How to recognise the inevitable: Latvian media narratives on climate change

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A B S T R A C T

Political elites over the world face considerable challenges in getting societies into climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. The process is even more complicated by complex media ecologies, into which official strategic narratives are modified and contested. This study explores the media narratives on climate change and their alignment with the official political narrative in a country located on the European Union's eastern border – Latvia, analysing the representation of climate change by the four most popular digital Latvian news platforms in Latvian and Russian languages. Observing that recognition and international cooperation narratives dominate, this study concludes that media only partially project the official political narrative, which focuses on opportunities from climate change. By considering multiple perspectives of scientists, politicians, society and businesses, the media provide an arena of contestation. At the same time, the media narratives lack a domesticated alternative on climate change that is fundamental for an action-encouraging discursive environment. As a result, the image of climate change as a geographically distant, internationally addressed, negotiated and contested phenomenon persists, yet the role of Latvian actors remains unspecified. Illuminating the climate change strategic narrative projection in Latvia, this study complements the research on climate change media coverage in Central and Eastern Europe and provides insights into the communication challenges the region faces.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, climate change is a subject of heated political debates and competing pledges. Scientifically, its anthropogenic causality has been proved and the urgency of action is uncontested (IPCC, 2021; IPCC, 2018; UN Environment, 2019). At a societal level, declining public support in developed countries has led scholars to conclude that new climate communication strategies are needed to overcome the "climate paradox" (Stoknes, 2014) defined as the ignorance of the scientific consensus despite the evidence. However, there is no straightforward answer on what could improve people's commitment to engage in the fight against climate change. Studies show that people possess a limited amount of 'issue space' meaning that climate change competes with other political and economic issues for public concern (Brulle et al., 2012). Climate 'fatigue', 'uncertainty transfer' from one climate-related topic to another, the individual and collective denial of the fact of climate change, as well as the politicisation of climate change provide additional explanations for declining public support (Capstick et al., 2015). Also, the partisanship effect in

Western democracies, in particular, the United States (US) (McCright and Dunlap, 2011), Australia, Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom (Stokes et al., 2015) and the Western European European Union (EU) states (McCright et al., 2016) has been recognised. Moreover, scholars point to perceived temporal and geographic distance, as well as to a lack of real or perceived personal experience as contributory factors to the relatively minor salience of climate change in society (McDonald and Nisbet, 2018).

This study aligns with scholarship that considers stories or narratives that accompany scientific consensus, climate policies and technological innovations as important triggers for mobilising (or not) the public support (Janda and Topouzi, 2015; Fløttum and Gjerstad, 2017; Moezzi et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018; Arnold, 2018; Morris et al., 2019; Hinkel et al., 2020, van der Leeuw, 2020; Stibbe, 2021). Paraphrasing de Graaf et al. (2015) "people make sense" of climate change "by means of stories". Unintentionally or consciously made, narratives help actors to orientate in complex and uncertain situations, which climate change is, and guide the action, navigating the actors through the past and the present towards the future. At a strategic level, narratives have the potential to ensure "a common thread" intertwining many stories people tell at different times, thus helping to overcome the gap between policy and action (Bushell et al., 2017). It points to the crucial role of narrators, be they governments, international organisations, environmental activists or others, in defining such a common thread that would be able to account for a variety of interests.

It is the spread of strategic narratives in an increasingly complex media ecology which challenges the potential effect of a strategic narrative (Antoniades et al., 2010; Miskimmon et al., 2013). Media ecology defined as a "complex interplay between humans, technology, media, and the environment" (Milberry, 2017) possessing a specific internal balance (Miskimmon et al., 2017) has undergone fundamental changes over the last decades. Development of digital media and advanced communication technologies has challenged the previous patterns of interdependence and diminished the possibilities of governments to exercise control over information flow (Miskimmon et al., 2017). With the spread of the Internet in the 2000s, the relationships within media ecologies have become more dynamic, interactive, polarised and fragmented. As Entman and Usher (2018) suggest, digitalisation has changed the ways information is produced, distributed, assimilated, and acted upon, and it has affected relationships among elites, traditional media, and individuals. A hierarchical way of communication has been replaced by a more flattened communication involving multifaceted communication and interaction networks. Though providing ways for enhanced democratic participation, new media ecologies complicate the efforts of political elites to spread coherent and unambiguous strategic narratives to the public, as these are mediated by various, often contradictory digital and social media platforms and agents.

