Becoming a global climate change discourse leader

A discursive approach to UK’s rise as an international climate discourse leader in 2005-06

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Summary

In 2005 the United Kingdom emerged itself as a global leader of climate change discourse. It initiated the Gleneagles Summit and commissioned the influential Stern Review. These acts had a major influence on the international discourse on climate change by raising its significance. To analyse why the UK government dedicated herself to taking this role, this thesis applies a three-dimensional discursive approach based on self-interest, norms, and identity. To draw the context of self-interest, public opinion on environment and climate change in the UK in 2005-06 is analysed through its occurrence in media and surveys. Then, - as an important aspect of national climate policy adaptation - the normative dimension is assessed through the scientific development of climate change discourse, analysed in the context of the UK by exanimating consensus and controversy. Finally, the role of identity is analysed through the connotation of public discourse with governmental representations in speeches and policies. The discourses of ecological modernisation and climate justice are treated as cases regarding the actual public discourse.

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# Introduction

Following a series of natural disasters in the sixties, the international political sphere was transformed by the introduction of global environmentalism. A new network of political actors arranged around the environment as an international issue emerged. The constant, and increasingly intense degradation of the global ecological situation gave rise to a variety of environmentally driven social movements and political campaigns. Fuelled by the end of the Cold War, inviting the international community to reconsider the international order, and climaxing diverse political endeavours, the environment became a prominent subject of concern in international politics leading to international conventions and regulations.[[1]](#footnote-1) Especially developed democracies showed strong will to mediate climate change in the global run. The UK was a prominent actor in this regard, having lobbied intensively for making climate change a ‘stand-alone agenda item’ in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century.[[2]](#footnote-2) This started with negotiations during and after the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, when the UK adopted high decarbonisation targets. UK’s international climate stance, however, reached a new level in 2005-06 when it initiated the Gleneagles Summit and commissioned the influential Stern Review. By adding economic significance, the Stern Review enhanced the priority of climate change, altering the international order. Effectively, through enhancing international climate change negotiations, Britain’s diplomatic behaviour in 2005-06 became perceived as exceptional.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Even though the UK’s diplomacy in 2005-06 is widely perceived as a major contribution to the global discourse of climate change, little insight has been generated on what moved the UK government to do so. Correspondingly, Simone Turchetti (2018) noted that a ‘significant gap’ of research about the topic would make any scholar ‘interested in finding out about the intersections between contemporary British diplomacy, technology and environment (…) struggle to retrieve enough on this subject.’[[4]](#footnote-4) This absence is problematic because historical thinking infuses climate discussions, policy considerations and institutional development.[[5]](#footnote-5) Accordingly, Mark Carey (2014) delineated an agenda for ‘critical climate history’ – arguing that historians should get more involved into present-day climate science and policy by assessing ‘climate change discussions, media coverage, policies, science (…).’[[6]](#footnote-6) In international relations (IR) theory, Mizan Khan’s (2016) distinguishes three major perspectives on climate change and environment. Realism – the most traditional perspective - views international relations as an ‘anarchic space with no order’ where ‘nations are guided as unitary rational actors by maximising interests based on power politics.’ Realism neglects the significance of moral values, justice and ethics in international (climate) politics arguing that ‘abstract principles (…) conflict with the concrete responsibilities that state leaders have (…).’[[7]](#footnote-7) Additionally, constructivism – the ‘social perspective’ - follows the premise that scientific knowledge is ‘constructed’ by scientists while conducting research within an ‘interpretive paradigm’ assessing the ‘meaning people ascribe to various aspects of their lives based on cultural values (…).’ Finally, regime theory offers a conciliatory perspective, arguing that nations are the central actors in international relations, with civil society constituting a minor role. Here, a regime encompasses ‘sets of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given area (…).’ [[8]](#footnote-8)

