sachs 1999: Ch. 6). Despite signs of increased activity, business approaches remained largely reactive and restricted in their attempts to transmit a detailed business programme for the global environment. Instead, piecemeal action was still linked to the view that environmental issues were not problematic enough to warrant concerted and collective efforts. Clearly, trial and error helped define significant parts of business strategy. The hope was that piecemeal remedial action and the use of such devices as general statements of intent could restore public confidence and subdue regulatory activity.

4.2.2. The 1992 Rio Summit

After the rise of environmental politics in the early 1970s, green issues on a global scale took a bit of a back seat in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in particular. It was not until the mid- to late 1980s, with the appearance on the agenda of issues such as the 'hole' in the ozone layer and climate change, that global environmental issues not only made a comeback but gained unprecedented importance. There is a growing consensus in the literature that the 1980s and early 1990s marked a period of significant change in the business approach to environmental issues (Carothers 1993). With the changing global environmental agenda in the 1980s, the need for a business approach to these issues at global level became more apparent, setting in motion developments that came to a first major conclusion with UNCED in 1992.

Of particular importance in the run-up to Rio were business contributions to the report *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) which essentially redefined ecological problems within a framework that favoured the emerging concept of sustainable development. This report also helped further consolidate the role of business as a legitimate actor within the global arena. It was largely sympathetic towards business and acknowledged the important role of corporations in the governance of transnational environmental problems. In addition, the policy delivery mechanisms mostly favoured market instruments and/or voluntary and negotiated outcomes.

The agenda of *Our Common Future* received an overwhelmingly positive response, including from many environmental NGOs. While environmental groups had traditionally been mainly critical of the role of business, calling for tougher regulation and control over corporate activities, the 1980s had seen some changes in the focus of NGO activities. Despite some country-specific variations, overall this period saw a move towards a more pragmatic, professional approach (cf. Jamison *et al.* 1990). This coincided with new opportunities to take part in policy-making at the international level. In particular the sustainable development agenda accelerated this development, drawing groups into a discourse that was potentially not as hostile to business as before.

The emergence of the sustainable development concept as the dominant framework of political discourse provided a challenge and an opportunity for business. On the one hand, environmental NGOs embraced the sustainable development concept as an historical opportunity to see many of their ideas put into practice. Business was thus faced with the unpalatable prospect of groups dominating the debate that had, at least in the past, not been particularly sympathetic to the ideas of the business community. On the other hand, the idea of sustainable development as set out by the Brundtland Commission called for business to be part of the project, to be integrated into a broader project that brought different stakeholders together to form a new consensus.

This new situation that seemed to compel the business community to become involved was not interpreted in a uniform way. Many business leaders, including CEOs of multinational companies, had mainly seen the environment as a kind of irritation; international conferences on global environmental politics were not traditionally seen as arenas in which business leaders were expected to make an appearance. More profoundly, the environmental conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s had instilled in major parts of the business community a perception that environmentalists were intrinsically 'anti-business' and that therefore it was not in the interest of business to further the development of a global environmental agenda.

How, then, did the business community become involved in the UNCED process? The story told by the official history of the WBCSD (Timberlake, 2006) suggests that a chance meeting at the start of the organisation of business contributed to the debate. The ICC, the main business representative in global environmental politics thus far, had organised a dinner for about 140 participants of a regional UN conference on environment and development taking place in Bergen, Norway, in the spring of 1990. Among the businessmen and CEOs attending was Stephan Schmidheiny, a Swiss industrialist who had made headlines by unilaterally closing down asbestos production in the company he had inherited from his father once he had become aware of the health problems caused by asbestos (cf. also Schmidheiny 2006). Another key participant was Maurice Strong, a Canadian businessman who had a long association with global environmental politics, having been Secretary-General of the 1972 Stockholm conference. Strong had been appointed to fill the

same position for the 1992 UNCED conference and was keen for the business voice to be represented at Rio. After talking to Schmidheiny in Bergen, Strong invited him to become his principal adviser on business and the environment. His role was to represent business at the summit and to help make the concept of sustainable development better known in the business world.

After some initial hesitation, Schmidheiny accepted the invitation and quickly set about mobilising the business community to take an active part in the UNCED process. Initially, this appears to have been hard going, with many business leaders reluctant to become involved. Despite this resistance, Schmidheiny used his contacts within fellow CEOs to bring together 48 business leaders to join a new organisation called the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD).

The launch of the BCSD appeared to rival other efforts to formulate a business view on sustainable development. The ICC had already started a major initiative in the run-up to Rio. The ICC Executive Board had approved a 'Business Charter for Sustainable Development' in November 1990 which was published in April 1991 (International Chamber of Commerce 1991). The Charter consisted of 16 principles which set out a business approach in fairly broad terms: environmental management should be given the highest corporate priority, integrated policies should be formulated, practices reviewed, employees and customers informed.

Compared with the ICC 'charter' setting out a very basic set of principles, the efforts of Schmidheiny and his Council seem to go much further. At its first meeting in the Hague in the spring of 1991, BCSD members discussed what contribution they could make. Members eventually agreed on a framework, with the concept of 'eco-efficiency' at its centre, and on a plan to develop the business case in a book to be written by Schmidheiny, aided by BCSD members. Apart from the work on the book, BCSD organised a whole series of conferences and workshops, mainly intended to mobilise support for its approach to the business community. The ICC appeared to be sufficiently impressed by these efforts to concede to the BCSD the lead role of representing the business community at Rio.

The production of a book-length version of the business view on sustainable development proved to be a difficult task: 'the differences across companies, not to mention across cultures, were vast, Schmidheiny recalled' (Timberlake 2006: 13). Schmidheiny realised that it would be impossible to obtain consensus among BCSD members on the entire text of the book. Instead, at a conference in late 1991 in Wilmington, Delaware, his idea was to get agreement on a short, three-page statement: the 'Declaration of the Business Council for Sustainable Development'. Even with such a short document, it was difficult to get uniform agreement. The principles to be stated 'had to be broad enough that every company could endorse them, but not so vague as to be utterly meaningless' (Timberlake 2006: 15). In the end, agreement on a text was reached to be published in the book entitled *Changing Course* in June 2002. It had also been agreed that the authorship of the book was to given as 'Stephan Schmidheiny with the Business Council for Sustainable Development'. The 'Declaration of the Business Council for Sustainable Development' with the names of all its signatories appeared right at the beginning of the book, 'giving at least the appearance that they had signed on to the entire book' (Timberlake 2006: 15).

The BCSD, with *Changing Course* its lead publication going into the Rio conference, certainly achieved some visibility. Schmidheiny and other associates of the BCSD had been received by President Bush in the White House three months before the summit. According to Timberlake (2006: 17), the BCSD contribution to UNCED 'received a fair amount of media and global attention, as this was the first time a business contingent had presented at a U.N. conference'. *Changing Course* eventually was translated into some 20 languages. According to Chatterjee and Finger (1994: 116), the BSCD dominated the field at Rio and was instrumental in ensuring that the role of business in the Agenda 21 statement was seen as making a positive contribution to sustainable development.

Timberlake's detailed account, written from the perspective of a BCSD insider,⁸ makes interesting reading for a number of reasons. First, the account makes it quite

⁸ Lloyd Timberlake is described as a freelance consultant who had been involved in the drafting of the Brundtland report and who was also editorial adviser to Stephan Schmidheiny in his work on *Changing Course* (Timberlake 2006: ii).

obvious that mobilising the business community to take an active interest in sustainable development in the run-up to Rio was quite an uphill struggle. The network of business leaders involved was quite small (48). While some of them represented major international companies such as Chevron, Volkswagen, Ciba Geigy, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Dow Chemical, Henkel and Shell, this could by no means be seen as representative of the global business community as a whole. Second, it is also very obvious that *Changing Course* could by no means be interpreted as the agreed statement of those involved. As we have seen, BCSD members formally agreed to only a brief statement of general principles. In other words, Schmidheiny's efforts were very much those of an advance guard. His book sets out the terms of how the business community should approach sustainable development; it is a programme for the future rather than an agreed statement to which business leaders had signed up.

Nevertheless, *Changing Course* is the most complete elaboration of a particular interpretation of the business case as promoted by Schmidheiny and his associates. As such, it sought to define the business environmental discourse and could thus be interpreted as a potential 'master' discourse. To what extent others in the business community as a whole subscribed to the main messages of *Changing Course* is a matter for further inquiry. However, what can be tested with our data is how typical *Changing Course* is in the context of all contributions to the business environment discourses at Rio.

4.2.3. From Rio to Johannesburg

After Rio, the future of the BCSD was uncertain. Schmidheiny had signed up his fellow CEOs to contribute to the process with the promise that the organisation would be disbanded after Rio. However, Rio had a profound impact on the development of the global environmental discourse. The output consisted of the Rio declaration of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The last three documents were also used in the development of a broad set of policy-related objectives to foster better interstate implementation of these principles. The Agenda 21 document set out a generic set of guidelines on the best methods for the localised

implementation of sustainable development. In other word, Rio set in motion a whole raft of political processes at the global, national and local levels. The need for the business case on sustainable environment to be refined and disseminated, and to convince more businesses to become actively involved in embracing sustainable development, was thus higher than ever. Beyond that, numerous initiatives were started to involve business in various capacities in the debate and development of policy.

The post-Rio years thus saw a rapid increase in business activities on the environment at all levels. At the global level, the BCSD continued to exist for a while, but membership fell as the focus on Rio had disappeared. The weakness of the BCSD was that it relied on the personal commitments of CEOs who signed up as members. With Schmidheiny taking a back seat after the exhaustive Rio process, the momentum had gone. For the ICC, the BSCD had probably gone further than they had liked: Chatterjee and Finger (1994: 115) refer to differences that appear to have emerged between Schmidheiny and the ICC. As the BSCD had originally been conceived as a organisation linked to Rio, the ICC decided to revamp its own efforts and set up its own organisation, the World Industry Council on the Environment (WICE), which had companies rather than individual CEOs as members. Eventually, it was this model that was to prevail. In 1995, WICE and BCSD joined forces to create a new organisation called the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD). At its launch, 110 companies were founder members of the new organisation; in the following years, WBCSD saw a steady growth of support, growing to 191 members in January 2006 (Timberlake 2006). The calibre of the WBCSD members is rather more weighty than the BCSD membership of 1992: major players in utilities and power formed an important group, followed by oil and gas, mining, consumer goods, the car industry, and banking and insurance.

The period between Rio and Johannesburg saw some major developments that placed business in a more central role. One important element is the inclusion of the environmental agenda as part of the 'corporate social responsibility' movement. Under the heading of 'Corporate and Environmental Social Responsibility' (CESR), the business greening approach made giant headway at the level of individual

companies. The WBCSD was actively engaged in promoting this agenda. One arena in which this was done at global level was the launch of the UN Global Compact in 1999 (Timberlake 2006: 29–30).⁹

Through these and many other initiatives, by the time the 2002 Earth Summit arrived in Johannesburg, business in general, and the WBCSD in particular, had consolidated and broadened its environmental discourse. The WBCSD now occupied a more legitimate position at international environmental fora than did its predecessor. Apart from the wider social and political changes already alluded to, the WBCSD benefited undoubtedly from its organisational strength. The WBCSD has implemented a widespread and sophisticated communication strategy. This involves the publication of policy-oriented research which reflects the general ‘business case for sustainable development’ and the concerns of specific sectors (including transport, mining, biotechnology and oil). Another facet of this is that the WBCSD also has a dedicated managerial structure that provides its representatives (mainly CEOs) with the financial resources to achieve a high level of observable activity. This includes attending and making speeches at numerous local, regional and international environmental gatherings. Najam (1999: 74) is in no doubt about the legitimacy of the WBCSD, concluding that it is an influential group which occupies an ‘undisputed

⁹ The Global Compact is one of the main voluntary agreements signifying the progress of business legitimacy. The Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, initially proposed this at the World Economic Forum in 1999 which called on CEOs to rise to the environmental challenge and take an active part in implementing global social and environmental development within their companies. The Global Compact is organised around nine principles drawn from the UN labour, human rights and environmental charters and accords. Principles 7, 8 and 9 of the environmental accords state that business should ‘support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges; undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies’ (UN Global Compact n.d.).

The Global Compact differs from other voluntary regulatory reporting instruments as it is specifically designed as a complementary ‘value based’ project and an ‘action and learning network’ to advance institutional learning (Whitehouse 2003). The twin concepts used to convince business about the worth of this are ‘corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility’. A few of the generic terms associated with this include ‘accountability’, ‘dialogue’, ‘transparency’, ‘openness’ and ‘stewardship’. The Global Compact also sets a rough benchmark for membership that measures success according to how well companies integrate the nine principles into their operations by engaging in ‘partnerships, best practice and dialogue’, and how they report on their progress. Many international business actors see membership of the Global Compact as a prerequisite for doing business within global markets and securing greater legitimacy. Membership has rapidly expanded to include all the major international business lobbying groups (including the ICC, WBCSD and the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum), seven international associations that encompass all the major business sectors, around 2000 individual companies and over 100 national sector associations. The Global Compact has also attracted much critical attention (Utting 2002a; Sklair 2002; Williams 2004; Levy and Newell 2005).

position as the most representative and authentic voice for big business on environmental issues' and has an 'ability to use this position to reframe discussion on sustainable development around its chosen parameters'.

In comparison with Rio, the conditions under which the green faction of the business community had to operate were thus very different. In 2002, the idea of business contributing to an international environmental summit was not particularly novel; business greening had made striking progress at all levels. As a result, the WBCSD effectively was perceived as the official representative of the business community and was thus in a prominent position to provide input into the preparatory committee meetings and at the summit plenary sessions. Reflecting this status was a specific lobbying initiative organised by the WBCSD and the ICC called Business Action on Sustainable Development (BASD). This proved to be a more focused means for business to present a unified front at the summit. The WBCSD/ICC/BASD trinity also used the 'public' platform at Johannesburg to put forward clear and simple messages. These appealed to the pricing and property rights assumptions of other state and business elites and a more general audience (particularly the media and other non-state actors). One of the major events organised by the BASD was the Lekgotla Business Day at the Sandton City Hilton, which also served as the main BASD headquarters and venue for most of the BASD meetings. Complementing this was an information desk, named media contacts, specific issue groups, daily press briefings and numerous formal/informal invitation-only meetings and social gatherings. A strong business presence was also evident at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and 'Lekgotla' events, both of which featured a wide range of plenary session speakers and workshop presentations.

What are the implications of this changed context for the interpretation of the key text to be analysed in relation to Johannesburg, namely *Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development*? Again, the title was published to coincide with the summit. This time three main authors are identified: Charles O. Holliday, Jr., Chairman and CEO of DuPont; Stephan Schmidheiny, now Honorary Chairman of the WBCSD; and Philip Watts, Ex-Chairman of the Committee of Managing Directors at Royal Dutch/Shell. The presence of Schmidheiny is one point

of continuity from *Changing Course* to *Walking the Talk*. At one level, both books are quite similar in their orientation: they seek to set out the business case on sustainable development in some detail. One important difference is that *Changing Course* was seen as a pioneering effort at the time; *Walking the Talk* builds on the earlier effort and seeks to evaluate the progress that has been made.

Another noticeable difference is the way *Walking the Talk* was published. Using a highly reputable academic publisher in MIT Press, *Changing Course* wanted to be taken seriously as there was a question mark over whether its arguments would be seen as acceptable, as legitimate. *Walking the Talk* was published by Greenleaf Publishing, Sheffield, and Berrett-Koehler Publishing, San Francisco, California. Both are specialist publishers in the area of business ethics and corporate social responsibility. This could also be seen as an indication that global business greening has 'arrived'; it has carved out a particular niche and does not have to struggle to be accepted as much as in 1992.

The same issue of acceptability also concerns the extent to which the books are supported by, and are representative of, the business community as a whole, or at least that part of the business community associated with its sponsoring organisations, the BCSD and the WBCSD. As we saw earlier, the issue of the support of BCSD members was somewhat tricky. For *Walking the Talk*, the issue did not appear to arise: Holliday, Schmidheiny and Watts feature as authors, with the WBCSD not appearing as an 'associate' author as was the BCSD. As *Walking the Talk* features the environmental success stories of WBCSD companies, the association with the WBCSD is not in doubt. Timberlake (2006: 50) describes the book as the 'primary contribution to the summit' but devotes only one paragraph to it. While *Walking the Talk* may thus have a larger claim of being supported by the WBCSD, its impact seems to have been less than its predecessor. Unlike *Changing Course*, *Walking the Talk* has not been published in paperback, and no translations into other languages are mentioned.

What conclusions can we thus draw on the comparability of the texts? Both books were written for essentially the same purpose, namely to put the business case on

sustainability to a summit audience. In that sense, our analysis of the specific circumstances has not dented the claim that both texts are of pivotal importance for the analysis of business environmental discourses at Rio and Johannesburg. One claim that clearly cannot be sustained, however, is that *Changing Course* could be seen as representative of the business community. *Changing Course* was a pioneering text whose influence may have been greater after Rio than at the summit itself, but there is no evidence to suggest that it had the active support of a significant part of the business community at the time it was published.

Our analysis of the contexts in which both texts appeared thus adds a new dimension to our leading research questions on the extent and nature of change in business environmental discourses from Rio to Johannesburg. If *Changing Course* was a pioneering, campaigning text, then comparing its discursive elements with those of *Walking the Talk* provides an opportunity to see how influential the 1992 text has been in dominating the business environmental discourse. Absence of change could thus be interpreted as *Changing Course* having successfully established a master discourse that is simply replicated at Johannesburg.

However, consideration of the contextual features of Johannesburg adds a further twist. In order to turn *Changing Course* into a master discourse that is accepted by a wide variety of business actors, it could be expected that certain changes might be necessary. The support basis of the BCSD in 1992 and WBCSD in 2002 varied radically. The WBCSD can make a convincing claim that a significant part of the business community including numerous world players supports it, a claim that the BCSD could not possibly have made. But with such a wider basis, the potential for resistance might have increased, and the same problem that Schmidheiny faced in getting approval for his three-page declaration from 48 signatories could mean that, since 1992, the discourse promoted by the WBCSD would have to become even broader, more vague and less meaningful as a result. Analysing the changes to be observed between *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* should give some first indications of which of these scenarios is or is not supported by the evidence.

