



**Características discursivas da Construção da Política  
Sustentável da PSJC Gazprom na Comunicação Corporativa<sup>1</sup>**  
**Discursive Features of PSJC Gazprom Sustainable Policy  
Construction in Corporate Communication**

**Keywords:** sustainable development, sustainability discourse, CSR, critical discourse analysis, Gazprom.

Marina Shturmina

**1. Introduction**

As written on its website, Gazprom According to Gazprom’s website, it is a “global energy company focused on geological exploration, production, transportation, storage, processing, and sales of gas, gas condensate and oil, sales of gas as a vehicle fuel, as well as generation and marketing of heat and electric power” (Gazprom n.d.-a). More than 50% of Gazprom’s shares are owned by the Russian state (Gazprom, n.d.-b). In 2019, Gazprom was the third-largest carbon emitter company in the world (Climate Accountability Institute, n.d.). Nonetheless, Gazprom has its own sustainability policy and publishes annual sustainability reports.

The research problem is the contradiction inherent in global capitalism: the most profitable companies are the biggest contributors to the climate crisis and social inequality (Fuchs, 2017). Since international institutions, such as the UN, have recognized the environmental crisis and have been creating ideological projects like the UN Agenda

---

<sup>1</sup>Text presented to VI Seminário Internacional de Pesquisas em Mídia e Processos Sociais. POSCOM-UFSM. Santa Maria, RS.



2030, businesses are compelled to transform their corporate communication to be discursively consistent with these projects. By creating the image of a sustainable company, corporations minimize reputational risks without a fundamental change in the nature of their activities.

Therefore, the present study attempts not only to expand previous research but also to demonstrate how corporate sustainability discourse functions as a part of the destructive capitalist system and its Russian specificity (Zhao, 2012). This study aims to highlight the discursive features of Gazprom's sustainable development policy construction and to determine how the selected discursive features correlate with global sustainability trends and Russian particularity.

## **2. Sustainable Development**

Although there is no agreement on the definition of sustainability, there is one definition of sustainable development that remains the most cited and is employed by Gazprom. Thus, according to the UN Brundtland Report, sustainable development is activity towards economic development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 39).

The definition is criticized for its abstractedness and immense positivity (Portney, 2015; Fuchs, 2017). It is focused on the state of the biosphere, particularly regarding natural resource use and depletion. Sustainability is understood as “finding some sort of steady state so that Earth or some piece of it can support the human population and economic growth without ultimately threatening the health of humans, animals, and plants” (Portney, 2015, p. 4). That is based on the premise that the Earth's resources cannot be used, depleted, or destroyed indefinitely.

## **3. Critical Sustainability**



Fuchs (2017) examines the UN's sustainability concepts from a critical theory perspective. He concludes that it is incapable of making a significant change, as it allows companies and governments to create publicly pleasing images without changing their harmful activities. He provides an example of the mobility industry, which includes vehicle and fuel manufacturers. They represented a fifth of the world's largest companies in 2015 (Fuchs, 2017, pp. 444-447). This industry, while profitable, is a primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, the climate crisis is caused and sustained by profitable businesses.

Another point of critique is the concepts that depict sustainability as a threefold concept, consisting of environment, economy, and society. One of the most famous ones is the Triple Bottom Line concept (Elkington, 1998). Its idea is the necessity of a comprehensive approach to sustainability, which involves simultaneous protection of the environment, promotion of economic development, and establishment of social equality (Portney, 2015, p. 6-7). Fuchs' critique focuses on the false assumption of the concept that economy, environment, and society are three distinct entities, while they are dialectically interconnected and influence one another (Fuchs, 2017, p. 452).

#### **4. Corporate Social Responsibility**

While there is also no universally accepted definition of corporate social responsibility (Rahman et al., 2022), the one by economist van Marrewijk (2003) is used in relevant studies (Gatti and Seele, 2013; Seilonen, 2020). According to this definition, corporate social responsibility is "voluntary activities aimed at including social and environmental concerns in business operations and interactions with stakeholders" (van Marrewijk, 2003, p. 102).

Portney (2015, p. 110) highlights the controversy, which is a characteristic of corporate sustainability practices. On one hand, corporations actively implement sustainability



practices. On the other hand, the corporations themselves are the manifestation of unsustainability, as they exploit natural resources to generate profit.