The following work positions itself in alignment with constructivism and regime theory, providing a comprehensive discursive approach to UK’s climate regime development. Inspired by an expansive body of climate policy literature this thesis recognises the significance of norms and values, while opposing the realist perspective of a nation as an unitary rational actor.[[9]](#footnote-9) Within the expanses of climate policy literatures, emphasis has been put on framing, anthropogenic aspects, institutional interactions, justice and public awareness. In line with these observations, this thesis aims to contribute to the limited insight on UK’s foreign climate diplomacy in 2005-06 by analysing it through a discursive perspective. The analysis follows Irene Lorenzoni and David Benson’s (2014) definition of discourse: ‘the process of generation of ideas, their acceptance, endorsement, legitimation and communication, which can lead to new sets of rules, values and practices.’[[10]](#footnote-10) In relation to national climate regimes, discursive approaches tend to involve a three-dimensional bottom-up/top-down assessment of interests, ideas and institutional causes, mainly focussing on the role of general and scientific knowledge.[[11]](#footnote-11) Adequately, these three dimensions will form the theoretical framework in the analysis of the question how the interplay of interests, climate discourse and institutional dimensions moved the UK government to become a global climate discourse leader in 2005-06.

The dimension of interests, represented in chapter 1, assesses public opinion and demand on climate change through its salience in media, public opinion measures (e.g. polls and surveys, in 2005-06) and ‘mobilised public opinion’ (e.g. environmental movements). Here, the focus is on self-interest, analysing a (potential) motive of re-election for the British government.[[12]](#footnote-12) The dimension of ideas, represented in chapter 2, regards ‘the politicisation of climate science’, or the epistemic evolution of climate science in 2005-06.[[13]](#footnote-13) This dimension analyses trends of scientific consensus and controversy about climate change. In chapter 3 and 4 then, two important discourses relating to the institutional dimension of UK’s climate policy adaptation are treated. This institutional dimension relates to the development of a certain state identity, conforming to the in previous chapters revealed public opinion and discourse. It focuses on the way the UK government expresses voters’ preferences in rhetoric and authority through public speeches and the formation of ‘epistemic communities’ (e.g. FoE, CCP, DTI). Based on these dimensions, it is argued that normative and developmental discourse are crucial for understanding UK’s rise of active climate diplomacy in 2005-06.

# 1. Public opinion and media

Like any other democratic nation, the British government strongly depended on public support in the formation and maintenance of governance in the early twenty-first century. Effectively, studies have demonstrated a high responsiveness of British government to public opinion in this specific period.[[14]](#footnote-14) 'Public' refers to citizens and NGO's, or 'civil society' as in international relations theory. On analysing public opinion, this chapter contemplates UK’s environmental movement, media coverage, polls and surveys. This is especially relevant when considering climate policies, since these have been demonstrated to be a profoundly public and normative subject.[[15]](#footnote-15) Therefore, this chapter seeks to trace public interest for the UK government to adapt climate change into its foreign diplomacy.

## 1.1 News media coverage

Although the actual relation between media and public opinion is beyond complex, there is a consensus that media has a major influence on public opinion, specifically in relation to climate change policies.[[16]](#footnote-16) The extent to which a subject is covered by media tells much about the level of public awareness. A study by Maxwell Boykoff (2008) on the coverage of climate change in tabloid papers - which have a much greater exposure than broadsheet news - of four major UK news companies (The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Express and Mirror) showed that climate change made a large contribution to the overall news content in 2005 and 2006.[[17]](#footnote-17) In fact, the study revealed two publication peaks, which Boykoff associated with the Gleneagles Summit and the Stern Review. Hugh Doulton and Katrina Brown (2009) found similar results analysing news coverage of climate change by The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Guardian, The Independent and Sunday between 1997 and 2007. Aside from assessing the quantitative representation of climate change in the news, Doulton and Brown also investigated *how* climate change was portrayed. They found five general tendencies in 158 newspapers; 1) climate change mediation was beneficial for development, 2) climate change was low priority, better to be consulted ‘as it occurred’, 3) the key to preventing serious consequences for development was mitigation, 4) climate change had ‘disastrous impacts on development’, and 5) mitigating climate change enabled ‘clean and sustainable development for the poor.’[[18]](#footnote-18)