4.3. Breakdown of the Business Discourse

Which aspects of business discourse on the environment have altered and which have remained relatively constant between the 1992 Rio and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits? In addition, is business attempting to synthesise various national and sectional discourses to produce a more coherent business-oriented globalised discourse? Given the relative longevity of business engagement with environmental discourse, an appreciably higher level of environmental symbols, imagery, rhetoric, concepts and so forth should be readily identifiable within the 2002 Johannesburg discourse, and less so within the Rio discourse. An additional objective is to place any changes and continuities within a classification framework, which sets out the main thematic components as discourse types. This will draw on the work of Dryzek (1997) and apply a modified version of his approach to classifying discourse. This is necessary as the discourse literature generally lacks a detailed overview of the major discursive components used by global business actors. The intention is to use a more traditional discourse reading to ascertain if this yields different findings from data generated by a content analysis approach. A discourse approach places more emphasis on interpretation and meaning, and this could contribute to a richer understanding of business environmental discourses.

The method employed to evaluate the research material uses a comparative discourse approach to explore the main thematic change in business environmental discourses over a ten-year period. The first objective was to establish how business talks about the environment by undertaking a detailed reading and rereading of the material. This also allowed for the identification and comparison of prominent arguments and their narrative forms, important terminology, metaphors and symbols. From this, it is possible to construct the main themes running through business environmental discourses (Boyatzis 1998). Business employs these forms of discourse to represent their version of contemporary events and processes and to project imagined possibilities (Fairclough 2003: 124). This is a very broad and interpretative application of discourse analysis. Hence, the focus is not so much on using discourse analysis to identify what remains unsaid within the substance of the discourse. Instead, the focal point is on highlighting the many thematic continuities and discontinuities and relating these to the background role of extra discursive factors

(wider political, economic and social events and relations). These play an important role in shaping the textual construction of business environmental discourses (Hook 2001: 536). In order to address the main research questions, it is necessary to use four general sub-questions as a way of outlining any change and continuity in the discourse. These are:

1. How are sustainable development questions defined and framed?
2. How do the two books discuss and structure environmental issues?
3. What kinds of environmental trends do the books consider?
4. In what ways does business portray non-state actors in its discourse?

The intention is to discuss the material in relation to these four areas and link this to the research questions.

4.3.1. How Does Business Define Sustainable Development Questions?

In both books, the definition of sustainable development employed by business unequivocally accepts the version proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its report *Our Common Future*. In this text, 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the future without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43). While reference to *Our Common Future* has not changed, several modifications have taken place in how *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* use sustainable development in their discourse.

Initially, *Changing Course* directly correlated sustainable development with the idea that economic growth is a necessary and contingent condition for realising positive environmental change. The main proviso is that 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' should characterise future business performance. This may suggest that the World Commission on Environment and Development definition is appealing in that it allows for interpretations that appear to favour prescriptive solutions based on fusing environmental and social development with the profit-seeking objectives of business. *Changing Course* also introduced the idea that sustainable development represents an interrelated series of growing problems for the west. The following illustrates this kind of reasoning:

[S]ustainable development will require the greatest changes in the wealthiest nations, which consume the most resources, release the most pollution, and have the greatest capacity to make the necessary changes. (Schmidheiny 1992: 6)

While sustainable development still had a certain novelty value in 1992, some aspects of the use of the concept in *Walking the Talk* ten years later illustrate how unproblematic the appropriation and reconfiguration of this definition had become for business at that time. *Walking the Talk* now considers this as a definition that only ‘corporations have understood and actively promote’ and that governments, NGOs, academics and the public fail to appreciate the concept. Their comprehension of the concept lags ‘well behind business actions’ and since Rio ‘business has been championing a term that is unknown to most of the world’s inhabitants but is universally known amongst environment and development actors and thinkers, where it seems to mildly annoy them all’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 12–15).

This line of reasoning is an important foundation stone of the whole business environmental discourse. One essential feature to emerge from both texts is the way that business elites position themselves as a dominant grouping. Business has the necessary knowledge to manage environmental issues and make decisions on behalf of those less able to grasp the significance of sustainable development.

Chapter 1 of *Walking the Talk* further considers the thesis that sustainable development is a concept liberated by business. Doing this involves questioning the perceptions and motives of other non-state actors and institutions. Generally, these groups displayed a clear lack of commitment to the ‘appropriate’ World Commission on Environment and Development definition. The pro-growth reading of the definition allows business to posit an immutable link between economic growth and environmentally oriented sustainable development. The subordination of sustainable development to business ‘bottom line’ objectives is now emphasised in much starker terms. ‘Some business leaders were drawn to the concept as they realised that not only was it not antigrowth but also it called for some serious economic growth to meet the needs of the current population’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 15).

In *Walking the Talk*, references to the sustainable development concept's lack of impact within the business community are absent. The idea that businesses might be deterred by an 'anti-growth' association with sustainable development is obviously no longer relevant: the debate has progressed, the business view of sustainable development has largely won over. Sustainable development in *Walking the Talk* is part of an economic, environmental and social 'triple bottom line'. However, these components do not receive equal ranking. Instead, the economic takes precedence over the environmental. The economic codification of sustainable development may suggest that nature is a commodity that can be valued and priced. Additionally, the environmental and social dimensions that now constitute this 'triple bottom line' lack robust definitional criteria.

An additional area of importance is the suggestion that sustainable development has allowed business to identify an intrinsic link between business activities and the condition of the environment. The most striking way of doing this is by business positioning itself as an ethical and moral environmental guardian. This plays out within a wider context that accords human-like qualities to institutional structures. The kind of discourse associated with social and environmental responsibility also involves adjusting obvious bad conduct in order to establish a level of expectation that appears to fit with what society and consumers expect.

The discourse suggests that the use of resources has established a business dependence on nature and this irrevocably links the fate of business with the fate of the natural world. This favours economic language and metaphors and is exemplified by a connection with nature that employs market and administrative rationalism so that business activity reflects the carrying capacity of the eco-system. Business thus adapts the World Commission proposal that the environment cannot exist independently of human interests and inverts this idea to put business interests first and everything else second (Stenmark 2002: 23).

Table 4.1: Key Statements Associated with Discourses of Interconnectedness

How is business interconnected with the environment?

- Re-contextualisation of business within global markets
- Environmental change brings business together
- Business leaders as stewards and guardians
- Nature needs business and business needs nature

4.3.2. How do the Two Books Discuss and Frame Environmental Issues?

Within both texts, the thematic ‘glue’ that organises business solutions to environmental problems is the active dissemination of a business-oriented vision of environmental progress. This vision also surrounds itself with descriptive and prescriptive assumptions about what kinds of outcomes are feasible and desirable.

Generally, *Walking the Talk* has developed a much clearer and more simplistic discourse on environmental issues and outcomes than its predecessor. In *Changing Course*, there was more emphasis on spelling out the future benefits of progressing towards ‘free market environmentalism’. Largely absent was the incorporation of a detailed discussion of how self-interest and economic growth could promote specific issues and outcomes, including corporate accountability, human rights, eradication of poverty, and pollution abatement. In *Walking the Talk*, major emphasis is placed on framing environmental issues within action-oriented language that sees corporations working towards delivering ‘clearly defined’ and ‘realistic’ objectives. Obviously, these objectives revolve around business-centric ‘eco’ concerns, such as economising on resources, injecting efficiency into production processes and putting in place managerial systems to allow business adaptability. Despite these differences, the shift towards integrating an environmental vision into managerial practice has its roots in *Changing Course*.

In *Changing Course*, the ‘issue is not whether the vision looks good on paper, but whether behaviour and outputs change’ (Schmidheiny 1992: 85). As such, ‘only firm leadership from top management can reconcile the goals of long-term sustainability and short-term profit’ (Schmidheiny 1992: 85). Here the basic premise is that

business elites equipped with a 'sound' business environmental picture are, by design, capable of implementing corresponding changes in business beliefs and values to move their companies forward towards sustainability. This mode of argument is, at the same time, a persuasive rhetorical device used by 'enlightened' business elites to convince other (unspecified) pro-business environmental sceptics of the importance of the sustainability discourse and is a way of dealing with unwanted external criticism.

In order to understand the dependence of both books on vision, it is necessary to consider some of the underlying assumptions. This allows us to consider how both texts use this assumption and, at the same time, help business galvanise their own ranks and deflect potential criticism. Chapter 6 of *Changing Course* sets out a detailed blueprint for 'managing corporate change' as 'the future for all stakeholders includes both a strong economic foundation and a healthy natural environment. Building a sustainable future depends on our absolute commitment to both' (Schmidheiny 1992: 96). Interestingly, in *Changing Course* a significant part of the environmental vision background narrative conceptualises the environment as having reached near crisis point. This is affecting society and by extension business, but more specifically the steady and foreseeable pursuit of long-term business profitability. Economic and business metaphors always frame the terms of this aspect of business environmental discourses. For example, in *Changing Course*, 'environment and economic decline are in many areas an inseparable part of the same downward spiral' or 'the bottom line is that the human species is living more off the planet's capital and less off its interest' (Schmidheiny 1992: 2–3). The following text is a useful example of the crisis narrative. Here the suggestion is that fundamental societal changes are taking place that will require corresponding changes in business practice.

Unsustainable development patterns appear to be part of the reason for the higher numbers of disasters over the last decades and the associated damage, injuries and fatalities. ... There is also growing concern that climate change might produce more disasters – more storms and cyclones as climate systems are disrupted further by rising carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, and more floods as sea levels rise. (Schmidheiny 1992: 66)

In contrast, this kind of quasi-apocalyptic imagery is absent from *Walking the Talk*. Instead, there is a more business-like approach to environmental issues. As previously stated, the socio-environmental dimension remained (at best) marginal to the business case presented in *Changing Course*. In *Walking the Talk*, the text utilises and explicitly links abstract concepts, such as justice, equity, opportunity, morality, and responsibility, as tangible by-products of market and growth-oriented forms of business greening. Now sustainable development 'is partly about social justice' and is something that 'involves considerations of justice between generations' (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 13). In *Walking the Talk*, business has now fully acknowledged sustainable development 'as an important moral concept' (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 18) as companies must develop a 'business model that integrates ethics, [and] social responsibility as well as concern for the environment (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 106, 13). What is evident is that, in 1992, business initially conceded the existence of an imminent environmental crisis. Yet, by 2002, the emphasis has noticeably shifted. Currently there is a greater inclination towards using assumptions as a legitimate basis to make prescriptive arguments. These visualise numerous environmentally progressive and socially desirable outcomes organised around economic growth and market liberalisation. At the same time, there has also been a marked decline in the intensity of the issue framing in favour of a tactical and piecemeal vision that tends to see environmental issues as discrete policy areas. It is not clear how assumptions that stipulate universal benefits could be realised on an issue-by-issue basis.

4.3.3. What Environmental Trends Does the Business Environmental Discourse Consider?

Changing Course identifies a series of environmental trends that set out the main agents and causal processes contributing to a potentially threatening state of affairs for business. These include concern about the negative impact that an increasing population will have on depleting resources, and the fact that this may generate wasteful practices that are 'inefficient and ill planned'. High population growth also leads to a 'permanent' loss of biodiversity and climate change. Finally, 'the most complex and potentially serious of these threats is a change in climate and in the stability of air circulation systems' (Schmidheiny 1992: 1–3).

From this discussion, it is possible to discern environmentally oriented themes. These tend to be organised within a broader business-oriented discourse that combines traditional business language (resource inefficiency, threats and stability) with environmentally oriented language that favours a 'population diagnosis'. This assumes that population growth pressurises the environment and that this in turn threatens the environment more than unrestrained economic growth (Thompson and Rayner 1998: 301–303). *Changing Course* takes these assumptions and broadens the population diagnosis to include the impact that 'human activities' (as opposed to business) have on the natural environment. Complementing this are questions about the ability of existing institutional and organisational arrangements to address the conspicuous impact of environmental issues. Governments lack the administrative and organisational capacity successfully to manage these issues. *Walking the Talk* is bolder in its claims, as the discourse also makes numerous linkages between business activities and the permanent resolution of environmental issues, such as global warming and poverty. More significant is the ring-fencing of increasing consumption as a necessary means of generating solutions to the long-term challenge of decoupling inefficient resource use and environmental degradation.

In *Changing Course*, the linkage between population growth, consumption and environmental degradation appears to indicate a mirroring of the general Rio concerns with the impact of increased consumption on the environment. At this point, it is possible to identify clear indications that a modicum of environmental concern has filtered into traditional business discourse. However, these features of the discourse also undermine the impact that such acknowledgements have had on the progressive development of business environmental discourses. Both *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* frame such concerns within a broader context that suggests increased consumption is a necessary axiom if organised around 'eco-efficient' growth, increases in greener production methods and the promotion of responsible consumption through the price mechanism. The business contribution to the causes of environmental problems is only ever circumstantial and tends to be replaced with easier targets, such as population growth.

Additionally, the environmental crisis imagery and rhetoric used in *Changing Course* to set out the trends is absent from *Walking the Talk*. When *Walking the Talk* discusses the trends, these are portrayed as given and open to change. Ultimately, the central reasons for the shift in acknowledging environmental change do not automatically reside in the impact of environmental trends on business environmental discourses (although this may be a factor). A more determining factor is the perception that, despite business efforts, policy action in the regulatory arena is inevitable. Therefore, the best solution is to stay one step ahead of this by putting in place a range of voluntary and negotiated mechanisms.

4.3.4. In What Ways Does Business Portray Non-State Actors in its Discourse?

Changing Course initially developed and *Walking the Talk* subsequently expanded on the proposal for increasing channels of communication with groups and institutions traditionally perceived by business as being counterproductive to their economic and political interests. This area has undergone a significant amount of change. Initially the idea was that outside groups could simply ‘help’ on an ad hoc and strictly limited basis by contributing towards drawing up green action programmes. We have to be clear that *Changing Course* did not advocate that business relinquish control over any perceived ‘deals’ with external bodies, nor was there a desire to hand over implementation and policy-monitoring roles fully to non-business actors. Rather the emphasis was on ensuring that other groups work within the concepts and policy mechanisms favoured by business. In *Changing Course*, four essential frames characterised business willingness to acknowledge other ‘voices’ (Schmidheiny 1992: 87–88):

- Public acceptance of corporate activity
- Reduced risk and liability
- Self-regulation rather than regulation
- Better policy advice

These four components reflect a very basic range of pro-business benefits and the first three courses of action tended to lack an explicit environmental dimension. Such concerns reflect a self-interested pre-occupation on the part of business with legitimating its economic activities. Of particular importance is the constant search to

redefine legitimacy and assimilate external pressures on the growth-oriented 'business model'.

One technique mooted in *Changing Course* for stabilising legitimacy is the incorporation of those non-state actors traditionally predisposed to a disparaging view of corporations. More specifically, in *Changing Course*, the focal point for integrating environmental concern into business environmental discourses is located within the very general and widely practised business notion that outsiders could provide business with constructive dialogue and better quality environmental knowledge. However, the consideration of other environmental actors in *Changing Course* remained at the embryonic stage. The main predicament was the deficit in perception: there was a discursive shortfall between the justification given for business environmental mobilisation, e.g. legitimacy and altruism, and the actual assistance sought from non-state actors, especially help with importing greater effectiveness and efficiency into business operations. In *Changing Course*, the business environmental discourse lacked a sufficient set of justifications for increasing dialogue that did not resort to defending narrow self-interest.

Walking the Talk develops this move towards dialogue based on the four criteria outlined in *Changing Course*. However, in *Walking the Talk*, more emphasis is placed on the benefits of business environmental communication with critical voices. To this extent, the dialogue metaphor now encompasses two novel domains. Firstly, there is the use of a 'listening' and 'understanding' discourse to facilitate the business move towards working with other actors on environmental issues. Secondly, a wider range of possible environmental/ecological objectives is attributed to the dialogue metaphor. The following list of key terms used by *Walking the Talk* highlights the main expressions associated with the two dimensions of the dialogue metaphor used.

Table 4.2.: The Key Components Associated with the Dialogue Metaphor

List of key terms used by *Walking the Talk* to facilitate dialogue

Domain 1 'Listening and understanding' discourse

- 'Giving other stakeholders a voice and listening to what they have to say'
- 'Being prepared to act or react accordingly'
- 'Acknowledging and valuing different needs and interests'
- 'Trade-offs'
- 'Synergy'
- 'New ideas'
- 'Stating a company's values and principles'
- 'Transparency and accountability'
- 'Empathy and compromise'

List of key outcomes in *Walking the Talk* linked to business working with non-state actors

Domain 2 Objectives and outcomes discourse

- 'Collaborative partnerships'
- 'Joint ownership of difficult situations'
- 'Building trust'
- 'Serious discussion that ultimately leads to real change'
- 'Tri-sector approaches between business, government and NGOs'
- 'Multi-stakeholder engagement'

The increased emphasis in *Walking the Talk* on instigating a 'listening and understanding' discourse and 'action-oriented' set of objectives also encompasses a strong conservative dimension. This appears in *Walking the Talk* (and previously expressed in *Changing Course*) as a desire to maintain business organisation and control over the discourses produced through stakeholder interaction. For instance, *Walking the Talk* states that dialogue 'does not mean that a company need involve other stakeholders in every decision or that every stakeholder request will be met' (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 152).

The reformulated business approach to dialogue also remains constant in the recognition that concessions are viable strategies *if* business can exercise guardianship over the terms and conditions under which compromises occur. What differs is that, whilst *Changing Course* advocated very 'loose' consultation-based

mechanisms for realising stakeholder incorporation, *Walking the Talk* advocates the use of different levels and points of contact, and a more co-ordinated effort to produce a general set of arrangements for dealing with non-state actors. Hence, the range of environmental objectives and outcomes flagged up by *Walking the Talk* includes a broad-based assortment of universal principles and action-oriented terms. All of these are considered as shared and unproblematic concepts and as terms to inspire organisational change in how business responds to other environmental actors.

Walking the Talk specifically emphasises the role of business in harnessing the expertise and knowledge within the NGO sector to implement and monitor 'developmental partnerships'. This shift appears in both texts and is exemplified by the changing types of case study-based evidence. In *Changing Course*, case studies primarily highlighted modifications in commodity production processes and managerial know-how. By contrast, in *Walking the Talk* case studies encompass additional details of successful business partnerships with the voluntary and NGO sectors. There are also numerous examples of the business environmental discourse enhancing dialogue and promoting internationally focused corporate and environmental social responsibility. Doing this has involved signing up to global charters, such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDC) and promising an adherence to global codes of conduct such as the OECD guidelines for multinational companies and the Global Sullivan Principles (GSP). Additionally, closer collaboration between business and the United Nations Environment Programme also legitimates the application of global standards derived from voluntary case-by-case oriented approaches.