This paper aims to uncover how the strategic narratives of climate change are projected by certain agents of new media ecologies – the digital media outlets, using Latvia as a case study. Latvia joined the EU in 2004 yet is a country where the "post-communist effect" (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2015) — a lack of climate and environmental awareness in political party programs and ideological orientation of society — has been constantly present. Recently, the political elite has embraced its commitment to reduce Latvia's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 65% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and achieve climate neutrality by 2050 (MEPRD, 2019). Arguably, such a decision is a consequence of Latvia's institutional constraints, namely Latvia's membership in the EU, as a result of which Latvia supports the European Green Deal (EGD) for pragmatic reasons. However, less straightforward is the resonance of climate change in the public space. Longitudinal Eurobarometer surveys (EC, 2015; EC, 2021) reveal that in Latvia, around 1–2% of the population consider the environment and climate change to be the most important problem facing the country, and, similarly as in the EU on average, more people (15%) view it as a concern that faces the EU rather than at a national level (EC, 2021).

Arguably, the media representation of climate change has contributed to a perception of Latvian public and through it the evolution of such public sphere (Habermas et al., 1964) where the members of the society are not motivated enough to engage in an informed debate on the challenges of climate change. To provide an insight into the media portrayal of climate change this study discovers the narratives projected by the four most popular digital media outlets of Latvia. Using a qualitative content analysis of a sample of 324 media articles in Latvian and in Russian in the period from August 1, 2020, until January 31, 2021, the analysis reveals the representation of such elements of the narrative structure as scene, actors, action and time in the Latvian media narratives. In addition, alignment of media narratives with the official political rhetoric, highlighted in previous research (Kleinberga, 2021; Metla-Rozentāle et al., 2022), is evaluated to discover if the media follows the political course. The central research question of this study is: what climate change narratives do media transmit to the Latvian public? To what extent do media project the official political narrative on climate change? The authors hypothesise that the Latvian media project the official pragmatic narrative of the political elite, which, given the institutional constraints of Latvia as an EU member state, tells the narrative of Latvia's obligation to implement the EGD. Previous research demonstrates that at the official political level, climate change is represented as an economic opportunity for Latvia and, in a long-term perspective, a political gain, establishing Latvia as an active and equal partner in the EU (Kleinberga, 2021). The hypothesis derives from theoretical assumptions of media effect theories such as the media indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) and the Politics-Media-Politics (PMP) principle (Wolfsfeld, 2013). Whereas the former assumes that the issues that are raised at high-level political debates are most likely to receive a wide-spread attention of the news media (Lawrence, 2014), the latter claims that media cover political processes yet variations in the political environment lead to variations in media representation, which, in turn, may have an impact on the political environment (Wolfsfeld, 2013). Empirical studies of Latvian media behaviour have found that media by and large follow the agenda of politicians and government officials (Rožukalne et al., 2020; Kruks et al., 2021).

Theoretical basis of this study – the conceptual framework of strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2013) - takes a less categoric stance on the media as passive transmitters of political agenda. In the new media ecologies, media play a significant role in putting forward certain perspectives or contesting them, by choosing which events to report on, which aspects to illuminate and which agents to highlight. Working as active agenda-setters, "media not only tell us what to think about" […] but also "how to think" (Ghanem et al., 2012). By using framing, the media enhance a visibility of a certain issue over others. With this, the media play an active role in the projection and reception phases of strategic narratives – the processes which are inextricably linked to the legitimacy and viability of strategic narratives. Contrary to the media indexing theory and the PMP principle, the strategic narrative theoretical framework

acknowledges that the media can have its own agenda and sources of information, which are not necessarily political. An alignment between all phases of the life-cycle of the strategic narrative - formation, projection and reception, which is so crucial for the persuasive power of strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2013), is much more challenging in such circumstances.

Notwithstanding the challenges, this study applies the strategic narrative theoretical framework because it allows to evaluate the actorness of the media in the projection process of official political narratives. By analysing the contents of the media narratives across the main elements of the narrative structure, other than political narratives can be identified. Having the whole spectrum of media narratives, it becomes easier for a researcher to identify how big is a share of official political narrative in the media portrayal. The strategic narrative theoretical framework thus allows to evaluate not only the fact that the media project the official political narrative but also identify the share of political narratives vis-à-vis other narratives in the news. It enhances the chances to see if alternative narratives to political ones emerge, and if they align or contest the political narrative.