Finally, broadcasted news media -as an auditory-visual source of information- should not be overlooked when assessing news media coverage. In fact, studies on auditory-visual news reportage of climate change have demonstrated a much stronger impact on public opinion than written news.[[19]](#footnote-19) Furthermore, television in the UK is considered one of the main sources of ‘trusted political information.’[[20]](#footnote-20) Interestingly, Justin Lewis and Tammy Boyce (2009) observed a vast increase of climate change reportage in three major tv bulletins in the UK between 2004 and 2006. As such, climate change rose from the fourteenth to the third most presented topic between 2004 and 2006. This was significantly higher than in broadsheet news reportages.[[21]](#footnote-21) Libby Lester and Simon Cottle (2009), in another study on climate change reportage in highly rated news channels in (and amongst others) the UK, found that climate change was consistently illustrated as a global issue. By framing issues related to climate change in a global context, Lester and Cottle made some intriguing observations regarding *how* different political actors were visualised when speaking about climate change. They observed challenger groups and NGO’s were ‘visually’ dissociated from the centre of political cooperation and problem-solving, while the nation and formal government were presented as the core of international cooperation for solving climate change.[[22]](#footnote-22)

## 1.2 Expression of public concern in polls and surveys

By the turn of the millennium, polls indicated that most people in the UK recognised the existence of climate change and perceived it as a significant topic of concern.[[23]](#footnote-23) From the results of a large survey on public attitudes towards environment and climate change in the UK in late 2005, Wouter Poortinga et al. (2006) concluded that climate change was not considered very urgent compared to other societal issues. In this survey, 1491 people aged 15 and above were interviewed face-to-face in their home environments. The survey showed that 91% of people recognised the occurrence of climate change, of which 82% were ‘fairly concerned’ about it. Furthermore, the survey showed that the majority (57%) thought current regulations and rules lacked sufficiency and (62%) opinionated that ‘every possible action should be taken regarding climate change.’ On the question where the locus of responsibility for acting about climate change ought to be, 71% answered on the national and international level.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Similar results were generated in other major representative surveys carried out by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), British Social Attitudes (BSA) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2005-06. Although varying slightly in statistics, these surveys also showed a high public awareness of the occurrence of climate change and a negative conception of the issue. The degree of concern, however, was found to be low compared to other societal topics. Climate change was rather perceived as a remote, and non-urgent threat, being relevant for future generations and ‘far away places.’ Another remarkable observation was that the majority of survey respondents lacked a comprehensive understanding of the nature of climate change, with the acknowledgement of its significance and scale being ‘extremely low’ according to surveyors. [[25]](#footnote-25) Accordingly, Lorraine Whitmarsh (2011) found that public uncertainty about the meaning of climate change was a continuous trend in the UK between 2003 and 2008.[[26]](#footnote-26)

However striking the result of these polls and surveys, a few notes should be made regarding the present salience of public concern. First, that it is probable for someone to state 'yes' when asked if he or she is concerned over climate change or thinks it requires mitigation. As such, results depend considerably on the preciseness and nature of questions. Open-ended questions are significantly more credible than closed-question formats. Finally, according to Jillian Lane et al. (2006), environmental surveys show a tendency to overstate the concern of respondents and create a socially desirable outcome. Nevertheless, the institutions responsible for the surveys mentioned in this paragraph were aware of potential flaws and shortcomings in their surveys, adding to their objectivity.