Walking the Talk favours business applying globally focused voluntary initiatives, partly to harmonise the environmental aspects of their operations by providing a framework of general principles and declarations that business can use across national boundaries. This is an area of substantive change. In *Changing Course*, there was little indication that business was willing to sign up to globally focused codes and charters or commitments to implement environmental and social concerns using

‘business models’. *Walking the Talk* appreciates that such pledges represent important changes in how business will deliver its environmental discourse. First, these initiatives require a degree of centralised and co-ordinated reporting (a prime function of the WBCSD). Second, broadening the discourse to include a listening and understanding dimension exposes companies to greater criticism if they fail to implement their public obligations. The wide range of universal objectives and outcomes postulated in the listening and understanding discourse also permits business to put forward these measures as substantive evidence of actual environmental commitments.

Another noteworthy feature of the *Walking the Talk* discourse used to portray non-state actors is the retention of market metaphors and the use of these to realign NGOs within economised relations. *Walking the Talk* states that ‘many NGOs recognise that they cannot ignore the market if they want to find and deliver solutions to complex environmental and social problems’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 155). An interesting discursive feature of the *Walking the Talk* discourse is that NGOs have now moved closer to business ideas and values, rather than vice versa. Here business is, at the same time, a protagonist wanting to ‘reach out’, and an agent capable of instigating profound environmental change. We can identify these themes in a short quote from *Walking the Talk*:

NGOs may believe that the private sector and the market cause many of those very same problems, but a number of them realize that for that very reason these institutions are part of the solution. (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 155)

4.4. Key Thematic Areas

4.4.1. Case Studies

Both texts devote a significant amount of space to outlining case study-oriented descriptions of evidence-based examples. This valuable metaphorical device allows business to compartmentalise and generalise their responses to environmental issues. *Changing Course* details 38 implementation successes spread across seven chapters. *Walking the Talk* goes even further by outlining 67 examples of business innovation

and excellence in delivering environmental goals. The case studies highlight company-by-company approaches encompassing the entire spectrum of business operations and production processes.

In *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk*, case studies are always correlated with the core themes of market liberalisation, voluntary initiatives, self-regulation and technical innovation. The cases highlight a mixture of radical and evolutionary organisational and technical shifts. In *Changing Course*, case studies tend to reflect changes within aspects of production systems, such as reducing the level of emissions, recycling waste and using fewer natural resources. These case studies tend to deal with more specialist technical change, often confined to specific practices. *Walking the Talk* divides its approach to case studies between the 'technical fix' dimension and an outline of the many successful forms of partnership working to implement environmental protection projects. This additional dimension covers such initiatives as recreating natural landscapes, funding environmental awareness programmes within local communities and consultation exercises. Many of the case studies in *Walking the Talk* are undertaken in conjunction with business adherence to global codes of conduct and the implementation of voluntary regulation.

Case studies are an integral part of the network of codes and voluntary initiatives. The outcomes of case studies have various organisational implications, functions and meanings. Table 4.3 groups these into two broad areas. The first is that case studies provide a verifiable function and the second is that they allow for the reconstruction of business discourse.

Table 4.3.: The Main Functions of Case Studies

Verification functions

- Provide the requisite evidence of change and commitments to sceptics and policy-makers
- A bargaining tool for the procurement of policy subsidies from governments and international NGOs
- Provide useful 'in-progress' examples that may anticipate potential regulation
- Help show that the core objectives of the business are compatible with environmental sustainability
- Stabilise potential conflicts occurring within the wider business environmental discourse

Reconstruction functions

- A way of building on initial discourse limitations to offer flexible adaptable and workable solutions
- Inform the development of further implementation strategies organised around initial principles
- Allow business planners a safer form of path dependency
- Generate new ways to avoid implementing wholesale environmental change.
- Generate additional cost savings and efficiency measures
- Provide knowledge that can be shared and interpreted by different firms and non-business institutions
- Changes that may have occurred outside the environmental context are easier to pass off as ecological

It is tempting to consider this aspect as representing a 'mixed' discourse in the sense that there are recurring themes (legitimacy, economic growth and liberalisation) and that business is preoccupied with linking the environmental aspects of its discourse with these. To varying extents, these different domains may be synthesised by discourse users. At a textual level, the mosaic effect this produces also renders them more susceptible to lapses into vagueness and contradiction. Yet, when the core assumptions are articulated, these tend to be characterised by the use of clear and precise phrasing. No matter how much the discourse evolves or adapts, there are noticeable continuities. This also suggests that, when business articulates its environmental discourse, it is attempting to integrate potentially antagonistic

language as a way of transforming the environmental outlook and practices of business. To put this complex process more simply: there is a concern among business elites with adapting and ultimately subsuming environmental language and its associated concepts into business language. This has wider implications related to the actual impact that environmental issues have on business activities and ideological practices.

4.4.2. Legitimacy and Self-Interest

Legitimacy and self-interest are two recurring issues discussed in detail in *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk*. One important aspect of this is the tailoring of any environmental objectives to legitimise environmentally unsustainable activities. *Walking the Talk* places more emphasis on legitimacy than *Changing Course* which is more pre-occupied with self-interest. A range of different euphemistic terms is used in *Walking the Talk* to convey the legitimacy message. Some of these include: 'building trust', 'securing a licence to operate', 'reputation building management and enhancement', 'accountability', 'openness', 'employee support', 'public acceptance of corporate activity', and 'leading by example'.

The main concept used to frame legitimacy and self-interest is Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility (CESR) which is now an important facet of the business environmental discourse. This 'generally incorporates a set of prevention mechanisms and management methods for products and raw material in order to use the natural resources in a socially responsible way' (Dion 1998: 154–155). *Walking the Talk* uses a different definition:

...the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families and the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life. (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 103)

This vague description modifies the sustainability concept towards preserving economic growth. There is a distinct lack of environmental dimension within this definition. Yet, in *Walking the Talk*, environmental responsibility is also a

‘fundamental concept – like liberty or equality – that is always being redefined to serve changing needs and times’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 103). These are two contradictory statements. The first appears to define what business will actually do, yet it is also couched in neutral terms that employ vague language (i.e. ‘working’, ‘improve’, ‘quality of life’, ‘commitment’). Only two outcomes are specified in the first definition: economic growth and ‘improved livelihoods’. The second statement juxtaposes these with concepts from other political domains i.e. ‘equality’ and ‘liberty’, yet these critical components are not included within the definition. These help build the ‘common sense perception’ that corporate social responsibility is an altruistic and flexible concept willing to adapt and incorporate concerns.

Another definition of CESR also operates within *Walking the Talk*. This suggests that ‘leading companies are making up their own versions of corporate social responsibility as they go along, and this is as it should be, for companies must guarantee a good fit with their own market realities’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 113). This definition relates the concept more to the kind of environmental and social responsibility a self-interested minimalist position would adopt, that is the use of quasi-philanthropic investments close to production sites as a means of image legitimisation, issue management and proactive engagement. Both the *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* discourses share the minimalist interpretation. The difference lies in the conceptual frameworks used to organise this type of thinking. *Changing Course* circumnavigates the concept of CESR and is more prone towards favouring management and production system modifications and case-by-case philanthropic projects to maximise profitability and sustainability. One problem in *Changing Course* is that the reasons given for these actions do not appear to reflect a high level of environmental principles or motivation. Furthermore, within the minimalist position set out in *Changing Course*, environmentally philanthropic activity, such as responsible care programmes, are legitimate business concerns only if they ultimately serve the maximisation of profits and shareholder value.

In *Walking the Talk*, business had clearly worked out that there were limits to selling its discourse in specifically ideological terms directly associated with highlighting markets and philanthropic gestures. Instead, there is more talk of business being a

‘good corporate citizen’. This change may have more to do with such factors as steadily declining levels of trust among the public, the real and potential impacts of involuntary regulation and the continual circulation and development of business discourse in response to such threats. Now the ‘big’ idea is to ‘extend the idea of corporate responsibility in time and space’. *Walking the Talk* ventures further and places citizenship as an integral component of the business environmental discourse: ‘today, environmental concerns tend to get put under the umbrella term “corporate social responsibility” ’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 106).

The following extract from *Walking the Talk* represents a typical discussion on corporate social responsibility:

[C]orporate social responsibility has moved beyond a simple equation of profitability plus compliance plus philanthropy to becoming more about understanding the societies in which business operates. Top executives are finding themselves dealing with a wide spectrum of issues, including greater accountability, human rights abuses, corporate governance, codes, workplace ethics, stakeholder consultation and the management of sustainability strategies. In a changing global arena, the social aspects of business are taking on a more business-focused meaning – whether in the form of ethical trade, social accountability, community investment, or good labour practice. (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 107)

The range of issues and objectives outlined in this quote appears to expand the business remit beyond simple self-interested philanthropy into other political and social areas. However, this shift also reflects concerns with more traditional business interests. The following provides a useful illustration of this point: ‘the move from dialogue, and later toward partnership, has been driven largely by a desire to manage corporate reputation – a critical asset’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 154). The quotes also highlight the permanent search to redefine and readapt legitimacy. The legitimising aspect of the discourse embracing an environmental dimension to business practice assists business in contextualising the increasingly changing nature of regulatory and pressure group activity.

4.4.3. Regulation

Regulation is one area of continuity within both texts. Both have a disparaging view of future forms of regulation that are binding, targeted, universal and 'command and control'-oriented forms of environmental regulation. Both *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* are clear in their conviction that longitudinal regulatory approaches with 'teeth' inevitably result in creative inertia for business. A command approach to legislation generally establishes counterproductive forces that end up promoting burdensome externally measured and standardised targets. Ultimately, these do not reflect or promote optimal efficiency, flexibility and innovation in the use of technology (Schmidheiny 1992: 24). More seriously is the fact that command and control 'cannot deliver continuous improvements, since the most effective solutions cannot be predicted or prescribed in advance' (Schmidheiny 1992: 25)

Yet, running in parallel with the negative view of regulation is a pragmatic interpretation of the need for command and control regulation and an acknowledgement of its effectiveness. For example, in *Changing Course*, the focus is on the retrospective successes of regulation and not on applying such measures in the future:

Our view is that ... regulations have served a useful purpose and that there will continue to be a need for basic regulatory frameworks in all countries. Command and control is particularly useful when there is a serious threat to health or safety or when pollution becomes especially dangerous once it exceeds a given level locally. (Schmidheiny 1992: 20)

Calling for command and control caps on pollution suggests that there are companies that will always attempt to circumvent the regulatory implications and business requires this type of regulation. Also stating that 'when pollution becomes especially dangerous' tends to suggest that pollution has a neutral impact on human health and the wider environment. In addition, the level of action suggested eschews preventative measures in favour of reactive regulation. Moreover, 'basic regulatory frameworks' encourage the implementation of minimum rather than maximum standards. *Walking the Talk* continues with this type of contradictory reasoning,

albeit in a more refined manner. Command and control regulations now occupy the bottom of a “smart” hierarchy of public policy tools’ (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 63). Here, implementing sustainable development relies on policy planners ‘understanding’ the importance of voluntary initiatives and negotiated agreements as preferable strategies. These should be used in conjunction with economic instruments. An example of this is the belief that economic instruments ‘can provide incentives but must be carefully designed to avoid unintended and unwanted consequences’. Clearly, business needs a legalistically organised order that is effectively monitored and enforced, and is conducive to the reproduction of its organisational structure and profit-seeking practices. Yet, business is also asking for the continuation of informally/formally negotiated voluntary initiatives as viable alternatives to planned forms of regulation. One way of framing this is to consider that the commercial imperative helps in establishing a high level of pragmatism within business. Both forms of regulation are conducive to realising business-related objectives.

4.4.4. Partnerships

Changing Course suggested that one way of extending business involvement in environmental governance was through ‘public–private’ partnerships. The key terms talk about the flexibility of these arrangements and the substantial benefits for both business and wider society. The broader context for the desirability of these mechanisms reflects the trend towards privatisation and the increasing role of the private sector in delivering and administering ‘public’ goods and services. *Changing Course* constructs partnership-based solutions with two dimensions. The first offers a reading that expands on the economised benefits of partnerships for business:

Multinational corporations should demonstrate – as many are already – a willingness to make long-term investments in countries at an early stage of development by entering into partnerships to build, own and operate joint ventures using the technology of sustainable development. (Schmidheiny 1992: 127)

The second dimension is tactical and acknowledges that ‘new’ interests will require incorporation in order to implement these state–business partnerships.

Considering stakeholder involvement to be legitimate and strategically important requires more effort than traditional public relations or information sharing responses. (Schmidheiny 1992: 86)

The first dimension seems to focus more on using partnerships as conduits in the strategic positioning of business within new markets. *Walking the Talk* intertwines these two separate areas and argues that 'progress toward sustainable development requires many more – and more complex – partnerships' (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 150).

Both of these textual samples depend on an implicit body of background assumptions and assumed knowledge. It is taken for granted that private interests have a pivotal role in the environmental trajectory of developing countries. Both texts tend to avoid important questions regarding the extent to which company or sector-specific partnerships will produce generalised and enduring environmental gains. This may indicate that the range of discourses business draws on to address environmental issues is limited to several mechanisms that tend to reflect its general self-interest. Instead, both texts express the belief that there is an in-built efficiency and effectiveness within corporate organisational structures and that the expansion of partnerships is primarily a vehicle for implementing and reproducing these components. The 'environmental' dimension is the assumption that partnerships are rational, superior, market co-ordination mechanisms. By maximising market participation, developing countries create greater opportunities for business investment and this allows the transfer of 'clean' technology and the better management of natural resources.

Business tends to use the partnership discourse as a solution to a complex array of environmentally-related issues, processes and outcomes. This approach was already evident in *Changing Course*, but *Walking the Talk* accords a much wider ranging list of characteristics and attributes to partnerships. Partnerships now have the capacity to produce environmentally desirable outcomes, such as technological innovation. In *Changing Course*, the assumption is that tangible environmental benefits are automatically produced, such as biodiversity preservation, emissions reduction, health provision and clean water supply. In addition, both books display continuity in their scepticism over the ability of governments to implement their own

environmental policies. In part, this reflects their sluggishness in providing the necessary infrastructures to allow business innovation and expansion. One specific example used in *Walking the Talk* blames the failure of the Kyoto protocols on institutional inertia, whilst circumventing the lack of enthusiasm among certain business actors for this accord. Partnerships represent a corrective mechanism to prevent such institutional failures.

In *Changing Course*, partnerships represented collaborative attempts to improve limited aspects of business environmental performance by maximising commercial responsibilities, and this core principle remains the norm in *Walking the Talk*. Although there is an additional emphasis in both books on the quantification of environmental knowledge, in *Walking the Talk* it is seen as essential to provide business with the technical and practical dimensions associated with implementing the private delivery of sustainable development projects. The expansion of business discourse into sustainable development policy-oriented learning contained in *Walking the Talk* retains and expands on the economised and self-interested motives set out in *Changing Course*.

4.4.5. Markets

In *Changing Course*, the cornerstone of sustainable development is 'a system of open, competitive markets in which prices are made to reflect the costs of environmental as well as other resources' (Schmidheiny 1992: 14). The primary idea is that market relations are immutable; harnessing the competitive nature of markets is the only means of facilitating the development and transfer of the technologies that will reduce pollution emissions. This produces a balance between environmental considerations and the pursuit of commercial objectives. Both *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* accord markets laws and rules that function independently of business activity. Environmental change occurs only if business has the incentives to respond to market signals. *Changing Course* suggests that markets should reflect the full costs and benefits of *all* environmental activity. This means that consumers should pay more if they are using scarce or environmentally harmful goods and services. Business is thus allowed to externalise costs with use of market instruments

such as environmental taxes and charges. The price mechanism also serves as a blueprint for bringing about the reorientation of markets towards full-cost environmental pricing. *Changing Course* details the benefits of markets in sustaining an individual company's competitive edge and their innovation in the efficient and effective use of resources. The approach taken here is thus more concerned with making cost savings rather than improving environmental quality.

The market discourse in *Changing Course* is occupied with informing the reader *why* and *how* global trade, energy, technology co-operation and capital markets should be oriented in a clearer manner towards openness and competition. At this point, a detailed consideration of outcomes remains very fuzzy and tends to revolve around arguing that such changes will, at some future point, reflect and promote environmental 'truths'.

The market dimension within *Walking the Talk* is more sophisticated, as this draws on a wider set of market attributes to envision an expanded range of environmental outcomes. *Walking the Talk* is more concerned with global business and its activities within emerging and developing markets. Some additional modifications include the general principle that global markets 'promote fairness' and the 'well being' of 'global civilisation'. One way of reversing environmental exhaustion is to ensure that current market frameworks are liberalised to overcome participation barriers. Since this 'lack of market access keeps countries poor', this inevitably increases the likelihood that environmentally benign technologies (developed by business) will flounder and environmentally destructive technologies prosper. Markets are essentially well-designed self-correcting systems, and any failures and weaknesses can usually be corrected through the judicious application of trade-related rules. The problematic issue of past market failures to address environmental degradation and their potential inability to co-ordinate non-destructive environmental activity occurs primarily because 'markets have simply not effectively reflected the costs of environmental degradation' (Schmidheiny 1992: 15).

The economised nature of the market argument does not construct its discourse around ecological criteria; rather there is an overt reliance on transporting the

theories and concepts associated with 'neo-classical economics' to organise 'free market environmentalism' (Eckersley 1995: 12–17). Both *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk* share the assumption that binding and universal forms of environmental legislation essentially represent narrow and politically motivated objectives that constrain the efficiency of markets and, by extension, business. A second assumption builds on the neo-liberal idea that individual companies, who follow their private commercial objectives in a rational and largely self-interested manner, will produce collective environmental benefits. Business is ideally placed, due to its dependency on markets and its understanding of the workings of basic market laws. In *Walking the Talk*, this logic appears in the linkages made between markets and sustainable development: 'the most important feature of market based instruments is that they harness companies' creativity and self-interest to achieve environmental and social objectives' (Holliday *et al.* 2002: 86).