On empirical level, the study presented in this paper complements a broader regional debate. The literature suggests that climate change has been largely a neglected phenomenon not only in political and societal agenda (McCright et al., 2016; Chaisty and Whitefield, 2015) but also in the media coverage of the former Soviet bloc and its Central and Eastern European satellite countries. Studies on climate change media representation are, in general, scarce in this region. This paper adds an empirical case study to the current scholarship, providing insights into the challenges the region – despite its membership in the EU – possesses in addressing climate change. The theoretical background and methodology of this study, informed by the strategic narrative conceptual framework (Miskimmon et al., 2013), add an international relations perspective to the scientific discussion on climate change narratives analysed by disciplines such as communication, linguistics and psychology.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Strategic narratives in the narrative research

Narratives in various forms have always existed in societies, shaping people's perception of reality (Bruner, 1991). In a broad sense a narrative is "a set of signs, which may involve writing, verbal or other sounds, or visual, acted, built or made elements that similarly convey meaning" (Squire et al., 2014). There has to be a movement between signs to constitute a narrative – it is through the movement that a meaning is constructed (Squire et al., 2014). Sequence in time and space are among the most common features of a narrative. Depicted as cognitive structures "in people's minds which involve a sequence of logically connected events" (Stibbe, 2021) they are "something with a beginning, a middle, and end" (Moezzi et al., 2017). Sequence and temporality distinguish a narrative from a frame, which is defined as a selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality" and making them "more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993). Frames are used in narratives to interpret an event or an issue in a particular way in order to make complex issues understandable to the audiences by using existing cognitive schemas (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Frames lack temporality and causality of narratives; however, framing is considered in the narrative research as parts of a narrative are framed in a certain way and the analysis of narratives helps to figure out "why and how framing works" (Antoniades et al., 2010). A distinction between a 'narrative' and a 'story' is more difficult to determine because both terms involve a sequence of events and an account of time. This study uses the distinction, originally provided by the Russian structuralist linguists in the 1920s, of a 'story' as a 'fabula' and a 'narrative' as a 'syuzet' (Squire et al., 2014). If the former refers to an unplotted sequence of events and tells what happened, the latter discursively organises the events into a prescribed plot and provides answers to 'how and why' the phenomenon occurred (Squire et al., 2014). Thus, this study recognises that narratives are given "a particular structure through which sense is achieved" involving "an actor, an action, a goal or intention, a scene, and an instrument" (Antoniades et al., 2010). The narrative structure is manifested in a narrative text, which is defined as "a specific oral telling, written work, or other expressive form, which recounts a series of temporally and logically connected events" (Stibbe, 2021). Narrative texts come in many forms, such as histories, myths, legends, novels, short stories, films, newspapers, advertisements, anecdotes and so forth, and include such types as visual images, gestures and music too. Journalists can be considered as particular narrators, producing a specific type of narrative texts: news, reports, interviews, analytical research articles, live broadcasts, video and audio stories, etc., which are the units of analysis in this study.

In the realm of energy and climate change, stories, narratives and storytelling have attracted the attention of scholars relatively recently, and it has been acknowledged that "no single identifiable corpus of theories, research approaches, or examples" exists to study them (Moezzi et al., 2017). However, it is seen rather as an advantage and not a shortcoming as it opens up possibilities for scholars of various disciplines and backgrounds to engage in the narrative research, leading to a multitude of findings and illuminating qualitative aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Moezzi et al. (2017) emphasize that "stories (and narratives and storytelling)" are valuable for providing the way out of the "'stuck-ness' posed by more conventional forms and rules of evidence" in so that "they let researchers speak and inquire differently, they provide a different set of data and voices, and they let go of some rigid notions of truth". Therefore, narratives are attractive objects of analysis in the so-called times of "post-factualism" or "post-truth" (Arias-Maldonado, 2017), when people's attitudes are formed more by a trust in a certain person or social group than by objective facts.

Scholars of various disciplines have been engaged in the studies of climate change narratives using a number of approaches. Stibbe (2021) emphasizes juxtaposition between the ideologies distinguishing neoliberal narratives, praising economic growth and consumption, and environmental narratives that underline human embeddedness in nature and nature as a value in itself. Similarly, a division between the green growth and the degrowth narratives is made, with the latter requesting fundamental change to societies'