## Environmentalism in the UK

Finally, a third aspect of public opinion concerns that which has been defined as the ‘awakened and mobilised public sphere’ by Jürgen Habermas.[[27]](#footnote-27) Regarding public concern in the UK this discerns itself as the manifestation of environmental awareness through the formation of environmental NGO’s (ENGO’s) and accordingly their political lobbying. Already in 1991, John McCormick stated that the UK contained ‘the oldest, strongest, best-organized and most widely supported environmental lobby in the world.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Neil Carter and Christopher Rootes (2006; 2003) underpin the claim made by McCormick by concluding that Britain had some of the most prominent environmental movements worldwide in the first decade of the new millennium. Consisting of approximately five to six million participants, representing about twenty percent of the total population.[[29]](#footnote-29) Even though the media depicted NGOs as outsiders to the core of political engagement with the environment, environmental NGOs (ENGOs) proved very present in an apparent trend of public environmental concern in 2005-06. It discerned this public concern most prominently in unifying acts such as launching the Stop Climate Chaos (SCC) coalition and the Friends of the Earth’s (FoE) ‘Big Ask’ campaign in 2005.[[30]](#footnote-30) Although the realm of ENGOs demonstrates a variety of motives, influential campaigns like SCC and FoE allow the distinction of one major shared value, namely the natural environment. Throughout the early twenty-first century, however, environmental movements became more plural and internationally oriented. Furthermore, ENGOs framed climate change mitigation increasingly as a benefit for both human and environment.[[31]](#footnote-31)

# On climate science

After having perused how climate change was portrayed in news media, and what opinions prevailed in the UK public in 2005 and 2006, the question arises in what way a climate change discourse was prevailing on the national level. Following public opinion and demand, scientific ideas and discourse are an important dimension in the formation process of national climate regimes. This chapter analyses the ideational roots of UK’s active climate diplomacy in 2005-06 by looking at the development of scientific consensus on climate change and prevailing discourses. Effectively, this chapter provides crucial insight into the ideational foundation of UK’s climate leader initiative.

## Climate science consensus

The theory that accumulation of carbon emissions lead to the warming of the planet, the so-called ‘greenhouse effect’, found empirical ground in the seventies. Ever since, climate change has been treated in various international conferences and assessments. Supported by sixteen national academies, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), commissioned in 1988, is considered a central pillar of a growing scientific consensus on climate change.[[32]](#footnote-32) Following a series of Assessments Reports, the IPCC gave climate change a dominant position in the international science community. In line with growing scientific attention, climate change started to become a prominent topic in popular discourse in the late twentieth century. This was enhanced by first attempts to envision popular opinion of climate change in the 1990s.[[33]](#footnote-33) Since then, harmonisation of scientific insights has led to increased public awareness and activism. This was particularly the case in the global north, representing the locus of international climate science. Within this climate science locus, the UK is found to be a historical ‘gatekeeper’ of climate knowledge.[[34]](#footnote-34) Accordingly, the UK saw a growing unification of its climate science community in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In cooperation with international partners, UK scientists investigated anomalies in different greenhouse gases leading to influential publications like the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution 2000 report underlining the importance of a global emission mitigation agreement. Based on the link between emissions and temperature, this rapport laid the foundation of a rigid scientific approach to policy in the UK.[[35]](#footnote-35) Eventually, growth of the British science community led to the enactment of the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) in 2000 to provide knowledge about climate change.[[36]](#footnote-36) Followed by the Sustainable Technology Development Programme (STDP) in 1993 and the Climate Change Programme (CCP) they represent UK’s first true commitments to epistemic unification and consensus regarding scientific knowledge on climate change. By enhancing national interest in climate change they explored sustainable technological innovations arguing that vast systematic changes were needed for managing energy consumption.[[37]](#footnote-37) UK’s climate concern was intensified from 2004 when a vast number of scientific essays and consultations stated that climate change would be much worse than was previously assumed.[[38]](#footnote-38) At the same time British ENGO’s started using scientific knowledge in order to support their campaigns, effectively raising public awareness and successfully encouraging the government to raise its (international) stance on climate change (e.g. the FoE commencing and popularising the Climate Change Bill in 2005).[[39]](#footnote-39)