4.4.6. Technology

Technology is an indispensable driver of environmental change in both books. In *Changing Course*, it has a positive historical impact on societal development. Generally, technology is a vehicle for reducing emissions and waste in production processes. *Changing Course* sets out two conditions that must be attached to this. The first is that future developments in clean technology should be rolled out across countries as co-operative ventures between different businesses and their requisite partners. The second is that processes and products 'must all contribute to a sustainable world' (Schmidheiny 1992: 84). A clear role is also set out for the state as, according to *Changing Course*, 'especially important is the recognition of government as a stakeholder and partner' (Schmidheiny 1992: 89). Some of the changes associated with technology include disease and drought resistant crops, a paperless society, hydrogen cell-powered cars, micro-production, solar powered houses and offices (Harrison 2000: 37). Technology is also the glue that structures wider societal relationships, such as 'building up infrastructure, [the] wealth generating capacity and competitiveness of a country' (Schmidheiny 1992: 118).

In *Changing Course*, technology co-operation involves a necessary restructuring of both the practical and abstract dimensions primarily associated with the heavily

economised business view of what constitutes positive environmental change. For instance, technology co-operation implies 'using the technology of sustainable development' negotiated between corporations as 'commercial ventures', rather than as a strictly environmentally motivated undertaking (Schmidheiny 1992: 122) This is further elucidated as the 'naïve view' that:

...corporations can somehow move technology on a concessional basis. This is impossible. Business enterprises exist to generate wealth by adding value. (Schmidheiny 1992: 121)

Commercial viability and profitability appear to form the essential prerequisite for the implementation of pro-technology policies in developing countries.

Walking the Talk is even more assertive about the benefits of technology. Here is an infinite range of positive outcomes linked with new technology, such as addressing poverty and eliminating hunger. The view is firmly located in the idea that technology is an abstract force outside the control of business and is something that naturally evolves. Paradoxically, technology is also something that *Walking the Talk* argues could be used to exercise greater control over the environment.

4.5. Discussion

What are the main results of our detailed comparison of *Changing Course* and *Walking the Talk*? The first message from this analysis is that there is, indeed, a very high degree of continuity between the two texts. In virtually all areas analysed in detail, *Changing Course* contained at least some elements of the discourse that was developed further by *Walking the Talk*. At the same time, there are no central elements of the *Changing Course* discourse that have been completely abandoned by *Walking the Talk*. The second main result of this comparison is that *Walking the Talk* has expanded the discourse to incorporate extensions to existing elements. The interpretation of *Changing Course* as defining key elements of a master discourse can thus be supported. What exactly were the stable and new elements in the change in discourse patterns over the ten-year period?

The intensity of public commitment and concern for the environment within business elites and their lobbying groups has resulted in a progressive increase in environmental symbols, imagery, rhetoric and concepts within business discourses. The comparative assessment of the two books indicates that the key thematic components of the business environmental discourses are relatively fixed. The fixed components include the liberalisation of markets (particularly in developing countries), regulators and the regulated negotiating/determining outcomes, more use of pricing mechanisms and property rights, and more use of voluntary regulation and private–public partnerships. What business appears to be doing is protecting the features of the core paradigm by altering the periphery of the discourse. Reflecting this was the employment of a pro-growth definition of sustainable development to organise the thematic content of both discourses. Business talk has remained tied to the guiding principle that economic growth is wholly compatible with environmental protection. At present, the tendency is to talk about this in terms of a more generalised business ‘sustainability’. Business also tends to organise its environmental discourses around the application of managerial and technological efficiency and effectiveness. This will allow business to move from ‘end of pipe’ solutions towards holistic management systems applying the latest state-of-the-art technology to make products that are more resource efficient. These identifiable constants in both discourses also indicate that there are significant limitations in the range of discursive material that business draws on to construct and manipulate its interpretations of environmental change.

Notable change has occurred in business perceptions of the strategic role of non-state actors. Epitomising this area of change was the identification of a set of ‘action’-oriented and ‘listening and understanding’ discourses, which broadly emphasised the desire to ‘value’ and ultimately ‘work with’ a broad church of non-state actors. To this extent, there has been a change in business environmental discourses towards advocating non-economistic forms of environmentally oriented disclosure, transparency and accountability.

Another interesting area of change is in the transformation of the environment from a policy problem into a managerial challenge. The *Walking the Talk* discourse,

therefore, contains a wider range of environmental agents, processes and outcomes and a substantive array of environmental rhetoric and symbols. The use of apocalyptic imagery and with it the idea that irreversible environmental changes could cause earth-threatening disaster, have been replaced. Replacing apocalyptic imagery is an emphasis on harnessing the reflexive capacity of elites to project an enlightened self-interest into business practice, the need to consider the environment as a business opportunity to increase market share, to legitimate their general business activities and anticipate regulatory activities. This is apparent in the *Walking the Talk* discourse, and in the continuous linkages made between legitimisation and the need to harness short-term profitability to long-term business sustainability.

Cohesion and strategic thinking are also evident in the disproportionate concern with linking environmental protection to normal business activities (e.g. resource extraction, profitability and market capture). Further cohesiveness has been added through business producing what it believes to be an authoritative set of concepts, terminology and policies for talking about the environment. This includes terms such as a 'triple bottom line of economic social and environmental growth', and policies that favour liberalisation and voluntary self-regulation. These also help embed the general belief within business elites that they can retain guardianship and control over the environment. This can be found in the emphasis on implementing different forms of CESR, which would include companies making controlled disclosures of environmental information, promoting a company's ecological values and beliefs and a willingness to work with non-business groups. The listening and understanding discourse used to engage with other non-state actors also suggests a greater degree of strategy. Business constructs the partnership arrangements that emerge from this discourse that view other groups as willingly coalescing around business perspectives on the environment. Part of this involves establishing the appearance of dedicated action. With this in mind, international business is running parallel corporatist arrangements with NGOs and the UN (Murphy and Bendell 1997, 1999; Bendell 2000; Arts 2002).

Transferring business environmental discourses into a more cohesive internationalised form, and maintaining them there, relies on business shaping its discourse in reaction to perceived threats. Therefore, the shift towards utilising a generic environmental discourse could initially occur within the reactive dimension. The gradual incorporation of environmental and social dimensions into business environmental discourses reflected a perceived inadequacy within business circles of earlier simple linkages between sustainable development and economic growth. Consequently, established meanings available to business (those from the economic domain) were insufficient to manage the gradual social institutionalisation of environmental issues. However, equally important is the changing context of business discourse. Generally, the structural power of business has increased since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Rowlands 2001; Clapp 2003b). The lack of extensive environmental controls imposed on business and the preferential treatment of business at both summits reflect this (Beder 1997; Gillespie 2001; Bruno and Karliner 2002). These developments have provided a relatively safe platform for organisations such as the WBCSD to extend the property rights discourse into other areas.

The modification of business environmental discourses towards the idea of using proactive social and environmental dialogue suggests that the more business reacts to environmentalism, the more measured and considered is its discourse. This is evident in the increased importance placed on using promotional and lobbying activities that contain a prescriptive message. This helps ensure that business preferences enter international policy formation processes at an early stage. Potentially, this may indicate the opening-up of business discourse to other possibilities and courses of action, resulting in a softening of the deeply economised pricing and property rights dimensions. This is also the broad argument put forward by mainstream advocates of business greening (Piasecki 1995; Marsden 2000; Prakash 2000), environmental 'management gurus' (cf. Hawken 1993; Elkington 1994, 1999; Elkington and Burke 1989), the ecological modernisation literature (cf. Hajer 1995; Mol 2000) and even some of the 'critical literature' (cf. Livesey 2002a, b; Livesey and Kearins 2002).

CHAPTER 5: COMPARING RIO AND JOHANNESBURG II: THE QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter used a discourse reading to identify and compare the most significant concepts and themes promoted by two key texts specifically produced for the Rio and Johannesburg summits by the leading global business greening campaigning groups. But how typical are these discourses for the business discourse at each conference as a whole? In order to analyse the whole range of views promoted by business at each summit, and to assess the extent to which business environmental discourses changed from one conference to the other, we turn to another method to analyse the range of texts available. Using a form of content analysis informed by elements of discourse analysis, this second empirical part of the thesis seeks to compare both summit business environmental discourses.

The first task of this chapter is to map out the main differences between the business environmental discourses at both summits. Can we identify any important changes and specify more precisely what these changes are? Using the coding frame developed in Chapter 3, the data on various aspects of environmental business discourses can be analysed and the salient developments from Rio to Johannesburg pinpointed.

The second task will provide further analysis in order to answer the key research questions developed earlier. In particular, there is the question of whether a master discourse has been developed or not. The results of the qualitative comparison broadly indicated that business produced its most significant concepts for the Rio Earth Summit and these were then adapted and expanded for the Johannesburg summit. By comparing the key elements of the discourse associated with the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) at Rio with the texts produced by other business sources not associated with the BCSD, we can examine

to what extent the BCSD discourse had indeed become the dominant discourse. Extending this approach further, we can also compare the key elements of the texts of sources associated with BCSD's successor organisation, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) at the Johannesburg summit. In order to examine change, we can then compare the BCSD and the WBCSD discourses in the context of the broader business environmental discourses of all business groups at each summit. To what extent have BCSD/WBCSD been able to dominate the discourse as a whole?

Beyond this test of the master discourse thesis, we can also explore the validity of the notion that sectoral and/or cross-national differences among business actors will make the development of a master discourse difficult. We can test the impact of both sectoral and national associations of business sources on key aspects of the business environmental discourse. This should allow us to carry out an additional test on the master discourse thesis, and also investigate whether changes in the representation of business interests from one summit to another affected the nature and content of the business environmental discourse.

5.2. Mapping Discourse Change

The dataset compiled by processing a total of 213 texts provides a unique opportunity to identify the main elements of the business environmental discourses at Rio and Johannesburg and allow us to pinpoint the main changes that have occurred in the ten years between one summit and the next. The results of the comparison will be presented in five sections, beginning with an overview of the background, identifying the main organisations, affiliations, regions, operating sectors and communication media involved in the construction of business environmental discourses. The second section analyses motives for engaging with global environmental issues, the third section looks at the representation of different actors in business environmental discourses. Following this is an outline of the prevailing central economic, social and political processes mentioned in the texts. These encompass regulatory issues, the different types of evidence used and environmental issues. The final category covers the range of prescriptive environmental outcomes made by business. These include the different kinds of expectations within business

environmental discourses, delivery mechanisms, and obligations and responsibilities. For each of these areas, continuities and changes from Rio to Johannesburg are highlighted.¹⁰

5.2.1. Background

The background section breaks the Rio and Johannesburg data down by geographic region, principal operating sector, form of communication, organisational affiliation and the intended audience for the material. These categories are important as the regional and sector variables will provide a detailed picture of the areas of convergence and divergence, while the remaining categories help identify any changes in how business environmental discourses are organised and communicated at mega summits.

Region

Table 5.1 highlights the changes in regional affiliation. The largest share of the documents cannot be associated with one specific region. Of those that can be identified with a region, the majority are associated either with Europe or the USA. The number of documents produced by business sources in Asia, Africa and Oceania was quite small at both Rio and Johannesburg. At Rio, a smaller proportion of US business produced material than their European-based counterparts. At Johannesburg, this situation changed with an increase in output from US business and a decline in European output. One possible explanation is the increasing tendency for documents from European companies to use multi-region associations to pool their discursive resources and a corresponding lack of US participation within such groups. The US business community appears to have become more involved on the international scene since Rio.

¹⁰ Consult the full version of the Discourse Content Coding Frame documented in the Appendix for information on how each variable has been coded.

Table 5.1.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Region

Region	Rio	Johannesburg
Europe	30	20
USA	14	19
Asia	3	1
Africa	5	1
Oceania	0	4
Multi-region	41	53

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of documents coded according to the geographical associations of their authors/sponsors.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Principal Operating Sector

Looking at the sector of the economy with which business sources were associated, a comparison of Rio and Johannesburg data shows that there were no substantial changes in the composition of discourse agents (see Table 5.2). Business sources associated with what we call ‘extraction’ (e.g. oil production, mining) produced almost one-third of all texts, topped only by documents associated with no particular sector. Businesses in the manufacturing and services sectors played an active part but produced a smaller number of texts. There is little change here from Rio to Johannesburg, with slight reductions in the representation of these sectors. This distribution may be due to the high public profile of extraction-based companies in global environmental discourses.

Table 5.2.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Principal Operating Sector

Operating Sector	Rio	Johannesburg
Extraction	29	32
Manufacturing	21	18
Services	16	15
Multi-sector	30	34

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of documents coded according to operating sectors.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Forms of Communication

One important methodological consideration is the validity of the measurements. Apart from the issues already addressed in Chapter 3, one potential source of bias to

be considered is the way in which the data were collected: attending Johannesburg as an observer provided a greater range of opportunities to collect texts in comparison with the archival search for texts that were the source of data on the Rio summit.

Looking at the type of texts collected for each summit (Table 5.3.), there are some important differences. Each document was coded in terms of its primary form of communication. Most were collected from both summits, but there are some types of text that are associated with only one. The most important is obviously ‘speech reports’: these texts are based on summaries of speeches witnessed personally at the Johannesburg summit. This type of text thus depends on personal attendance and, in the absence of any similar study for Rio, no equivalent data source is available. The second type of document limited to one summit is the ‘Other’ category for Rio: these documents are mainly short statements produced by individual companies or business associations setting out a limited range of views that could nevertheless be seen as contributing to the summit discourse. This is primarily an indication of the lack of organisation and professionalism that some business groups displayed at Rio, as their participation was still a novel experience. By the time of the Johannesburg summit, business representatives of all types had adopted an extremely professional attitude to communicating their views, and thus there were no documents that could not be easily classified in 2002.

Table 5.3.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Form of Communication

Form of Communication	Rio	Johannesburg
Policy paper	32	20
Company report	8	7
Evaluation report	25	28
Speech report	0	16
Speech	6	30
Other	29	0

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of documents coded according to different types of texts.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

There are also some interesting differences in the relative importance of certain means of communication present at both summits. There was an increase in sector-based and individual company evaluation reports that detail progress towards sustainable development. One major difference has been the significant increase in

the documentation of speeches on business environmental discourses at Johannesburg, and a lack of these at Rio. These texts relate to speeches for which press offices provided documentation. In the absence of comparable information on the activities of business groups at Rio and Johannesburg, we cannot wholly exclude the possibility that the greater number of speeches at Johannesburg simply relates to the lack of documentation of speeches at Rio and/or their preservation over time. Another explanation could be that the higher number of documented speeches indicates that business groups were better organised and more active in disseminating their views to the press and conference participants than at Rio. While there are few changes in the relative importance of company and evaluation reports, the share of policy papers dropped considerably. Even if we exclude speech reports from the calculation (as no speech reports could be compiled from Rio), policy papers would still be substantially less prominent in Johannesburg than in Rio.¹¹ This could also be an indication that the discourse has been established, and that statements of principles and policies were no longer so important at Johannesburg. Instead, the Johannesburg summit looked more closely at the ‘solutions’ side and otherwise concentrated on the dissemination of business views, making global summits part of a ‘hearts and minds’ communication strategy.

In analysing the changes between 1992 and 2002, we must pay some attention to possible differences between the types of texts to ensure that differences observed are not due to the mode of data collection, but represent actual changes that relate to ‘real’ business environmental discourses. This question will be addressed in Section 5.3.1.

Types of Organisations Involved

Trade associations and lobbying groups produced most of the Rio and Johannesburg material. These internationally focused groups represent companies from different geographical regions and operating sectors. However, we find some very dramatic changes from Rio to Johannesburg in this area. One identifiable trend is the sharp decrease in individual companies articulating their sustainable development discourse independently. Table 5.4 details the main actors involved in the formation and circulation of international business environmental discourse.

¹¹ If speech reports are excluded, the share of policy papers at Johannesburg would be reduced to 24%, company reports would account for 8% and evaluation report for 33% of texts.

One area of continuity is the dominant presence of global business organisations, and prominent in this area are the BCSD, specifically set up for Rio, and its successor organisation, the WBCSD. The ICC was the main global business group contributing to business environmental discourses before Rio, and it is still represented at both summits. The BASD was a special organisation set up for Johannesburg and sponsored by WBCSD and ICC. In addition to texts generated by BASD, there were other texts that were equally associated with all three organisations (i.e. WBCSD, ICC and BASD). If we count all the texts associated with this ‘triumvirate’ together, then we find that over 50% of all texts were generated by these groups. This tallies with the combined share of texts generated by the BCSD and ICC combined at Rio (49%).

Table 5.4.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Organisational Affiliation

Organisation	Rio	Johannesburg
BCSD/WBCSD	30	18
BASD	–	14
ICC	19	9
WBCSD/BASD/ICC	–	10
Other	14	43
None	37	6

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of documents coded according to lobbying group affiliation.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Where then is the big change? At Rio, a substantial group of texts – 37% – were generated by business actors not affiliated to any of the global lobbying groups mentioned above, or any other trade group or business association at a lower level. These generally were individual companies that produced texts for the Rio conference. At Johannesburg, this group has virtually disappeared, with only 6% of texts generated by business actors not affiliated to any global, regional or national collective business group. In contrast, the organisation type that saw the most rapid increase are business groups that represent a particular industrial sector, or regional or other geographical unity. Contributions from these types of actors shot up from just 14% at Rio to 43% at Johannesburg.

Intended Audience

To whom are the various texts addressed? Table 5.5 sets out the target audience for business discourses. We can identify similar levels of emphasis on engaging a cross-

section of actors at both Rio and Johannesburg. These include other business representatives, non-state and state actors. The high figures for targeting a cross-section of actors suggest that the majority of documents and speeches are trying to get the business position across to different audiences. Where there has been a slight change is in the number of texts that appear to be specifically targeted at policy-makers. Their number decreased quite sharply, by 50%. This could be seen as a general indication of the type of conference Johannesburg was: business actors were not perhaps as limited as before in trying to influence specific policy decisions, but their focus was very much on the broader debate involving a wider range of possible recipients of their message.

Table 5.5.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Who is Business Talking to?

Intended Audience	Rio	Johannesburg
Other business representatives	13	18
Policy-makers	27	13
Cross-section of actors	67	69

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of documents coded according to various audiences.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

5.2.2 Business Agents' Motives

This section outlines the different motives for engaging with global environmental issues. Two different categories are used to group the motives: environmental and non-environmental. Environmental motives are organised around five categories: sustainable development, environmental social responsibility, harmony, concern and protection. The question here is: has business been using a generic set of environmental motives to frame its discourse on environmental issues? If this is the case, then what are these motives and how are they distributed? Agents' motives also map out the extent to which environmental terminology and concepts have entered into business discourse. Hence, does business favour certain kinds of motives over others?