In line with Portney, Sandoval (2015) demonstrates that the idea of CSR contradicts the two most common hypotheses on how social well-being can be achieved within capitalism. In the case of the *laissez-faire* doctrine, CSR casts doubt on the market's ability to self-regulate. For the intervention doctrine, CSR demonstrates the failure of government regulation of corporations. Sandoval concludes that the notion of CSR challenges traditional views on state-market relations. As Sandoval states, the fundamental flaw of the CSR concept is that it never questions the primacy of profit and the interests of capital.

#### **4.1 CSR in Russia**

Zhao (2012) coined the idea of political legitimacy based on CSR, according to which companies create, maintain, and/or enhance the perceived appropriateness and desirability to gain access to governmental resources through CSR. As he shows, companies can lobby for changes to existing policies on social and environmental issues, as well as modify or strengthen the existing potential of the state in addressing social and environmental problems.

## **5. Methods**

To examine how corporate communication participates in the reproduction of capitalist relations, this paper uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, described in *Analyzing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research* (Fairclough, 2003). The book offers a theoretical and methodological framework for text analysis within the framework of social research (pp. 1-2), which allows for linking social theory with linguistic text analysis. Additionally, in the book, Fairclough steps aside from his classical three-dimensional model and offers its advancement by transitioning to more detailed levels.



Thus, social structures become a separate element of analysis, which makes it possible to trace how class society is connected with specific social practices.

Fairclough states the need to combine CDA with other theoretical and analytical approaches (2003, p. 11). Therefore, in the study, CDA is enriched with a critical perspective, provided by the works of Fuchs and Sandoval. Additionally, quantitative content analysis is utilized for the interdiscursivity analysis.

## **6. The empirical base**

The material analyzed with CDA included the text from Gazprom's sustainable development website (<https://www.gazprom.com/sustainability/>) and the transcription of the video from this webpage. Content analysis was conducted on 454 Gazprom press releases tagged with “Ecology” (*Экология*), “Social Responsibility” (*Социальная ответственность*), and “Gazprom for Children” (*Газпром – детям*) published from March 2022 to March 2023.

## **7. Results**

Gazprom defines sustainable development similarly to the Brundtland Commission, but without the attribution of the voice. As the definitions are synonymous, the criticism directed at the UN's definition can be extended to Gazprom's. It considers the environment, economy, and social sphere as autonomous entities while they are interconnected. This approach also disregards issues of communication, class, and capitalism. Furthermore, the definition is broad and abstract, encompassing vastly different utilization. Despite referencing the UN and EAE (Eurasian Economic Association) without sources, Gazprom's text only partially represents the discourse of climate change, and the harmful role of extractive industries is absent. Additionally, a contradictory statement is made in the text about natural gas being an eco-friendly energy source, contrary to UN and EAE assertions.



# Anais de Resumos Expandidos

## VI Seminário Internacional de Pesquisas em Midiatização e Processos Sociais

ISSN 2675-4169

Vol. 1, N. 6 (2024)

---

General terms are used in the text without establishing their precise meanings. Furthermore, the text does not specify the exact problems Gazprom seeks to address. Additionally, no description of specific solutions is present. Employing such terminology might serve to mask existing contradictions within the text.

Contrary to expectations, the discourse on energy security is nearly absent from the text. Moreover, there's no mention of the company's shareholders as stakeholders.

As the critical analysis of the website text and video transcription didn't clarify the specific actions Gazprom takes within its environmental and social responsibility framework, further analysis of other forms of corporate communication is necessary.

Quantitative content analysis was conducted to identify specific activities that Gazprom labels as activities towards sustainable development and social responsibility. Eight general themes were outlined, as illustrated by the pie chart below (Figure 2). Three-quarters of all press releases belong to three themes– activities to support the invasion of Ukraine (29,4%), which Russian authorities call a “special military operation”, activities to support children’s harmonious development (24,6%), and environmental activities (21%). Thus, 79% of press releases are dedicated to the social aspect of sustainability and only 21% to the environment.