## 2.2 Climate science scepticism

The development of the scientific discourse on climate change did not solely mark itself by consensus. Climate scepticism, i.e. doubts and uncertainty around physical and scientific insights on climate change, has been persistent in the discursive history of climate science.[[40]](#footnote-40) Various explanations have been provided for the existence of uncertainty about climate change, but no consistent factor has been distinguished.[[41]](#footnote-41) Interestingly, John Dryzek et al. (2011) noted that international climate scepticism finds its roots in the British International Policy Network (IPN). This corporate-funded think tank was founded in London in 1971 with the supposed intention to distribute research-based knowledge on public policy in various areas. However, as Dryzek et al. stated, they provided continuous support to diverse organisations in different countries, ‘committed to denying the reality of climate change.’[[42]](#footnote-42) In addition, Walther et al. (2005) observed that the early twenty-first century showed a consistent gap between academic and political perception of climate change. Specifically, they mentioned the G8 annual summit 2005, which formed an important landmark in UK’s foreign climate diplomacy. Walther et al. described the draft statement of the summit as ‘weak, vague, (…) and in clear contradiction to the findings of climate impact research over the past decade.’[[43]](#footnote-43) In the same year, uncertainty about the seriousness of climate change is also observable in *The Economics of Climate Change* (2005-06) rapport. In this rapport, the House of Lords Committee, trivialised conclusions made by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on amounts of emissions and predicted effects of climate change, stating to ‘have some concerns about the objectivity of the IPCC process, with some of its emissions scenarios and summary documentation apparently influenced by political considerations.’[[44]](#footnote-44) Scepticism in UK government was also observed in the Institute of Economic Affairs by Verweij et al. (2006). In their socio-cultural analysis of political decision-making on climate change they argued that within Britain’s Institute of Economic Affairs climate scepticism was prevailing in the form of a culture of ‘business as usual.’ To their definition a tendency to view climate change as an erroneously idealist concept provided by ‘international bureaucrats looking to expand their budgets and influence’.[[45]](#footnote-45) In relation to Britain’s prominent contribution of scientific knowledge to the global climate science community, climate scepticism forms a controversial, though important topic, as it helps to understand the low public concern and uncertainty about climate change outlined in chapter 1.

# 3. Ecological modernisation

Central to the development of any nation is a national conception of modernity. Globally, and more intensively in industrialised countries, the environment became increasingly part of this conception.[[46]](#footnote-46) Ecological modernisation (EM) represents such an environmental conception of modernity, having developed into an extensive discourse over the past few decades. In the UK, climate change mediation became associated with the idea of ecological modernization and the notion that a low-carbon society could be technologically more sophisticated, efficient, and competitive.[[47]](#footnote-47) Furthermore, ecological modernisation connects well to the in 2005-06 observed public opinion in the UK. Having a high responsiveness to public opinion, contemplation of the EM discourse is crucial for understanding the UK government’s environmental policy reforms.[[48]](#footnote-48)

## 3.1 Evolving of a discourse

The EM theory originally evolved in the 80’s, endeavouring an attempted enlightenment around an ideological clash between economical- and sustainable development. Joseph Huber, Martin Janicke and Udo Simonis, the theoretical architects of the concept, challenged the conventional idea that economic growth inevitably correlates to environmental downfall by arguing that economic and sustainable development can be ‘mutually supportive’.[[49]](#footnote-49) Many different definitions were derived from this core assumption, making it an intriguing philosophy of modernity. In 1996, Peter Christoff noticed frequent use of the theory and deemed it necessary to clarify its definition. In his conceptualisation he wrote that in a weak sense EM could be defined simply as a technical innovation. The strong version suggested a radical change to economic systems and institutions by adjusting them environmental concerns.[[50]](#footnote-50)

## 3.2 Common values of EM

The strong version of EM links well to UK’s public opinion, as observed in chapter 1, linking climate change primarily to development. Andrea Revell (2005) detected three commonalities of the EM discourse in UK’s public discourse. First, the presence of ‘win-win ideas’ or the notion that environment and economic growth linger on a relation of mutual support. This feature of EM can be perceived in different speeches given by important politicians in 2005 and 2006. Gordon Brown -who both as chancellor and prime minister represented a key figure in the public discourse on environment and climate change- made some highly relevant remarks when he announced the commissioning of the influential Stern Review on March 15, 2005:

‘Today we know that there is a third objective on which our economies must be built - and that is environmental care. If our economies are to flourish, if global poverty is to be banished, and if the wellbeing of the world's people enhanced - not just in this generation but in succeeding generations - we must make sure we take care of the natural environment and resources on which our economic activity depends.’ [[51]](#footnote-51)

Brown’s ‘economise climate change move’ forms a clear-cut example of an attempt to (re)gain popularity by adapting to current norms and cultural values through the practice of ‘soft power’. The term soft power was coined by political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990, contemplating a new perspective on international power politics. In addition to hard power, Nye conceptualised soft power as the ability to attract, as opposed to coerce. Explicitly, he gives the example of inducing someone to do something by offering economic resources.[[52]](#footnote-52) By making climate change a source of attractiveness, Brown changed the ‘interpretive paradigm’ of climate change to converge to the set of norms and principles entailed in Britain’s EM discourse.

The idea that climate change and economy thrive under a mutually beneficial symbiosis was shared by Charles Kennedy (leader of the Liberal Democrats at the time) in a speech on 19 December 2005. Here, he stated that: ‘The answer to our energy problems is not to pour money into nuclear power and build up even more problems for the future. We need a government determined to find an energy mix that is economically sustainable and works for the environment.’[[53]](#footnote-53) The speech was given shortly after the election of David Cameron as the new leader of the Conservatives, raising electoral competition. The BBC reported that Kennedy’s senior colleagues urged him to raise his game. In this regard, Chris Huhne (then member of the Liberal Democrats) said: ‘I think we do need to raise our game. I think the environment is a choppier one than it has been up until now.’[[54]](#footnote-54) As noted in chapter 1, this ‘choppiness’ of the environment as a political window-opportunity resulted from a peak of news coverage around the Gleneagles Summit a few months earlier. Heavy snowfall and hail just two days before Kennedy’s speech added to the public awareness of climate change. The snowfall even trapped approximately thousand people near Cornwall on highway A30, who had to be rescued by the police and military. Effectively, the BBC reported: ‘arctic blast cripples Cornwall.’[[55]](#footnote-55)

A second prevailing value Revell detected in EM discourse is a ‘promotion of clean technology’, regarding the industrial innovation through the development and dispersion of ‘clean energies.[[56]](#footnote-56)’ This value was highly present in the national discourse in 2005-06 due to various factors. Firstly, the UK was struggling realising the decarbonisation targets it had adopted in previous years.[[57]](#footnote-57) This was confirmed by the UK Climate Change Programme (CCP) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) prognosing that the government would not meet its 2010 emissions targets. The DTI-rapport *The Energy Challenge*, in 2006, concluded this by stating that: ‘(…) since 2003, emissions have risen on the back of strong economic growth and higher fossil fuel prices that have been favourable to coal-fired power generation. New projections suggest that UK carbon emissions will reach 146 MtC by 2020 on the basis of current policies. So we would need to make bigger cuts in emissions (…) to reduce emissions to 110-120 MtC by 2020.[[58]](#footnote-58) The Carbon Trust – an independent company financed by the UK government and founded in 2001 – formed a key piece of institutional infrastructure to realise these cuts in emissions. Effectively, the CT endeavoured to fulfil its mission by consulting policy makers and businesses on technological innovation, saving energy or increasing energy efficiency.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Tony Blair, leader of Labour and prime minister from 1997 till 2007, made climate change a central component of Labour’s political campaign from the beginning of his premiership till the end. Like Kennedy and Brown, Blair utilised climate change in his political campaign as a source of soft power. However, as became apparent in a debate about climate change in the House of Lords on November 10, 2005, he perceived economical reasoning as a major obstacle to make climate change mitigation an attractive source of politics. Robert May (then chief scientific advisor to the UK government) opened the debate with a strong emphasis on the role of clean technology in the course of reversing ecological destruction. As such, he informed the House of Lords of four measurements requiring consideration. Firstly, to ‘stop building on floodplains’; secondly, by ‘reducing wasteful consumption’; thirdly, to ‘capture some of the carbon dioxide (…) and sequester it by burying it on land or under the seabed;’ and finally to ‘move to the various forms of renewable energy sources.’ In reaction to May’s proposed solutions, Blair stated that ‘the blunt truth about the politics of climate change is that no country will want to sacrifice its economy in order to meet this challenge’.[[60]](#footnote-60) Blair’s concern about the economic attractiveness, in combination with a recognised significance of clean technology is clearly visible in an earlier speech he gave on October 30, 2005:

‘It is one of the new technologies we need to help tackle climate change. We need to create the right market conditions to increase the necessary investment to develop and install new low carbon energy generation - and to ensure it is shared with emerging economies. (…) But by developing and sharing new technologies for coal we can minimise its impact.’ [[61]](#footnote-61)

This quote links well to the third trend which Revell acknowledges in her analysis of EM. Namely a tendency of discussing environmental modernisation in Britain as ‘alternative and innovative policy approaches that introduce economic concepts and mechanisms into environmental policy.’[[62]](#footnote-62) Revell mentions eco-taxes, market-based instruments and voluntary agreements as examples of such innovative policy. This conception of environmental policy approach connotates well to Blair’s mentioning of creating certain market conditions. In fact, Blair had publicly urged business leaders to act on climate change the previous year, showing much inclination of the UK government to market-based innovation.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Supported by, and in culmination of Blair’s concern about the economic attractiveness of climate change the in 2006 published Stern Review offered solution. In the rapport -encompassing the economic advantage and (ought) future policy to climate change mitigation - Nicholas Stern connected the three previously outlined dimensions of EM discourse in very clear terms: ‘Policy to reduce emissions should be based on three essential elements: carbon pricing, technology policy, and removal of barriers to behavioural change. Establishing a carbon price, through tax, trading or regulation, is an essential foundation for climate-change policy.’ [[64]](#footnote-64)

# 4. Climate justice and leadership

As Kathryn Harrison and Lisa Sundstrom acknowledged in *Global Commons, Domestic Decisions* (2010),norms of global fairness and responsibility loomed large in the ratification and climate policy decisions of industrialized countries. In the prevailing north-south debate on climate change, southern governments consistently argue that the global north has inflicted most environmental damage and continues contributing more net greenhouse gas emissions than poorer countries.[[65]](#footnote-65) Effectively, this chapter analyses the ethical dimension of the UK government’s move to climate discourse leadership by contemplating the so-called climate justice discourse in relation to institutional adaptations.

## 4.1 Environmental and climate justice discourse

The most profound and historically rooted discourse in the UK regarding the environment is the concept of environmental justice. As outlined in chapter 2, about fifty years ago, scientists started conceptualising the environment through different ethical frames. Leaving aside the theoretical difficulties of the concept, ‘just sustainability’ started to become a matter of policy in the UK throughout the late twentieth century. It was expressed in a variety of epistemic communities like environmental groups, rapports, conventions and associations. Environmental justice was essentially about equity and sustainability. [[66]](#footnote-66) Equity in a sense that environmental degradation mostly affects the poor (environmental racism) and sustainability referring to equity through justice and government.[[67]](#footnote-67) Climate became integrated into this conception of environment justice through the foundation of the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative (EJCCI) in 2001. As David Schlosberg and Lisette Collines (2014) observed, key principles of climate justice were ‘slowing emissions and the use of fuels, protecting vulnerable communities, acting in the face of uncertainty, assuring intergenerational justice and demanding (…) leadership on the global issue of climate change.’ [[68]](#footnote-68) However, as Schlosberg and Collines observed, climate justice submerged into public policy from top ENGO’s, not from grassroots movements.