Turning to non-environmental motives (self-interest, legitimacy and legitimisation and internationalisation), business could be expected to favour certain environmental approaches for reasons unrelated to environmental policy concerns. Business wants

to survive and grow, and business associations could be expected to promote conditions that would allow companies to do this. Within this context, environmental approaches could thus be advocated for business-related reasons.

Environmental Motives

Table 5.6 lists five different types of environmental motive. General indications are that these motives have not fared well. At Rio, levels of environmentally oriented motivation were remarkably low and subsequent increases were small. Environmental concern (which covers general expressions of unease about the state of the environment) and harmony (which includes the desire to create a business environmental relationship that connects business smoothly with the whole environment) showed small increases. The role of environmental protection (which includes the idea of business as an environmental guardian) has actually declined. The basis of an environmentally motivated discourse should have resulted in increasingly higher levels of environmental concern. Yet, texts expressing general concern about the environment rose from only 19 to 27%, i.e. environmental concern did not feature in 73% of the documents at Johannesburg.

Table 5.6.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Environmental Motives

Motives	Rio	Johannesburg
Sustainable development	62	87
Environmental social responsibility	22	74
Environmental harmony	11	28
Environmental concern (general)	19	27
Environmental protection	65	54

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various motives with an environmental dimension.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Environmental harmony shifted from an initially inconspicuous position at Rio of 11% to 28%. Despite this increase, environmental harmony and concern remain the least favoured motives. Instead, replacing environmental concern and harmony is the concept of sustainable development, which increased from 62 to 87%. The high figures for sustainable development reinforce the suggestion that this continues to be

a 'safe' concept and a favoured justification for framing business motives towards the environment.

It is clear that there is a substantial amount of rhetorical commitment for working towards sustainable development, and tempering this is a lack of appreciation of other critical environmental concepts within business environmental discourses. One possible inference is that business is not motivated to produce its discourse by general concerns about the condition of the planet, although it is also clear that there is an identifiable trend towards incorporating the language of 'shallow' environmentalism into business discourse. The relatively low levels of enthusiasm for protection, harmony and concern within business environmental discourses may just indicate that these are difficult concepts to transfer. Alternatively, it may be the case that business does not consider these as important or necessary dimensions in their environmental motives discourse.

Non-environmental Motives

Non-environmental motives include three main categories: self-interest, legitimacy and legitimisation, and internationalisation. Self-interest includes reasons for action derived from choices that either maximise or promote business. Legitimacy and legitimisation are concerned with business normalising its activities, with a particular emphasis on NGOs and the public. Finally, internationalisation refers to the use of terms and phrases that aspires to integrate current or future activities and policies outside national or regional contexts. The results comparing Rio and Johannesburg are shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Non-environmental Motives

Motives	Rio	Johannesburg
Self-interest	86	97
Legitimacy and legitimisation	40	76
Internationalisation	41	47

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various motives with a non-environmental dimension.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Self-interest has maintained a consistently high position, increasing from 86 to 97%. It is clearly an essential element of business environmental discourses to present environmental issues and their solution as compatible with, and even beneficial to the self-interests of business. Whilst self-interest is a shared motive, it is not entirely clear if this is a coherent motive. Lobbying associations and companies acting in the logical pursuit of their own self/collective interest do not necessarily aspire to maximise benefits that all companies will automatically share. The reverse of this is that self-interest produces collective benefits and is one of the main arguments used by business to appeal to other actors. The self-interest discourse also argues that embracing environmentally oriented change leads to increased profitability. In effect, self-interest forces companies to amend their own operational practices in response to ecological change. One argument is that the pursuit of sustainable development by self-interested profit-seeking companies and its amplification through lobbying associations will eventually provide tangible benefits for society and the environment. Self-interest does not function as a stand-alone motivational agent. It is more fruitful to consider self-interest as functioning in tandem with legitimacy and legitimisation. This means that, when business discourse combines self-interest with other discourse components, it becomes a powerful motivating force.

The consideration of legitimacy and legitimisation reveals a different picture. Here, we can see a major change, as only 40% of Rio texts but 76% of Johannesburg texts mention this category. One possible reason for this large rise may be that business is under greater external pressure to normalise its activities within an environmentally friendly and benign prism. Alternatively, it may be the case that business is more confident due to a resolute lack of regulatory action at the global level. Similarly, the relatively low level of legitimacy at Rio suggests that this may not be a shared motive. This will be explored more fully below.

Legitimacy is used in a variety of ways. One objective is to persuade non-state actors of the pivotal role of business in finding and implementing solutions to different environmental problems. There is also a concern that state institutions are either ill prepared to make the 'right' environmental policies or suffer from inertia. An additional goal is the use of the concept to promote the continued status of business

as a good social, political and economic actor. The high frequency of self-interest, legitimacy and legitimisation suggests that these have evolved into two significant generic objectives.

A third indicator of agent motives is the desire to internationalise business environmental commitments. These are filtered through mechanisms, such as codes of practice and voluntary self-regulatory initiatives. Overall, the intensity of commitment to this idea has remained constant, with a modest increase from 41 to 47%. Internationalisation obviously does not play such an important role in the development of discourses from Rio to Johannesburg.

5.2.3. Representation of Actors

This section compares the range of actors and the different kinds of agency that populate business environmental discourses. Two broad analytical categories help organise this material. The first is 'consolidated agency' and includes three organised groups of actors deemed to have an impact on business. These are:

- Individual businesses (Companies)
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Political authority

The second category encompasses more 'abstract agents' and includes actors to which business accords causal attributes. Organising this category are:

- Societal groups (civil society, society, the public)
- Collective groups (stakeholders, consumers, citizens)
- Global community (the idea that business is a part of a single connected world)

Consolidated Agents

How important are references to organised groups that may play a more or less important role in global environmental politics? We first look at how frequently these types of groups are mentioned. For non-governmental groups and political authority, we also analysed how business texts evaluate the role of such groups.

Starting with the importance of business agents, Table 5.8 displays the frequency at which texts at Rio and Johannesburg make reference to these types of groups. One interesting finding is that business environmental discourses devote a high level of discursive space to actors and their agentic functions. Individual companies and different company sectors feature prominently, while other equally high impact groups such as investors do not occupy such a high position. The overall focus is on highlighting the positive environmental role of different company sectors and individual companies. Business is more reluctant to incorporate the role of suppliers, traders and investors into their discourse. Why would business focus more on other business actors and less on investors? One possible interpretation is that business prioritises this arena to reinforce the widespread self-belief that significant environmental change occurs at the sector and company level. The frequency of investor groups has increased from 24% to 43%, which suggests that some business actors are starting to acknowledge the importance of these groups. The overall discursive emphasis remains on reassuring investors that the environment will not produce lower profits, nor will it cause business to stray from maximising shareholder returns. The comparatively low level of discussion of the investor's role also suggests that these groups of actors are background agents that have a restricted impact on what business does and how it approaches sustainable development.

Table 5.8.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Business Agents

Types of Business Agent	Rio	Johannesburg
Investors	24	43
Traders	11	13
Suppliers	35	41
Individual companies	86	93

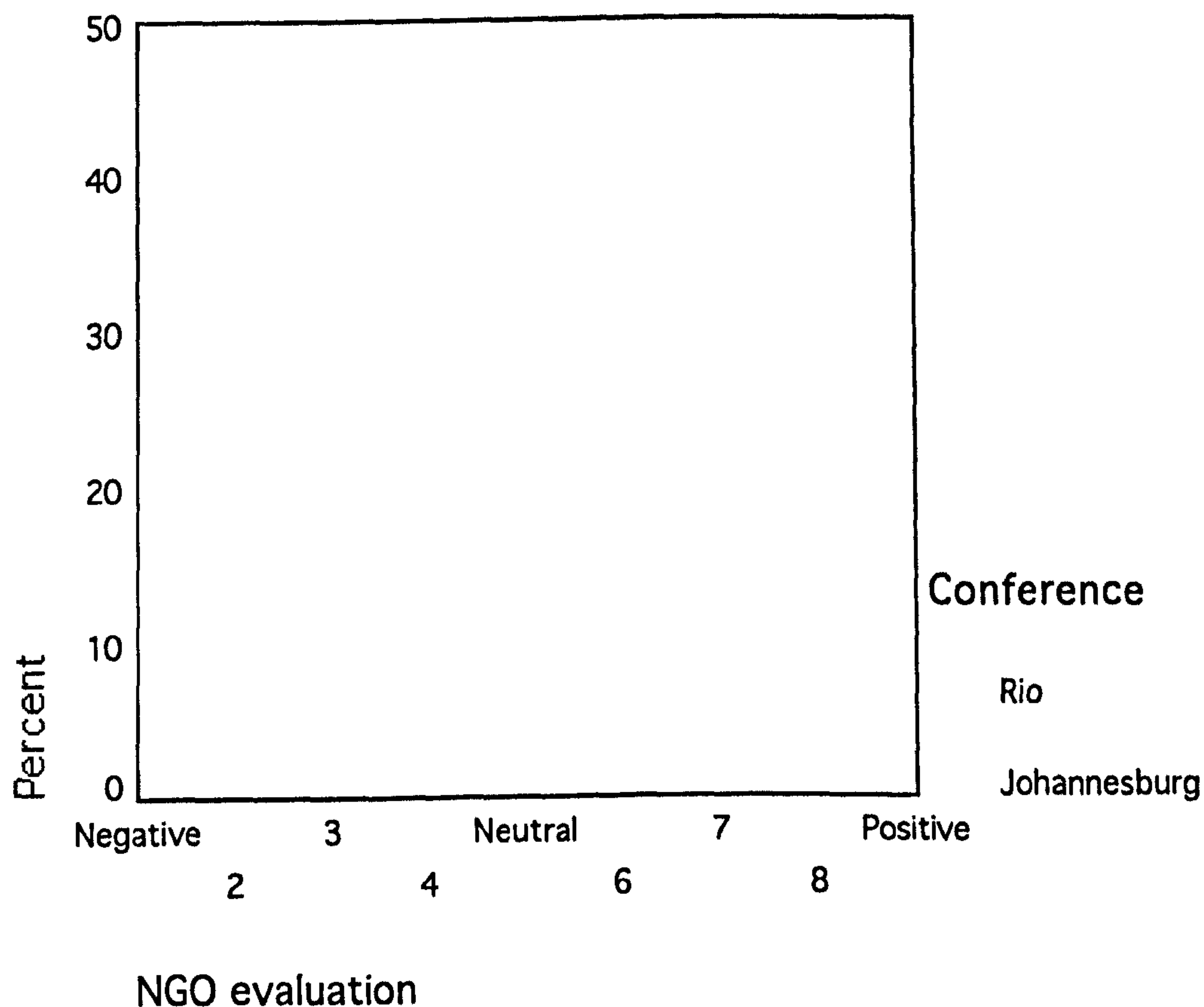
Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various business agents.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Turning to non-business consolidated agents, one important group of actors are environmental NGOs. Here, we can observe quite an important change. At Rio, only 25% of documents mentioned NGOs. At Johannesburg, this figure has risen to 67%, suggesting a substantive increase in the presence of the NGO sector within business environmental discourses.

Beyond mentioning NGOs, we considered it of particular importance to record whether documents referred to NGOs in a positive or negative light. Each document mentioning NGOs was thus evaluated and a score was allocated to it, using a scale from 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive), with 5 marking the 'neutral' mid-point. The distribution of scores for Rio and Johannesburg is seen in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1.: Rio vs Johannesburg: NGO Evaluation



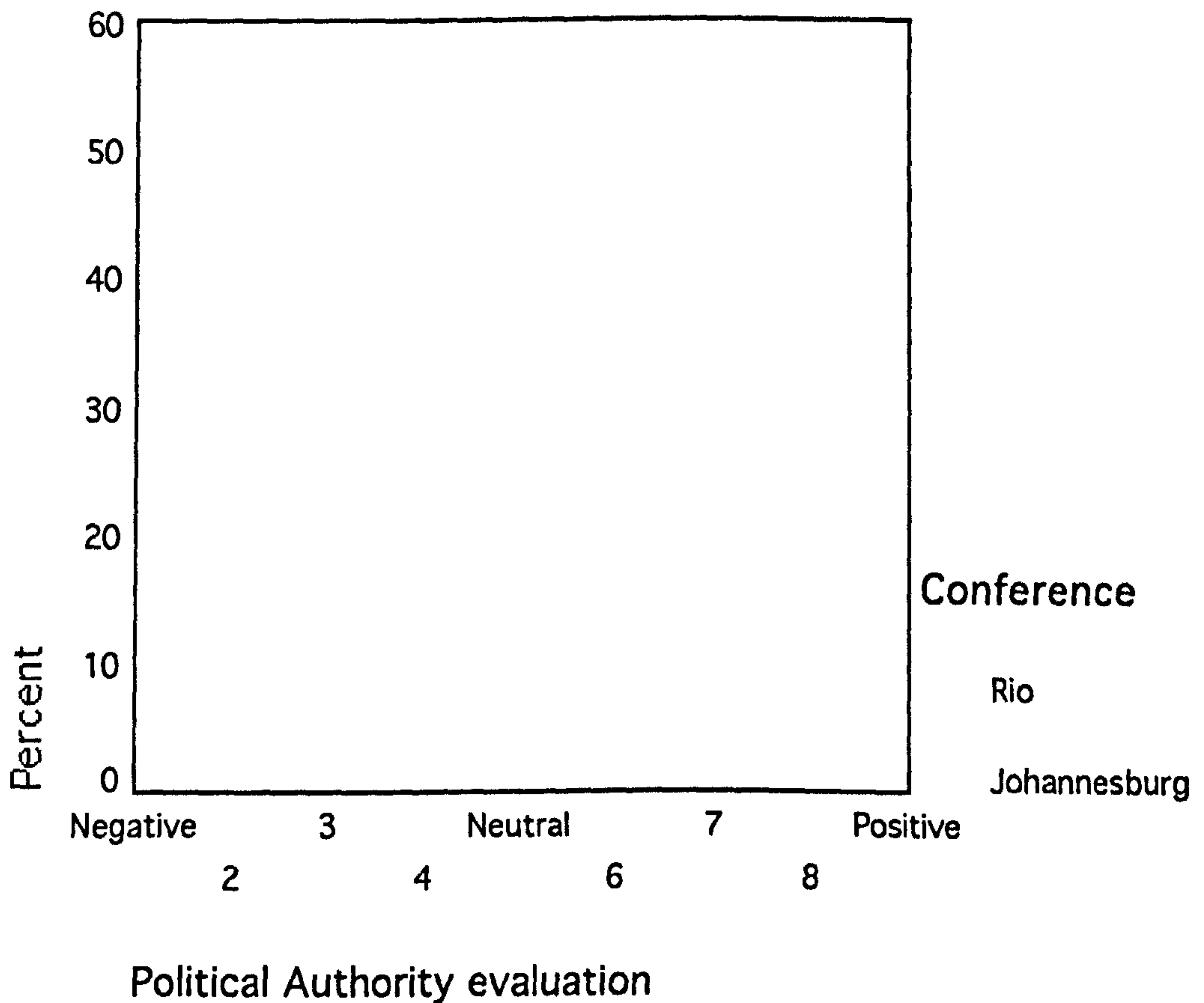
Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts coded for an evaluation of NGOs using a scale where 0 represents the most negative, 5 is neutral and 10 is the most positive.
2. Rio N=16, Johannesburg N=110.

Evaluating the degree to which the texts that mentioned NGOs evaluated them positively or negatively, we find some stark differences. At Rio, business opinion on NGOs was concentrated within two distinct positions, which were either negative or positive. At Johannesburg there is a far more uniformly positive evaluation. Only 14% of Johannesburg texts gave NGOs a negative evaluation. The mean evaluation score at Rio was 5.0 and at Johannesburg 6.3, indicating an overall warming of the

business community to environmental NGOs. We must treat these results with some caution as the number of documents that contained any kind of evaluation of NGOs at Rio was rather small, but the combination of the rate at which NGOs are mentioned and have a positive evaluation at Johannesburg does indicate a major shift in their role in business environmental discourses.

Figure 5.2.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Political Authority Evaluation



Notes:

1. Entries are percentage of texts coded for an evaluation of political authority using a scale where 0 represents the most negative, 5 is neutral and 10 is the most positive.
2. Rio N=49; Johannesburg N=138.

Turning finally in this section to political authority, what views does the business community promote on the role of the state in environmental affairs? Of particular importance for the discourses is how political authority is seen: is it regarded mainly as a positive or a negative force by the business community? Political authority is evaluated by 78% of texts in Rio and 92% of texts in Johannesburg, indicating an increased perception of the need to comment on the role of the state. The evaluation

score for political authority was recorded in the same way as for NGOs, using a ten-point scale. The results are shown in Figure 5.2.

What we see here is that both the Rio and Johannesburg evaluations have remained consistent, peaking at neutral or favouring a negative evaluation. The average score has become slightly more positive, 5.1 at Johannesburg compared with 4.8 at Rio. This indicates that business remains somewhat sceptical about the role of state authorities.

Abstract Agents

This group of actors is referred to very frequently, with a very high level of continuity. The category uses abstract metaphors to define and accord equal agency to a large number of distinct groups, such as ‘society’ and the various components that constitute society, e.g. ‘civil society’ and the ‘public’. Business uses these abstract groups to make claims that sound either ominous or sincere, while the level of agency remains abstract enough to have little or no direct causal properties. One example is the use of the ‘society’ metaphor to suggest that ‘civil society’ and the ‘public’ will not tolerate business actors who do not demonstrate progress towards sustainable development. The frequency in which these ‘abstract’ groups are mentioned at Rio and Johannesburg is shown in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Abstract Agents

Types of Business Agent	Rio	Johannesburg
Societal groups	86	95
Collective groups	86	91
Global community	14	65

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various abstract agents.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Collective groups also occupy a high position within business environmental discourses, with reference to these groups rising from 86% at Rio to 91% at Johannesburg. Business accords such groups the capacity to enforce important changes in business sustainable development practices. This reflects the tendency for business to place consumers and stakeholders as sovereign agents. The general

argument is that these groups demand more and better goods and services, and it is up to business to meet these demands based on sound environmental principles that minimise wastage and maximise recycling. This also suggests that, for business, change is not a top-down process, as sustainable development begins with business interpreting the thoughts and actions of groups. One possible implication is that business orients its sustainable development messages towards abstract groups. At Rio and Johannesburg, one common preoccupation was the idea that collective groups are unpredictable and require higher levels of pro-business socialisation. These categories also help business classify and delineate the actions of large sectors of the population into manageable groups that fit with the business view.