### Distribution of press releases by theme

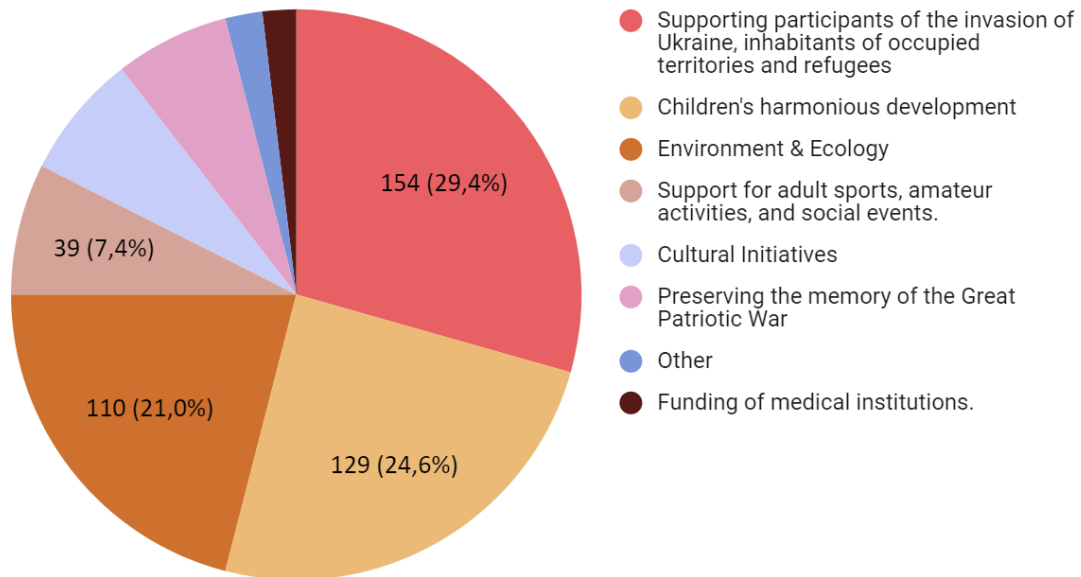


Figure 1. Distribution of press releases by theme

Considering environmental activities, the most common one is cleaning some territory (35.5%). Employees collect trash in a certain place, and sometimes their children join the cleaning. The locations cleaned vary from public spaces such as parks, embankments, and memorial complexes to areas near Gazprom's offices. According to the law, local administrations are responsible for keeping public areas clean; however, Gazprom commits to it.

The second and third most common themes are planting trees (29.1%) and the release of animals into natural habitats (21.8%), mostly the release of fry into rivers.

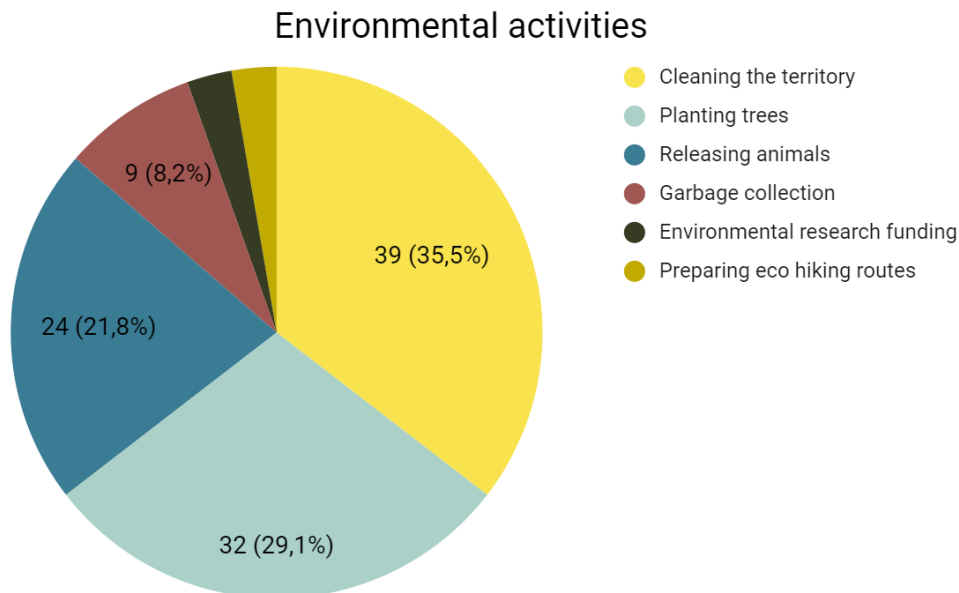


Figure 2. Distribution of press releases on environmental activities

The biggest concern about resource companies' environmental impact is greenhouse gas emissions. However, Gazprom's environmental activities are aimed at the partial completion of local administration tasks and "caring about biodiversity" by planting trees and releasing fish in the rivers.