In the case of the UK, Julian Agyeman and Bob Evans (2004) noted that environmental justice created political opportunity in the UK around the same time as the EJCCI. In their analysis of the development of environmental justice in the UK they treated the Friends of the Earth (FoE) as the main actor in connecting the discourse of just sustainability to the public. Following key acts like the ‘Big Ask Campaign’ in 2005, the idea of climate justice became prominently incorporated into both the public and political sphere in the UK. The following citation from the Stern Review illustrates well how the idea of equity and protecting vulnerable communities, was incorporated into UK’s governmental climate change campaign: ‘The impacts of climate change are not evenly distributed - the poorest countries and people will suffer earliest and most. And if and when the damages appear it will be too late to reverse the process. Thus we are forced to look a long way ahead.’[[69]](#footnote-69) Additionally, in the *2003 Energy White Paper*, Blair wrote emphatically about the importance of leadership in the global climate discourse. Connecting to the beforementioned inclination to market-based innovation, Blair wrote the following about global climate discourse leadership: ‘Our analysis suggests that, by working with others, the costs of action will be acceptable – and the costs of inaction are potentially much greater. And as we move to new, low carbon economy, there are major opportunities for our business to become world leaders in the technologies we will need for the future. Science and technology are vital (…).’[[70]](#footnote-70)

# Conclusion

By following the process of generation of ideas, their acceptance, endorsement, legitimation and communication, this thesis has contemplated the question how the interplay of interests, climate discourse and institutional dimensions moved the UK government to become a global climate discourse leader in 2005-06. This generational process was envisaged in a theoretical framework regarding ideational, interest and institutional roots of UK’s innovative climate change mitigation leadership through public opinion, scientific development and the presence of two influential discourses in UK’s innovative leadership.

Firstly - regarding the dimension of interest - it was found that climate change discourse was broadly embedded in Britain in the first decade of the 21th century. News coverage of climate change was high in 2005-06 due to extreme weather conditions, important events like the Gleneagles summit and the announcement of the Stern Review. While there was a high public awareness of the occurrence of climate change, the level of concern was relatively low (in comparison to other social issues). Regarding mitigation, British broadcasted news media portrayed the government at the core of political engagement with the environment. Additionally, both ENGO’s and media became more internationally oriented regarding climate change in the early 21th century. The combination of a high public awareness and the media framing the government and international community at the core of political action opened a window for prominent politicians like Charles Kennedy, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Eventually, the Stern Review supported their political endeavours to utilise climate change mediation as a medium of soft power by envisaging climate change mitigation as a technologically realistic source of attraction.

Secondly - regarding the dimension of ideas - the controversial course of development taken by climate science from the late twentieth century onward connects well to the observed public awareness and uncertainty in 2005-06. Accordingly, the UK government reflected this trend of climate scepticism in influential government rapports like the *Economics of Climate Change Rapport* and the draft of the Gleneagles summit by questioning the extent of climate change and its consequences. Speeches and debates on climate change in terms of ecological modernisation and climate justice showed that economy and technology were major topics of concern for key politicians like Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. To cope with uncertainty about the economic attractiveness of climate change mitigation, they enacted the Stern Review, legitimising Britain’s course of modernisation and offering a window to exercise soft power.

Thirdly - regarding the dimension of institutions - an important motive for the UK government to increase its discursive position towards climate change mediation was an increasingly urgent need to comply to its carbon emission targets in 2005-06. As suggested by reports from government institutions such as the DTI and CCP, considerable action was needed to meet these targets. Effectively, a centralised and unitary organisation of the UK government made it possible to implement policy initiatives such as the Carbon Trust to realise compliance to carbon reduction targets. In accordance to the by Schlosberg and Collins outlined principles of climate justice - slowing emissions, ‘acting in the face of uncertainty’, assuring intergenerational justice and claiming leadership on global climate change mediation made climate change mediation a highly normative matter of concern.

Finally, a discursive concert of internationally orientated climate leadership evolved itself in Britain, led by key figures like Blair and Brown who found major support from parliament, ENGO’s, and even business in their international environment campaign in 2005-06. Eventually, through a normative and developmental campaign portraying climate change mediation as an economic necessity and a perceived justness -tightly covered by media- the UK government legitimised climate discourse leadership via ‘an ability to reduce vulnerability, opportunism, and uncertainty while stabilizing expectations needed to promote collective action.’[[71]](#footnote-71)

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