The only major change we can detect in this area is an increased reference to the global community. This significant variable helps gauge the cosmopolitan ambitions of business environmental discourses. The suggestion is that business is moving towards a global community of shared beliefs and norms about the environment. This value has increased from 14% to 65%. At a generic level, there are sufficient grounds to assert that there was more of a general commitment to this concept at Johannesburg.

5.2.4. Issues and Processes

What issues does business consider most important requiring the attention of the world community, and how does business propose these problems should be addressed? The first question explores the kinds of environmental issues discussed, and the second outlines the evidence used to frame business approaches to these processes.

Issues

Turning first to business views on the various types of environmental challenges, the coding frame disaggregated general environmental issues into six major areas: climate change, poverty, water, consumption, biodiversity and public health. All of these issues contain defining characteristics directly related to business activities.

It might be surprising to list poverty here as an environmental issue, but business discourses link poverty very strongly with the generation of environmental problems. This is consistent with the assumption that poor countries are more likely to harm nature as they lack the basic technological and economic conditions to maximise the efficient use of resources and markets. Of note is the significant increase in business concerns about the effect of poverty and how to remedy it. At Rio, only 19% mentioned this issue, despite poverty being at the heart of the sustainable development debate. At Johannesburg, this increased to 56%. Business tends to see poverty as one of the defining causes of environmental degradation. Encompassing this was a bolder vision of a world without poverty and the use of strong rhetorical commitments to its eradication. A further interesting trend in this context is the notable increase in concern about the poor public health situation in developing countries. This rose from 8 to 40%.

Table 5.10.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Environmental Issues

Issues	Rio	Johannesburg
Climate change	59	69
Poverty	19	56
Water	14	25
Consumption	11	41
Biodiversity	37	39
Public health	8	40

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various environmental issues impacting on business activity.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Turning to the more traditional 'environmental' issues, climate change is the highest-profile environmental issue, increasing from 59% to 69%. Least popular at Rio was consumption. The problem of western consumption patterns initially received little discussion at Rio, appearing in only 11% of the material. This increased noticeably to 41% at Johannesburg. The very low value at Rio may reflect the fact that consumption posed a problem for business discourse as the issue may have lacked an overarching conceptual framework. At Rio, it was difficult for business to counteract assumptions that linked consumption with negative environmental trends. Only a few business actors argued for increases in consumption patterns. One possible solution was to omit a discussion of this issue

and work on developing concepts that operate within a business-oriented framework. At Johannesburg, a substantial minority of business actors raised consumption patterns advocating increased consumption as a non-negotiable precondition for sustainable development.

Processes

Business continues to be concerned about the impact of increased regulation that may be imposed by government. References to regulation issues increased from 61% of texts in Rio to 88% at Johannesburg, a sign that this is very much on the agenda of the business discourse. Looking at specific items on the best processes to achieve environmental aims, it becomes very clear that business continues to be sceptical about the role of regulation. The solution is not to come from increased regulation but through other means.

Four categories make up this dimension of the process discourse. These are: free enterprise, the role of economic incentives, partnerships and evidence-based approaches. The degree to which business groups referred to these processes is shown in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Processes

Processes	Rio	Johannesburg
Free enterprise	89	95
Economic incentives	29	62
Partnerships	33	89
Evidence-based approaches	79	95

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various processes to achieve environmental aims.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

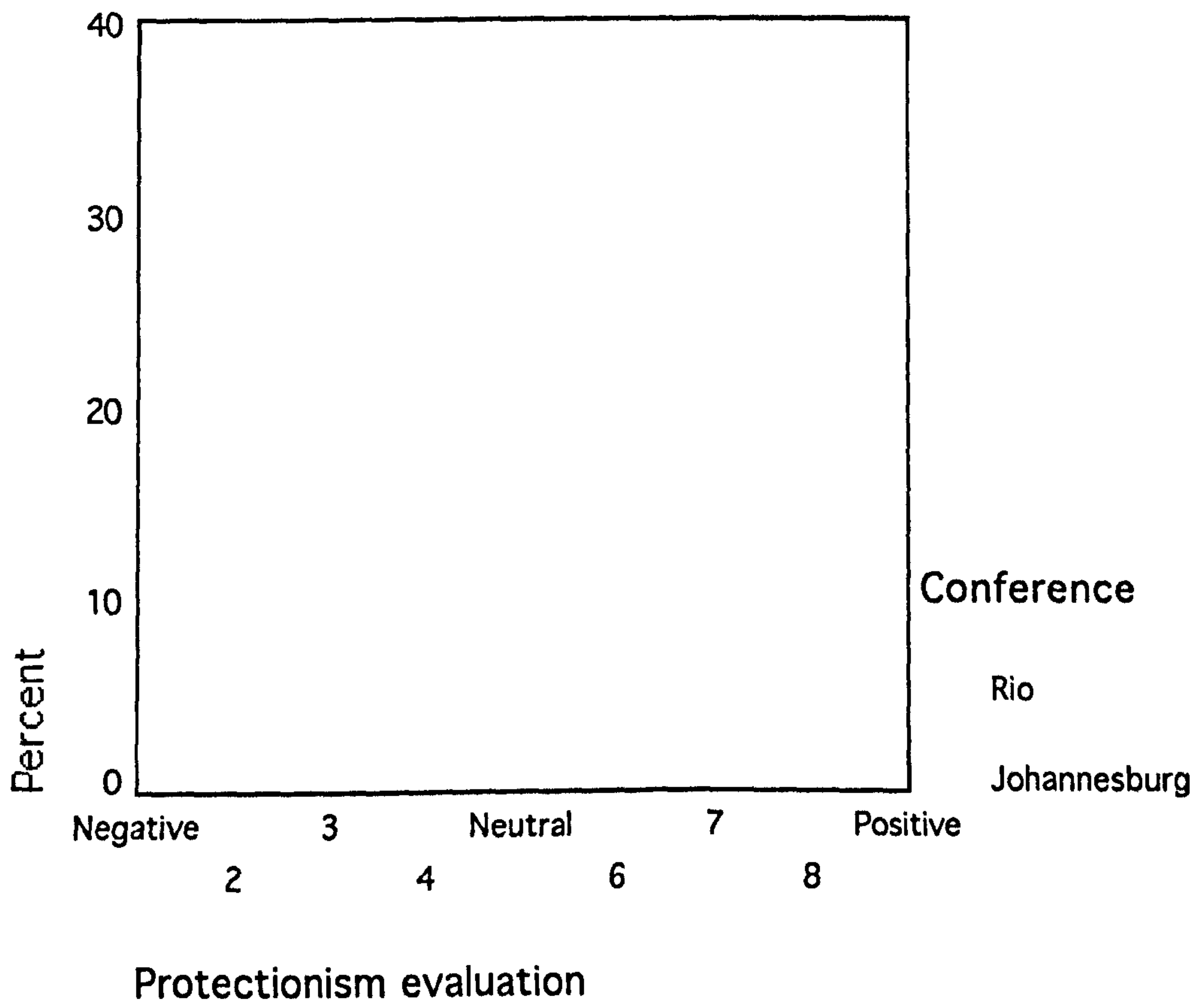
Free enterprise covers the collection of ideas that link the business response to environmental issues with the routine features and practices of business, with a specific emphasis on regulatory issues. This is a key area of discursive stability and remains a widespread assumption, increasing from 89 to 95%. One area where business approves of state action is in the provision of financial incentives to attain environmental aims. Reference to these types of incentives increased dramatically, from 29% to 62%. Otherwise, the preferred choices for implementing business

commitments involve no interference by government. In particular, voluntary codes and partnerships have become even more popular options in Johannesburg as compared with Rio.

Reference to 'partnerships' includes the idea that the private sector can work in harmony with other state and non-state actors to achieve a more efficient and better range of policy outcomes. Within the Johannesburg discourse, this is the most favoured policy implementation mechanism. Mention of partnership increased dramatically in comparison with Rio from 33 to 89%. Partnership is an elusive term within business environmental discourses and is a 'catch-all' metaphor to describe a range of different processes. Generally, partnerships are a way of demonstrating the limitless capacity of business to engage with a wide range of actors and issues. Partnerships also provide business with a notable range of benefits, which include access to previously closed market areas, displacing risk, and integrating business perspectives into non-state actors and international institutions. Again, there is also a predominant emphasis on developing and newly developing countries.

A further policy option examined was the idea of environmental protectionism, using custom tariffs to regulate international trade. Comparatively few texts made any reference to this idea, 27% at Rio and 45% at Johannesburg. The detailed results are displayed in Figure 5.3.: it is quite obvious that businesses are overwhelmingly opposed to imposing any limitations on international trade for environmental purposes; overall, the mean support for environmental protectionism rose slightly from 3.29 to 3.91, but clearly remained in the negative zone.

Figure 5.3.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Evaluation of Environmental Protectionism



Notes:

3. Entries are percentage of texts coded for an evaluation of environmental protectionism using a scale where 0 represents the most negative, 5 is neutral and 10 is the most positive.
4. Rio N=17; Johannesburg N=67.

Business is thus generally opposed to state interventionism. Instead, ‘partnership’ emerged as a much favoured concept. This could also involve the state, in particular where it is willing to offer environmental subsidies and other financial resources. The preference for partnership also ties in well with the earlier result that business has moved from a sceptical to a more positive attitude to environmental NGOs. Which other actors are mentioned as potential partners in this partnership discourse? We recorded which international organisations are mentioned in business discourses, and the results are seen in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12.: Rio vs Johannesburg: International Organisations as Partners

International organisations	Rio	Johannesburg
UN	35	82
World Bank	8	19
IMF	2	3
WTO	10	9
Others	13	10

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various international organisations as partners of business in environmental activities.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

The UN has moved from a relatively marginal actor in the business view of global environmental processes into a favoured institution. Reflecting this is the increase in discussions about the UN from 35% to 82%. We can contrast the rising status of the UN in the Johannesburg results with other global financial institutions closely involved in sustainable development partnerships with business. Here mentions of the World Bank increased only from 8 to 19%. The IMF fared even worse, and the WTO also received little attention. The disproportionate status accorded to the fiscal and policy-making role of these groups suggests that their status is that of an ‘invisible’ actor when global environmental issues are constructed by business. There are several possible reasons for this. Business does not consider these institutions important to its public environmental discourse as they already reflect the same broad environmental outlook as business. This would be compatible with the notion that business has successfully ‘captured’ these organisations. The IMF and the WTO also offer relatively limited access to other non-state actors. Business therefore has to focus its attention more on organisations that actively promote a more inclusive agenda, such as the UN.

Another important process unfolding within business environmental discourses is the increasing use of evidence-based argument to highlight business commitments to positive environmental change. The use of different types of evidence showed a marked increase from 79% to 95%. Looking at the different types of evidence that business prefers, we see some interesting preferences (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Types of Evidence Utilised

Types of Evidence	Rio	Johannesburg
Case studies	51	76
Legal compliance	30	26
Compliance with voluntary codes	59	82
External reporting and verification	3	23
Internal monitoring and evaluation	30	61

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various types of evidence to be utilised.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

The types of regulation that scored lower were those with commitments to external forms of verification, reporting, and evaluation and planning. At Johannesburg, business remained less likely to use examples of compliance with binding external monitoring and verification measures, although the overall figure increased from 3% to 23%. Put another way, 77% of the business community are still against direct intervention by outside institutions in defining the terms and conditions of environmental regulation. In contrast, the use of localised or single-issue case studies to make generalised claims about the overall condition of the global environment is one of the preferred options. Citations of case studies increased from 51% to 76% between summits.

5.2.5. Outcomes

The Rio and Johannesburg material indicated that business is prepared to make a wide range of written and spoken commitments about the realisation of various ecological and social objectives. Looking at the question of time scales, business environmental discourses display antipathy towards making specific commitments to enact substantive changes. Instead, there is more emphasis on outlining general commitments. These tend to sound impressive, but are often devoid of detailed content. Evidence for this is found in the lack of detailed time scales, with the use of these having increased only from 6% to 14%. Overwhelmingly, business texts contained generalised commitments, and their frequency has increased marginally from Rio to Johannesburg.

It is apparent that business generally finds it easier to avoid specific time scales in its discourse, as they are seen to restrict business goals severely by enforcing burdensome objectives that would entail extra resource costs. One implication is that there is a general reluctance within business to implement or roll out many of the commitments made to realising social and environmental outcomes.

Operating in conjunction with general commitments is the tendency to make *indirect* references to environmentally desirable outcomes. This means that business is more likely to allude to or describe desirable states of affairs and is less likely to engage in unambiguous narratives. The frequency of this increased from 42% to 79%. Business environmental discourses also make *direct* linkages between business practices and positive environmental outcomes. This rose from 67% to 70%. At both Rio and Johannesburg, business shares the widespread perception that it is normal practice to enact act transformational environmental change.

Moving from the time scale of change to its location, in which locations do business discourses see the need for most change? Documents were coded according to whether they mentioned ‘developing countries’, the ‘newly developed countries’ or ‘developed’ countries. The results are shown in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14.: Rio vs. Johannesburg: Locations of Change

Locations	Rio	Johannesburg
Developing countries	57	81
Newly developed countries	64	63
Developed countries	54	35

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning locations where environmental change needs to occur.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

Indicating a preference for a geographic location remains consistently high, as 90% of the Rio material and 91% of the Johannesburg data indicated an intended location. One interesting area of change here is the shifting emphasis on the location of outcomes. At Johannesburg, more emphasis is placed on ‘developing’ countries with 81% and ‘newly developing’ countries with 63%, whereas at Rio, more emphasis was placed on ‘developed’ western countries with 54%. ‘Developed’ countries have

now dropped to 35%. Another way of illustrating this important shift is that at Johannesburg 57% favoured action in developing countries compared with only 17% at Rio.

Why has business attention shifted from developed countries to other locations? One possible reason is that the emphasis at Rio simply reflected a bias towards domiciled locations. Business environmental discourses were not tied to the idea that outcomes must be linked with new markets opportunities. Instead, there appeared to be more of a regional discourse that believed that some remedial environmental action required to be undertaken within developed countries. At Johannesburg, one implicit belief may be that business has 'done enough' in developed countries, and it is easier to transfer technology and managerial systems to other markets, with returns that are more tangible. One important background argument at Johannesburg is that outcomes can be realised only if business continues to access new markets or expand its activities within developing markets.

If change is necessary, even if there is no specific time scale, how should this change take place as far as the role of business itself is concerned? At both conferences, business emphasised applying traditional business values to deliver progress on environmental issues. We looked specifically at how business documents described the role of business in environmental change and at the need to change business practices. At the most general level, statements suggesting a direct linkage between business and environmental change became more prominent in Johannesburg: 49% of texts in Rio made such a reference; at Johannesburg, this increased to 70%.

But to what extent does business believe that its own practices have to change? We coded statements relating to business practices, distinguishing between specific shifts limited to individual branches, companies, etc. and general shifts relating to managerial approaches, attitudes to technological change, etc. We also noted quite frequent references to what could be termed 'traditional business values', and we thus recorded whether or not a text referred to these values as contributing to a solution to environmental problems. The results are shown in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15.: Rio vs. Johannesburg: Business Practices Required for Environmental Solutions

Practices	Rio	Johannesburg
Specific shifts in business practice	10	22
General shifts in business practice	70	85
Traditional business values	87	93

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various business practices.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

The message here is stark: business recognises the need for changes in practices, in particular at the general level, but at the same time there is a very strong belief that such changes should be in line with traditional business values. Business environmental discourses thus strongly promote the view that solutions to environmental problems, while requiring some practical changes in the way business operates, are not incompatible with traditional business values. On the contrary, finding a solution to environmental problems should rely on such values.

This fundamental attachment to 'traditional' concepts in the business world also manifests itself in the analysis of the main sources of change that, in the view of the business community, will contribute to finding a solution. Business texts frequently refer to three sets of factors when discussing solutions to environmental problems: increases in growth and productivity, new and sophisticated forms of technology and more elaborate environmental management systems. The results of the frequency of these references at Rio and Johannesburg are given in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16.: Rio vs. Johannesburg: Means of Change

Means	Rio	Johannesburg
Growth in productivity	79	79
Technology	75	84
Environmental management	81	89

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts mentioning various means to achieve environmental change necessary for sustainable development.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg N=150.

The prominence of these concepts at both conferences suggests that business considers these as definitive prescriptive tools. Change to solve environmental problems is thus necessary, but this is not incompatible with changes that are already part of the dynamism of the business world. Embracing new technology and promoting growth in productivity are seen as the solution, not the problem.

5.2.6. Summary

What then are the main continuities and changes in the development of business environmental discourses between Rio and Johannesburg? Concentrating on the most pertinent aspects of the discourse, a number of continuities are of fundamental importance.

One key feature is a reliance on business 'self-interest' as a moving force to promote sustainable development. This is a key element of the 'eco-efficiency' approach that was first promoted by Stephan Schmidheiny's (1992) *Changing Course*, written for the Rio summit. This focus on 'self-interest' is very different from the discourse of sacrifice, of the abandonment of economic growth, of denying high living standards. Embracing a green agenda here does not mean that business has to renounce its driving force; on the contrary, in order to survive and grow, business has to welcome the sustainable development agenda in its own interest.

Linked to this self-interest motivation is a strong focus on the belief that 'free enterprise' and 'traditional business values' are not contradictory to the aims of sustainable development, but should form the core of a green business strategy. The greening of the world is going to benefit from applying free enterprise principles and business values. This is a core element of the discourse.

In line with such neo-liberal principles is also the scepticism and rejection of a state-led, top-down approach to sustainable development: business is sceptical about using legal compliance as a measure to achieve environmental goals, and is at best neutral in evaluating the role of 'political authority' in this process. Instead, what business is expecting to provide by way of solution to environmental problems are

growth in productivity, new technology and environmental management. In other words, the 'standard operating principles' of international business are not fundamentally at fault; with the use of some environmental management, an 'eco-efficient' solution can be achieved. 'Economic' and 'ecological' efficiency are not just compatible with each other but they are inherently linked – both go together.

A comparison of the results of the content analysis with the discourse analysis in the previous chapter shows a very high degree of compatibility in the two approaches. But what about discourse changes? In trying to identify the most salient features, the content analysis has pinpointed important changes in business discourses in a number of areas.