The most common topic for the social aspect of Gazprom's sustainability was supporting the war in Ukraine (29.4% of all press releases tagged CSR) (Figure 2).

Gazprom and its employees provide for the war in Ukraine. Over the year, 121 times employees sent their daily salary to purchase humanitarian aid for soldiers and refugees from the occupied territories (so-called new territories). Furthermore, the company and its employees provided equipment for the attack, which ranged from sewing machines to quadcopters.

When a state begins a war, it is responsible for providing for its needs. However, as Zhao (2012) points out, Russian companies actively seek governmental support, therefore





engaging in fulfilling the state's tasks. Taking on this responsibility, Gazprom creates and/or maintains the image of an appropriate recipient of governmental resources. Despite the sanctions adopted in response to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which led to a change in Gazprom's sales markets, the company would not continue its activities without governmental support.

By applying quantitative content analysis to the press releases, Gazprom's specific activities towards sustainable development were identified. Thus, it can be argued that the company's main activities within the framework of environmental and social responsibility are supporting the invasion of Ukraine, activities to support children's harmonious development, environmental protection activities, and support for adult sports and amateur creative activities.

Only a fifth of the press releases cover the environmental aspect; all the rest are devoted to the social aspect of sustainability. In spite of Gazprom generating vast greenhouse gas emissions, its environmental activities include cleaning public areas, planting trees, and releasing fish into rivers.

## **8. Conclusion**

Gazprom's corporate social responsibility activities focus on supporting state policies through activities for supporting the invasion of Ukraine, preserving the memory of the Great Patriotic War, supporting children's harmonious development, adult sports, and amateur activities.

By taking responsibility for part of the state's tasks, Gazprom creates and/or supports its image as an appropriate recipient of access to state resources. This approach to corporate social responsibility reduces social responsibility to a means of achieving the company's goals, namely establishing good relations with the government.



## References

- Climate Accountability Institute. (n.d.). Carbon Majors | Climate Accountability Institute. Carbon Majors. Retrieved November 24, 2023, from <https://climateaccountability.org/carbon-majors/>
- Elkington, J. (1998). ACCOUNTING FOR THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE. *Measuring Business Excellence*, 2(3), 18–22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb025539>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2017). Critical Social Theory and Sustainable Development: The Role of Class, Capitalism and Domination in a Dialectical Analysis of Un/Sustainability. *Sustainable Development*, 25(5), 443–458. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1673>
- Gatti, L., & Seele, P. (2013). Evidence for the prevalence of the sustainability concept in European corporate responsibility reporting. *Sustainability Science*, 9(1), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-013-0233-5>
- Gazprom. (n.d.). About Gazprom. Retrieved October 11, 2023, from <https://www.gazprom.com/about/>
- Gazprom. (2022, August 15). Shares. Retrieved October 11, 2023, from <https://www.gazprom.com/investors/stock/>
- Portney, K. E. (2015). *Sustainability*. MIT Press.
- Rahman, M., Wahab, S. A., & Latiff, A. S. A. (2022). Definitions and Concepts of Organizational Sustainability. *Society & Sustainability*, 4(2), 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.38157/ss.v4i2.496>
- Sandoval, M. (2015). From CSR to RSC. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 47(4), 608–624. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0486613415574266>
- Seilonen, J. (2020). *What Is Sustainability? A Discourse Analysis of Oil Companies' Sustainability Reports [MA thesis]*. Hanken School of Economics.



**Anais de Resumos Expandidos**  
**VI Seminário Internacional de Pesquisas**  
**em Midiatização e Processos Sociais**

ISSN 2675-4169

Vol. 1, N. 6 (2024)

---

Van Marrewijk, M. (2003). Concepts and definitions of CSR and corporate sustainability: between agency and communion. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 44(2), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1023331212247>

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World - A/42/427 Annex, Overview - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements* <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov.htm>

Zhao, M. (2012). CSR-Based Political Legitimacy Strategy: Managing the state by doing good in China and Russia. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(4), 439–460. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1209-6>