First, one theme that is far more dominant in Johannesburg than it was in Rio is a focus on the environmental and other problems of the 'developing' world: in Johannesburg, we found a substantially greater focus on action in developing rather than developed countries; issues such as poverty and public health play a far greater role.

Second, there is a much greater discursive emphasis on sustainable development and corporate and environmental social responsibility, rather than more traditional concern about environmental protection, as motivating forces.

Third, while there is continued scepticism about state action, there is far greater reliance in Johannesburg on voluntary codes and internal monitoring and evaluation as a means of achieving success in sustainable development.

Fourth, and finally, there is a major change in the role that business expects environmental NGOs to play. Moving on from either ignoring NGOs altogether or seeing their role in a neutral way, as at Rio, business actors at Johannesburg embrace them as a predominantly positive force. This ties in with an increased preference for partnership (involving NGOs and other agents) as a way of achieving sustainable development.

5.3. Explaining Discourse Change

What are we to make of these changes? Some of them are hardly radical U-turns of discourse content, but could be interpreted as further developments, or further concretisation of principles that were already present at Rio. Other changes are perhaps more surprising. Beyond stating what are the continuities and changes identified by content analysis, the study goes one step further and tries to analyse some of the reasons and interrelationships behind the discursive changes.

The first question to be asked is how 'real' are the changes identified: how sure can we be that these measured changes are not the result of differences in data collection methods?

Second, one of the research questions concerns the development of a business environmental master discourse. Agents for the formulation of such a master discourse have been identified in the leading global organisations promoting a business greening approach. To what extent are the discursive changes identified with these business groups?

Third, a rival interpretation of the master discourse notion is that substantial geographical and sectoral differences should make it more difficult, if not impossible, for one common discourse to emerge and become dominant. How important are divisions of discursive preferences along these lines?

5.3.1. Business Environmental Discourse Change as an Artefact?

As outlined in previous chapters, there are important differences in the way data on business environmental discourses were collected at Rio and Johannesburg. Essentially, these differences stem from the fact the researcher could not go back in time and attend the Rio conference in person in order to maintain complete equivalence in the data-gathering method. Is there any evidence that these factors have any impact on the results and their interpretation earlier in this chapter?

In order to address this question, we look in particular at the types of text that were not available at Rio, namely reports on speeches given at the conference. As shown in Table 5.3, speech reports make up 16% of all texts analysed for the Johannesburg conference. Are the discourses promoted in these speeches different from the discourses in other types of text?

Concentrating on the four most important areas of change identified, the study analyses to what extent, if at all, speeches given at Johannesburg as recorded by the researcher show a different pattern from the other documents. In order to assess to what extent any difference at Rio might be due to the inclusion of speech reports, the percentage for all Rio documents is also given. The results of the comparisons for the most relevant change variables are given in Table 5.17.

The comparison of reported speech with other texts at Johannesburg does show some fairly large percentage differences in some cases. With one exception, reported speech texts display a smaller percentage of the change items. This indicates that the inclusion of recorded speech texts in most cases reduces the difference to the Rio texts rather than increases it. In other words, the differences between Johannesburg and Rio are definitely not the result of the inclusion of these reported speeches – on the contrary. The comparison with Rio provides further reassurance. In all cases, even the lower percentage of either reported speech or ‘other’ texts is substantially above the percentage recorded for Rio.

Table 5.17.: Rio vs. Johannesburg: Discursive Content of Reported Speech vs Other Texts

Key Change Items	Johannesburg		Rio
	Reported Speech	Other	All
Location: developing countries	79	92	57
Issue: poverty	54	67	19
Issue: public health	44	21	8
Motive: sustainable development	87	92	62
Motive: environmental social responsibility	72	83	22
Action: voluntary codes	80	92	59
Action: internal monitoring and evaluation	59	75	30

Notes:

1. Entries are percentages of texts with the identified features.
2. Rio N=63, Johannesburg reported speech N=24; Rest=126.

Turning to the evaluation of NGOs, the mean score of reported speech texts is 6.17 as compared to 6.34 for the other types of texts. The average NGO evaluation at Rio was 5.0. The NGO evaluation of reported speech texts is thus slightly less positive than the other texts, but still substantially more positive than texts from Rio. This confirms the trend established for the other variables and provides further assurance that the changes identified are not an artefact of the way the data were collected.

5.3.2. (W)BCSD/ICC/BASD as Producers of a Master Discourse?

One of the central questions that we set out to answer with the help of the content analysis approach concerned the importance and possible dominance of the business environmental discourses promoted by the BCSD in 1992 and the WBCSD in 2002. Two specific questions arise in this context. First, how representative were the discourses promoted by both business groups among their affiliated members? Second, how does the business environmental discourses of these supposedly 'leading' business groups compare with discourses promoted by business agents that were not affiliated to any of the global environmental business groups?

Turning to the first question, let us examine more closely how coherent and in agreement affiliated members of the main global business groups were. For the elements of the discourse that were diagnosed as showing a very high level of continuity, the degree of agreement is so high that any difference found between affiliates and other groups will not be significant. Most interesting is the analysis of the items that clearly have seen some change. Let us start with the variable that perhaps is typical of the most significant change, namely attitudes to environmental NGOs. Arguably, most businesses before 1992 saw NGOs as adversaries rather than partners. One important feature of the 1992 *Changing Course* text analysed in the previous chapter was that it promoted the idea of overcoming an adversarial relationship with these groups and finding grounds for a new partnership between business and environmental NGOs.

On the basis of these data, how popular were environmental NGOs among various types of business agents in 1992 and 2002? Focusing on the evaluation of NGOs in a

positive or negative way, we compared the mean evaluation score of NGOs for various types of groups. The results of this analysis are given in Table 5.18.

Table 5.18.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Evaluation of NGOs by Different Types of Business Group

Organisation	Rio	Johannesburg
BCSD/WBCSD	4.78	6.67
BASD	–	6.06
ICC	5.50	5.78
WBCSD/BASD/ICC	–	6.25
Other	4.67	6.30
None	6.00	6.33
Total	5.00	6.31

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean evaluation score for NGOs, using a scale from 0 to 10 (0: very negative, 5: neutral; 10: very positive).
2. Rio: BCSD N=9; ICC N=2; Other N=3; None N=2; Total N=16; Johannesburg WBCSD N=21; BASD N=16; ICC N=9; Other N=37; None N=6; Total N=101.

This makes interesting reading. The first startling result is that BCSD affiliates in 1992 did not seem to share the positive ‘partnership’ role that Schmidheiny was advocating *vis-à-vis* environmental NGOs. The average evaluation score of BCSD affiliates was slightly negative. Only business actors associated with other trade groups or business associations were more negative, while the ICC and unaffiliated business sources were more positive. The very small number of documents from Rio which contained any evaluation of NGOs makes any comparison between groups rather unreliable. However, on the basis of the available texts, Schmidheiny and his followers clearly had some convincing to do given a widespread scepticism within business circles about the role of NGOs.

The figures for 2002 show that the WBCSD indeed appears to have played a leading role here. With a score of 6.67, texts associated with the WBCSD show the most positive NGO evaluation of all types of business groups in 2002. More remarkable perhaps is the substantial difference in 2002 and 1992 between the BCSD and its successor organisation, the WBCSD: the difference in average scores is remarkable. Expressed in percentage terms, 44% of BCSD evaluations of NGOs were positive in 1992 compared with 81% of WBCSD evaluations of NGOs in 2002.

What is also interesting to see in the 2002 data is that almost no hardcore resistance

to partnership with NGOs remained. All types of business groups now display a positive evaluation of NGOs, with the differences between groups being rather marginal. Only the ICC stands out a little on the negative side.

Are there similar patterns for the other change variables? Focusing on the seven variables listed in Table 5.17 and selected as central indicators of discourse change between 1992 and 2002, a scale from 0 to 7 was constructed: a text that failed to mention any of the seven items would score 0, a text that mentioned all of them would be given a score of 7. How 'attached' were our business groups to these changes? The figures are shown in Table 5.19.

The results essentially replicate the patterns already seen in the NGO evaluation. This time, however, the differences between different types of groups are a little more marked. This applies particularly to Rio where the BCSD texts already show a relatively high adoption level of the items that, by 2002, showed up as major elements in the business environmental discourse. The ICC again is lagging behind the BCSD. A fairly clear rejection of these discourse items is displayed by the 'independent' business actors contributing to Rio.

Table 5.19.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Adoption of Change Discourse

Organisation	Rio	Johannesburg
BCSD/WBCSD	3.37	5.19
BASD	–	5.48
ICC	2.42	4.00
WBCSD/BASD/ICC	–	6.25
Other	2.33	4.69
None	1.43	4.44
Total	2.33	4.89

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean score for seven variables representing the main dimensions of discourse change between 1992 and 2002, using a scale from 0 to 7.
2. Rio: BCSD N=19; ICC N=12; Other N=9; None N=23; Total N=63; Johannesburg WBCSD N=27; BASD N=21; ICC N=14; WBCSD/BASD/ICC N=15; Other N=64; None N=9; Total N=150.

By 2002, the differences between the groups are a little less marked. The vanguard role of the WBCSD, as supported by the BASD, is clearly shown. Particularly positive to our seven key change items are texts that are sponsored jointly by the

WBCSD, BASD and ICC. Again, ICC texts lag behind the rest and show an even lower rate of adoption of these discourse elements than business groups not affiliated to the main organisations.

5.3.3. The Role of Sectoral and Cultural Differences

Having demonstrated that leading business greening organisations were in the vanguard of promoting a new, changed environmental business discourse starting at Rio and further developed at Johannesburg, the question remains as to what extent sectoral and geographical differences played a role in undermining attempts to develop a master discourse. The difficulties experienced by Schmidheiny of creating a consensus on the business approach to the environment have already been alluded to. Can we provide evidence from our data that, indeed, resistance to the WBCSD master discourse was based mainly on sectoral interests and cultural divergences, the latter essentially being defined as the difference between US and European approaches?

Following the pattern of the analysis established in the previous section, the study looks first at attitudes to environmental NGOs according to economic sector and geographical origin in 1992 and 2002. This is then followed by an analysis of the adoption of the key discourse change elements.

Turning first to the differences in approach by different business sectors (Table 5.20), the results are somewhat disappointing in terms of showing relatively little variation. The service sector, as could be predicted, is most positive about NGOs, but business actors in the areas of extraction and marketing are also not far behind. The extraction sector is, however, below average in its positive evaluation of NGOs at Johannesburg.

As far as the attitude to our variables indicative of the discourse changes between 1992 and 2002 is concerned (Table 5.21), again the relatively positive attitude of the extraction sector may surprise. Manufacturing is least tuned in at Rio, but then recovers well at Johannesburg. More puzzling perhaps is the relatively low enthusiasm for the new discourse within the service sector. Overall, there is

relatively little indication here of a hard-core source of resistance to the dominant business environmental discourse associated with specific economic sectors.

Table 5.20.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Evaluation of NGOs by Economic Sectors

Organisation	Rio	Johannesburg
Extraction	5.00	5.91
Manufacturing	–	6.22
Services	6.50	7.08
Multi-sector	5.00	6.47
Other	3.50	–
Total	5.00	6.31

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean evaluation score for NGOs, using a scale from 1 to 10 (1: very negative, 5: neutral; 10: very positive).
2. Rio: Extraction N=7; Manufacturing N=0; Services N=2; Multi-sector N=5; Other N=2; Total N=16; Johannesburg Extraction N=33; Manufacturing N=18; Services N=13; Multi-sector N=36; Other N=0; Total N=100.

Table 5.21.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Adoption of Change Discourse by Economic Sector

Organisation	Rio	Johannesburg
Extraction	2.61	4.79
Manufacturing	1.54	5.26
Services	1.90	4.52
Multi-sector	2.89	4.94
Other	2.00	–
Total	2.33	4.89

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean evaluation score for NGOs, using a scale from 1 to 10 (1: very negative, 5: neutral; 10: very positive).
2. Rio: Extraction N=18; Manufacturing N=13; Services N=10; Multi-sector N=19; Other N=3; Total N=63; Johannesburg Extraction N=48; Manufacturing N=27; Services N=23; Multi-sector N=51; Other N=0; Total N=149.

Turning to geographical origin, do we find any evidence of huge differences in approach to the role of business in environmental affairs that so many authors have written about between the USA and Europe? The results for both NGO evaluation (Table 5.22) and adoption of discourse change elements (Table 5.23) are rather remarkable. At Rio, it was not Europe but US-based business actors who displayed the most progressive attitude: US business actors had the most positive attitude to NGOs in 1992, while European business actors were rather hostile. Ten years later, however, the situation is reversed. Now, it is Europe that leads the way in embracing

the idea of a partnership between business and NGOs, while US-based business actors display a far more lukewarm attitude. Indeed, the evaluation of NGOs by US business actors in 1992 was more positive than in 2002!

Table 5.22.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Evaluation of NGOs by Geographical Origin

Region	Rio	Johannesburg
Europe	4.50	6.75
USA	6.25	5.50
Other	4.50	6.33
Multi-region	4.63	6.34
Total	5.00	6.31

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean score for seven variables representing the main dimensions of discourse change between 1992 and 2002, using a scale from 0 to 7.
2. Rio: Europe N=2; USA N=4; Other N=2; Multi-region N=8; Total N=16; Johannesburg Europe N=24; USA N=16; Other N=3; Multi-region N=58; Total N=101.

Exactly the same pattern can be seen when we explore the adoption of the main elements of the changed discourse: here, it is again the USA who is leading the way in 1992 and Europe lagging behind, with the reverse situation in 2002.

Table 5.23.: Rio vs Johannesburg: Adoption of Change Discourse by Geographical Origin

Region	Rio	Johannesburg
Europe	1.42	5.23
USA	3.44	4.03
Other	1.67	4.60
Multi-region	2.85	5.11
Total	2.33	4.89

Notes:

1. Entries are the mean score for seven variables representing the main dimensions of discourse change between 1992 and 2002, using a scale from 0 to 7.
2. Rio: Europe N=19; USA N=9; Other N=9; Multi-region N=26; Total N=63; Johannesburg Europe N=31; USA N=29; Other N=10; Multi-region N=80; Total N=150.

These results suggest that there is some resistance to the new business environmental discourses from US-based actors. However, looking at developments over time, it appears that US business was somewhat of a pioneer of business greening in the early years and adopted its current more negative position only in the years between the two summits. Given these findings, it seems difficult to maintain that there is a specific US and a separate European business culture that determines attitudes to

business greening. Each business culture appears to be more flexible and subject to change than has hitherto been recognised.

5.4. Discussion

Business environmental discourses have changed in important respects between Rio and Johannesburg, but there have also been very substantial continuities. Business groups have not abandoned their key attitudes to some economic and management issues. In fact, it is part of the master business environmental discourse to claim that, in a nutshell, what is good for business is also good for the environment.

In many respects, the results of the content analysis presented in this chapter confirm the main findings of the discourse analysis in Chapter 3. Our results are certainly compatible with the narrative of a master discourse being forged in the run-up to Rio that then became the template for further developments. The fuller discourse presented at Johannesburg is seen as the product of past labours, keeping the core elements of the Rio discourse, but developing some of the key themes that were not present before.

What the content analysis has added is some confirmation that the ideas promoted by Schmidheiny (1992) and Holliday *et al.* (2002) were not isolated products of business visionaries that had no resonance within the wider community. Our results have made it quite clear that some aspects of the Schmidheiny discourse were not universally accepted by business groups at the time of the 1992 summit. Even documents associated with the BCSD produced for Rio show some signs of less progressive attitudes. However, we can show that, even in 1992, the BCSD was ahead of other groups in embracing some key aspects of the future discourse that was to mature in Johannesburg. In that sense, there is clear evidence here of a vanguard role for the BCSD and its successor, the WBCSD. In contrast, the ICC who had taken an active interest in global environmental politics since the 1970s, lagged behind in its embrace of new ideas on the business greening agenda.

Our data also show that sectoral and geographical differences were perhaps not as influential as could have been expected. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that

US business sources were among the most progressive in 1992, with Europeans and others lagging behind. The situation was then completely reversed for the 2002 summit.

CONCLUSIONS

Business has shown itself to be remarkably flexible in accommodating social, cultural and political changes in recent decades. The environment appears to be a case in point. Business has embraced the environment, with a confrontational attitude to the environmental movement giving way to the idea of partnership. Ideologically, business has made the environment a legitimate business issue, seeking to overcome perceptions of antagonisms between business interests and environmental interests. In the process, business has sought to promote a discourse about the environment in which free enterprise and the pursuit of profit are not seen as problems but as solutions to the environmental challenges of the future. Such 'business greening' can be observed at local, regional and national level, but perhaps most influential is the influence of business greening at the global level as part of a hegemonic neo-liberal ideology.

The thesis set itself the task of analysing the development of business environmental discourses, using the Earth Summits of Rio and Johannesburg as reference points. We started by analysing the literature on business greening, focusing in particular on critical approaches which attempted to analysis business attitudes to the environment within a hegemonic framework. Business interests, according to this perspective, are actively promoting discourses trying to impose a hegemony of business-friendly views. Business greening was becoming part of a global business discourse defining and framing environment-related issues in a business-friendly way. Particularly interesting from this point of view was the theory of the formation of a new transnational business elite: global business greening organisations were found to be well networked within an elite group of leading transnational organisations.

This hegemonic interpretation of global business greening nevertheless left many questions unanswered. Even if the environmental business groups were well networked, this did not necessarily mean that consensus had been achieved on the nature of the discourse. There were also dissonant voices, casting doubt on the notion of a new global environmental discourse. Such a master discourse of the environment

would have to overcome significant obstacles in the form of sectoral interests and cultural differences. Notions of 'corporate social responsibility' and the idea of business accepting a green corporate framework had received heavy criticism, in particular from business sources and analysts in the United States.

Furthermore, the analysis of business discourses mainly had a static element. A certain discourse was identified and deconstructed but the element of change over time was usually not considered. Regarding discourses as a dynamic phenomenon, what attracted our attention in particular to the phenomenon of global business greening was the element of change. A new approach for business to engage with environmental questions appeared to have been pioneered in the context of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and this new business environmental discourse appeared to have become more important and more elaborate by the time of the Johannesburg 'Rio +10' follow-up Earth Summit in 2002. The challenge was to analyse this process of change in business environmental discourses over a ten-year period.

Attempting to answer these questions with an empirical study of business discourses raised important methodological issues. The 'discourse analysis' approach dominating the field had some important weaknesses. Its focus on the close textual analysis of a small range of documents may establish the contours of a business environmental discourse but it would be difficult to establish to what extent it was shared by a wider range of business actors. The quantitative 'content analysis' approach, on the other hand, had been largely abandoned by critical discourse analysts because of its emphasis on counting textual features whose substantive meaning remained largely undetermined.

The approach chosen was to combine features of both: we would start with a close reading of key texts in the tradition of discourse analysis. Fortunately, two book-length expositions of the business approach to the environment were produced in 1992 and 2002 which could be compared. The aim was to identify the existence and degree of change in global business environmental discourses with reference to these documents. The second approach took a more quantitative orientation: based on a 'discourse analysis' reading of a selection of texts, a coding frame was constructed to

capture key elements of business environmental discourses; a total of 213 texts from both Rio and Johannesburg were processed using this coding frame. This approach first gives us a second bite at delineating the main elements of the 1992 and 2002 business environment discourses, but more importantly, we are now able to ascertain how popular the key elements of this discourse were with reference to the business environmental discourses at both summits as a whole, taking into account all business actors contributing to the discourse.

The qualitative element of our empirical research supports the idea that the 1992 Earth Summit saw the introduction of a new style of a global business environmental discourse that went beyond the rather defensive efforts that had been sponsored by the International Chamber of Commerce before. This new discourse was championed by a group of CEOs that had joined together in the Business Council for Sustainable Development. Formulated under the leadership of the Swiss industrialist Stephan Schmidheiny, the 1992 approach delineated in the book *Changing Course* set the tone for developments in the business community for many years to come. Business was expected to embrace the environmental challenge with a more pro-active approach. The concept of 'eco-efficiency' was given a central role here. The key message is that it is not only ecologically but also economically 'efficient' for business to become 'sustainable'. Turning green makes good business sense. This kind of business environmental discourse sought to replace a discourse that perceived environmental policy mainly in terms of state action and regulation, with business disputing the case for reform and using neo-liberal discourse to push back the influence of state regulation. The new discourse remains ambivalent about the role of the state but places business now in an active role as an agent of environmental change.

The comparison with the 2002 discourse as manifested in the follow-up book *Walking the Talk* confirms the status of the 1992 discourse as a new master business discourse of the environment at global level. The 2002 text embodies all the key elements of the 1992 discourse but develops some further ideas, such as that of a new partnership between business and environmental NGOs. *Changing Course* was sponsored by a small group of business leaders and could not claim at the time to be

representative of a substantial section of the business community. *Walking the Talk* was sponsored by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development whose support amongst leading global players was rather more substantial and who dominated the public image of business at Johannesburg through a series of high-profile events.

The results of our quantitative analysis provide additional confirmation for the idea that 1992 saw the establishment of a master discourse that was more widely adopted and expanded in 2002. According to these results, there are some key continuities between the business environmental discourses at Rio and Johannesburg. These include the focus on 'self-interest' as a motivating force for business to embrace sustainable development, a continuing commitment to the free market and traditional business values and scepticism about state intervention on environmental issues. The 'content analysis' approach allowed for the identification of a number of changes that occurred between Rio and Johannesburg. Most important perhaps are a greater reliance on voluntary measures in terms of monitoring and evaluating environmental progress, a specific focus on 'partnership' with non-business actors and a more positive evaluation of environmental non-governmental organisations. Cultural and sectoral differences between business actors did not affect the acceptance of the new master discourse.

A direct comparison of the results of the qualitative and quantitative method shows a very large degree of overlap. There are no major continuities and changes that only manifest themselves with the use of one method and not with the other. Both methods thus compliment each other well. A good example is the discussion of the role of non-governmental organisations and the use of 'partnership' as the solution to environmental problems. The content analysis approach can show that, indeed, the discourse in Johannesburg shows a far more positive attitude to NGOs. Content analysis cannot rival the close textual analysis of the two key texts in examining the more detailed nuances in the approach towards NGOs and their perceived part in the formulation and implementation of business-friendly conceptualisation of sustainable development. At the same time, we have to bear in the mind that the focus of each method is different: discourse analysis can establish what a possible master business

environment discourse promoted by the most active proponents of business greening looks like and how it has changed over time; the content analysis approach can provide evidence whether or not and to what extent the main elements of that master discourse are reflected with the broader discourse involving all business actors at each conference.

Generally, our results have shown that it is possible to study discourses related to specific events/processes empirically. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can play a role. While the value of discourse analysis will depend on the validity of claims on the importance of the text to be studied, the use of content analysis is one way to provide additional evidence on the role of such key texts within a wider context. In addition, the use of content analysis with coding criteria defined by a 'discourse analytical' reading of texts appears to be a promising way of overcoming some of the shortcomings of discourse analysis

Confirmation that 1992 saw the first comprehensive formulation of a new master business discourse of the global environment supports the general idea of the importance of transnational business elites. The 1992 discourse was formulated by a comparatively small group of leading business executives whose ideas at that time could not command wide support within the business community. Ten years later, the key elements of the 1992 discourse appear to have entered the mainstream of business thinking, at least as far as business groups represented at Johannesburg are concerned. Here, the results of the content analysis are particularly striking. While the main elements of this new master discourse did not find major support amongst business actors at Rio, our evidence strongly suggests that this was very different ten years later. The major ideas promoted by the WBCSD representing a very broad range of major corporate interests gained widespread support in Johannesburg. At least as far as global environmental politics is concerned, the WBCSD as a representative of a new transnational business elite appears to have been quite successful in establishing a master discourse.

Nevertheless, there are a number of questions that remain as challenges for future research. First, the empirical analysis of business environmental discourses presented

in this study is obviously limited to the business actors that took part in the Rio and the Johannesburg summits. There are many companies and other business actors that did not take part in the UNCED and WSSD processes; the WBCSD has grown in importance, representing almost 200 major corporations, but the WBCSD cannot necessarily claim to speak for the global business community as a whole. Further empirical research would be necessary to establish to what extent non-participating business actors are engaged in different types of business environmental discourses.

A further important limitation of our study is that it focuses exclusively on 'Earth Summits' dealing with sustainable development and general issues of the global environment. This is an area where one might expect business to be more co-operative and less antagonistic to the political agenda promoted by environmental NGOs. A different business approach could be expected in areas of global environmental politics where specific regimes are established and developed, such as ozone depletion, climate change, and biodiversity. Here the specific changes to national policies required are more likely to impact directly on vested interests. We might thus expect a higher degree of resistance to the idea of business greening, potentially with 'counter-movement' business environmental discourses remaining as an important feature.

Moving beyond the level of global environmental discourses, further analysis might explore other 'levels' of discourses and their interaction. For example, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) distinguish between Micro-, Meso-, Grand- and Mega-Discourses. The global business environment discourse as a 'Grand Discourse' might be seen as part of a global Mega-Discourse of, say, neo-liberal globalisation, delineating the shape of discourses across a range of policy fields. Below the 'Grand Discourse' at global level, business environmental discourses at national and local levels might display different patterns. The most vociferous opposition to the WBCSD approach as well as to the general idea of corporate social responsibility appears to come from some business actors and academics in the USA. Their voices were not prominent at the WSSD at Johannesburg but appear to be a force in national environmental discourses.

The interrelationship between discourse levels would also be an interesting topic to explore. Are global business environmental discourses the result of the aggregation of lower level discourses, for example are the discourses of a particular region or country becoming dominant? Or are business environmental discourses at lower levels the result of a trickle-down effect, with the master discourse formulated at the global level imposing its dominance on national and local discourses in due course?

Ultimately, the most interesting question, though, concerns the issue of the impact of the creation of a master business environmental discourse. Even if the environmental debate within the business community is dominated by a specific master discourse, this would be of little influence unless other participants in the political process engage with such a discourse. How does this discourse affect the way non-business actors debate the global environment? How is the idea of partnership with business resonating within the NGO sector? Is the partnership idea involving business, NGOs and government in the implementation of sustainable development successful in dominating the shape of environmental policy at all levels?

Does the master discourse promoted by business enable it to dominate the wider social and political discourse on the environment as a whole? Are the principles of the dominant business environmental discourse able to define the terms of global environmental governance? There are indications that, indeed, some elements of the business environmental discourse analysed have found resonance beyond the business sector. For example, Andonova and Levy (2003), Clapp (2005) and Finger (2005) have highlighted the use of partnerships as a mandate for the further involvement of business in environmental governance. Generally, business, governments, the UN and some NGOs are enthusiastic about these partnerships. If these findings are replicated in other studies, then the notion of a master business environmental discourse as the foundation stone of a hegemonic project of global environmental governance promoted by a transnational business elite will be difficult to dismiss. Whether such a project will ultimately prevail in the face of a 'counter-movement' discourse promoted by other sections of the business community as well as an anti-globalisation discourse that may gain more ground in the NGO sector is a matter for the future.

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Appendix: Discourse Content Coding Frame

Area 1: Background

101 Region

- Europe
- USA
- Asia
- Oceania
- Other

102 Principle operating sector

- Extraction
- Manufacturing
- Services
- Other

103 Form of communication

- Speech
- Policy-related paper
- Company report
- Evaluation report
- Reported Speech
- Other

104 Affiliation

Does the document express any affiliation with any specific trade or lobbying body?

105 Organisation

Does the author/speaker represent any specific business environmental lobbying or interest group?

- Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD)/World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
- Business Action on Sustainable Development (BASD)
- International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)
- Other
- WBCSD/ICC/BASD jointly (Johannesburg)
- No organisation

106 Who is the text being addressed to?

- Other business representatives
- Policy-makers
- Cross-section of policy-makers, lobbyists, and business actors
- Unable to determine

Area 2: Agents

201 Consolidated agency

This category identifies the range of consolidated agents deemed to have varying impacts on business:

- Societal groups (civil society, society, the public)
- Collective groups (stakeholders, consumers, citizens)
- Global community
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Others
- Not mentioned

202 Individual business agency

This category identifies the range of agents operating at the individual level of interaction:

- Investors
- Traders
- Single companies
- Suppliers
- Different company sectors
- Others
- Not mentioned

203 NGO evaluation

This category includes a general discussion on NGOs or specific mentions of individual groups. Positive categories include expressed desire to work with NGOs, NGOs as part of the solution to sustainable development, and NGOs as agents in 'partnerships' on sustainable development. The negative aspects encompass mentions of NGOs as unwilling to co-operate or change to the new realities as mentioned by the speakers, and NGOs displaying antagonistic attitudes towards business.

Each text was coded on a 0-10 scale, with 5 as the neutral point.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Negative						Very positive				

If no evaluation possible, tick 'cannot classify'

204 Political authority evaluation

Favourable mentions of strong government; including enforcement of market rules, promoting economic and social stability for investment; leadership or direction. The negative end of the scale includes favourable mentions of restricting the role of government within the above; negative mentions of excessive government involvement in business environmental activities; lack of leadership and direction.

Each text was coded on a 0-10 scale, with 5 as the neutral point.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Negative					Very positive					

If no evaluation possible, tick 'cannot classify'

Area 3: Business agents' motives

This refers to the foundation principles offered for businesses involvement in environmental issues.

301 Environmental concern: general

General phrases and terms employed by business to express concern for the environment. Including phrases such as a desire to express companies' social and environmental values and beliefs and references to sharing environmental concerns and problem-solving. Action-oriented terms are also pertinent to this category, such as being involved in a constructive manner, achieving results, getting things done, leading by example. This category should also identify specific reference to environmental concern as a direct motivating factor such as eco-system carrying capacity and the future of business activities, a desire to eradicate environmentally negative trends, i.e. climate change, water shortages, food production, sources of energy and vehicle use.

302 Sustainable development

Indications that sustainable development now represents a general business goal, declaration of a belief in sustainable development; favourable commitments to realising sustainable development.

303 Environmental harmony

Appeals for collective effort and shared solidarity between business, society and the environment; a united approach; concern over environmental issues causing societal/environmental discord.

304 Self-interest

Self-interest includes direct references to economic processes associated with business, such as shareholder value, profits and profitability, and the 'triple bottom line'.

305 Legitimation and legitimacy

Mentions of engaging with environmental activities, motivations, outcomes and processes that engender the continued status of the corporation as a social, political and economic actor. This includes mentions of the concept of corporate social responsibility and the values associated with this, such as openness, accountability, honesty and transparency. Also more general terms fall into this category such as reputation, trust, capacity-building and public perceptions.

306 Environmental protection

Calls for general preservation of natural resources; proper use of forests, respect for bio-diversity; resources balanced in line with earth's carrying capacity.

307 Environmental social responsibility

Appeals to installing an ethical and moral dimension to business; includes favourable mentions or promoting good practice, transparency, accountability; desire to eliminate improper corporate environmental behaviour; general claims that business represents more than narrow self-interest; favourable mentions of the corporation as an environmental citizen.

308 Internationalisation

Need for binding forms of international co-operation to address environmental issues; favourable mentions of realising international environmental goals; more co-operation between businesses and international organisations, including the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations.

Area 4: Processes

401 Specific environmental issues broached

This category looks for any specific mentions of environmental issues constructed as causal processes that impact on either short- or long-term business activity.

- Climate change/global warming
- Poverty
- Consumption patterns
- Water
- Bio-diversity
- Public health
- Others
- Not mentioned

402 Types of evidence utilised

If yes, what kind

- Case studies highlighting specific projects or initiatives
- Indication of compliance with legalistic norms
- Indication of compliance with voluntary codes and measures
- Adherence to external reporting initiatives
- Publication of internal monitoring and evaluations
- No evidence utilised

403 Free enterprise and the environment

Favourable mentions of free enterprise capitalism; efficiency and effectiveness of business; sanctity of private property rights; role of unhampered personal initiative and entrepreneurialism.

404 Regulation

If yes, which type:

- Market regulation
- Voluntary codes
- External monitoring
- Environmental planning
- Others
- Regulation not discussed

405 Protectionist measures" evaluation

Positive end of the scale covers favourable mentions of extending or maintaining tariffs to promote the development and expansion of lasting technology, goods and

services. At the negative end, we find statements critical of trade and tariff barriers; protectionism considered a hindrance to transfer of environmental knowledge and new technologies.

Each text was coded on a 0-10 scale, with 5 as the neutral point.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Negative					Very Positive					

If no evaluation possible, tick 'cannot classify'

406 Specific reference to international policy-making bodies

- United Nations (UN)
- World Bank (WB)
- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- Others
- None mentioned

408 Environmental incentives

Expressions of the need for governments to provide business actors and lobbying groups willing to engage with environmental issue incentives; including subsidies, tax breaks, research and development; sharing of risk; legislative reorganisation.

409 Partnership working

Included within this are general mentions of business as a willing participant in instigating and implementing partnerships with governments, multilateral organisations, NGOs. This also includes specific references to different types of partnerships across different sectors.

Area 5: Outcomes

Generally, an outcome refers to:

- Different types of environmental change that the discourse users envision in the prescriptive dimension of the discourse
- The types of concepts used to portray outcomes

501 Specified time scales for outcomes

Does the document offer any indication of when specified outcomes will be accomplished?

- Specified time frame
- No specified time frame
- Outcomes not discussed

502 Where will business external environmental action occur?

What is the external implementation level of the outcomes referred to?

- Developing countries
- Developed countries – includes major western states
- Newly developing countries
- Not specified

503 Social outcomes: environmental dimensions

Included within this category are references to specific future environmentally related states of affairs. This covers tackling/reducing/mitigating/eradicating poverty and streamlining resource usage by lessening consumption patterns. Disseminating environmentally oriented forms of energy, including solar, ocean and wind. Any references to reductions in stratospheric pollution, ozone depletion and global warming.

504 Social outcomes: general

General social outcomes include explicit claims that refer to business instigating improvements in general social conditions. This category also includes vague and abstract references to improvements in social conditions. The key categories for this include references to health care, narrowing the wealth gap, discussions of improving life chances and opportunities, preserving/stabilising the social fabric, consumer choice, greater access to knowledge, widening market participation, increments and dispersions in wealth, job creation.

505 Indirect references to environmentally desirable state of affairs

Indirect references, which take the form of catch-all terms or expressions concerned with identifying the wider benefits. These are predicated on identifying business as an essential environmental actor. Included here are improving environmental

standards, mitigating adverse environmental effects, global sustainable development, eco-efficiency, saving ecosystems and the efficient use of natural resources.

506 Direct reference to environmentally desirable state of affairs

Direct improvements correlated with a specific issue. This includes direct statements that associate specific issues, such as technological change, climate change, deforestation and air quality with direct improvements resulting from business action.

507 Shifts in business practices: specific commitments

Shifts in business practices focus on the various ways business will alter its practices to address environmental change. This includes specific occurrences of the kinds of concrete commitments business will make to their practices. Included are references to:

- Partnership working, partnerships and public private partnerships
- Quantification and qualification of environmental impacts and consequences
- Specific targets and timetables
- Commercialisation of new environmental technologies
- Transparency and accountability
- Frameworks of multilaterally agreed principles for foreign direct investment
- Greater involvement of business in financing economic mechanisms associated with developing/newly developing countries, i.e. debt relief and investment guides

508 Shifts in business practices: general commitments

Shifts in business practices focus on the various ways business will alter its practices to address environmental change. This includes general commitments that do not specify detailed aspects relating to any particular type of change or are couched in vague and non-committal language. Included are references to:

- Maximisation of shareholder and societal value
- Better environmental management by business that tailors solutions to individual problems/issues
- Liberalised markets that eschew protectionist measures
- Moderate taxation levels within efficiently functioning product, service, capital and labour markets
- Qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) forms of environmental change
- Sustained and sustainable economic growth
- Commitments to legalistic norms

509 Traditional business values deployed as solutions to environmental issues

Refers to using concepts associated with managerial ideology to frame approaches to understanding and resolving environmental issues. Key terms include:

- Leadership
- Rationality
- Organisation
- Anticipation
- Learning
- Flexibility
- Taking the initiative

509 Growth in productivity

Need to encourage or facilitate increased production to address environmental issues; linkage between developing new products and the use of environmental measures to meet rising demand; importance of productivity for progressing towards positive environmental change; growth and expansion in general.

510 Technology

Importance of technology in producing sustainable development; dissemination of technology to developing or newly developing countries; pivotal role of technological change for business, research and development role; innovation, mentions of technological change made to reduce polluting activities or increase recycling/waste minimisation.

511 Environmental management

Favourable mentions of a general need for the application of better quality, environmentally focused management as a means of solving environmental issues. Includes mentions of various managerial systems such as total quality environmental management and the role of managers in creating and maintaining change.