production and consumption patterns (Hinkel et al., 2020). Brüggemann and Engesser (2017) observe that journalists tend to focus on narratives of "warners vs. deniers", missing the chance to create constructive narratives instead — narratives that "hold politicians accountable for their public pledges" given at the Paris summit, and look at the implementation of national commitments to reduce CO_2 emissions. In a more schematic way, Janda and Topouzi (2015) distinguish three types of stories that they attribute to telling about energy efficiency: hero stories, learning stories and horror stories. Whereas the former relies on technology to ultimately save the planet from climate change, the latter are the stories "no one wants to tell" as they include failure Janda and Topouzi (2015). Learning stories provide a pragmatic middle-ground, "focusing on the search for meaning in specific time and place" and emphasizing the role of agency and active participation and reflection Janda and Topouzi (2015). Hinkel et al. (2020) underline transformative narratives, denying the mobilising potential of the dominant "doom and gloom narrative" of climate change and exploring the potential of narratives that emphasize opportunities from climate action instead. Similarly, Stoknes (2014) invites one to think of positive rather than frightening environmental stories. Wittmayer et al. (2019) have elaborated on the "narratives of change" to understand the horizontal and vertical dynamics of narrative formation, especially regarding the emergence of alternative narratives and coming to critical junctures in societal transformation. Similarly, van der Leeuw (2020) argues that narratives lie at the heart of societies' "imagined futures" and as such can effectuate societal change.

This study follows the social constructivist approach and embeds the premise that narratives are strategic means for international actors to structure the "chaotic world", thus providing meaning to certain phenomena (Roselle et al., 2014). The conceptual framework of strategic narratives, lying at the intersection of international relations and political communication, provides that narratives are constructed intentionally with the purpose to influence the behaviour of others. The scholars of strategic narratives focus on particular actors, who construct the narratives, and their intentions. They consider strategic narratives to be "a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors" (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Climate change is such a contemporary challenge of international politics, around which strategic narratives by various international (states, international organisations, transnational corporations, global social movements) and domestic (politicians, political parties, administrations, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations, grass-root activists) actors are being constructed and contested. Acknowledging that a variety of narratives exist simultaneously, Bushell et al. (2017) propose that "a narrative, strategically designed, can provide a common thread that runs through many different stories told by different people that can be adapted flexibly over time", thus helping "to close the gap between climate policy and action". De Graaf et al. (2015) maintain that strategic narratives "tie together otherwise disjointed events and trends by providing a general structure" through which in their case – war, but in the context of this paper – climate change, can be understood; "they offer answers to the fundamental why, what and how questions of a given conflict". Strategic narratives, constructively structured, therefore have the potential to accommodate different needs by showing the purpose and path to follow. In addition, the conceptual framework of strategic narratives accounts for a variety of interests, exploring narratives and their alignment on three levels: formation, projection and reception. Scholars maintain that the narratives are more influential if there is a convergence between the formation, projection and reception phases of the narrative (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Chaban et al., 2017; Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2017; Greenland, 2019; Bain and Chaban, 2017). Interaction between political and media narratives, and their level of convergence, therefore, is crucially important in terms of their effect on society and thus the legitimacy of the narrative. Coherence of narratives, particularly in democratic countries, reduces uncertainty, whereas multiple and clashing narratives imply contestation, causing confusion.

Up to now, research on strategic climate change narratives has not been extensive. Dupont (2019) demonstrates how climate change has gradually become securitised in the EU. Bushell et al. (2017) identify several existing narratives in the United Kingdom: narratives supporting action on climate change (such as "Gore", "End of the world", "Every little helps", "Polar bear" and "Green living" narratives) and narratives deterring action on climate change (such as "Debate and Scam" and "Carbon-fuelled expansion" narratives), and call for a unifying strategic narrative to reduce uncertainty and foster action in addressing climate change. On the opposite, Bevan et al. (2020) call for narrative pluralism and underline narrators' credibility. By exploring five emergent and mutually reinforcing bottom-up narratives in the context of the IPCC 1.5 °C special report (such as "12 years to save the world", "The collapse is imminent", "You're destroying our future", "Climate emergency", "Our plastic straws are choking the planet") the authors demonstrate that "strategic narratives need not be top-down", and civil society is able to construct narratives that may be more credible than the official political ones (Bevan et al., 2020). Bain and Chaban (2017) demonstrate how the EU communication on the EU energy week resonates on Twitter, forming the societal perceptions and paving the way for the EU strategic narrative on 'Sustainable Energy Europe' to emerge.

Importantly, there is a great variety of perspectives in the climate change narrative research, and numerous approaches for classifying the narratives. The typology by and large depends on the purpose and methodology of the research, as well as on the researchers' background, in-depth knowledge of the specific local situation, such as country and community-specific values, belief systems and historical, political, economic and cultural conditions. As a result, no uniform approach can be identified, neither across countries nor within one specific country. What is important is that the "narratives must find legitimacy in the actors they purport to recruit" (Soutar and Mitchell, 2018), therefore, the narrative research should address both the formation and projection and perception sides, as it is proposed by the strategic narrative conceptual framework. A focus on the whole process of a narrative life-cycle is the strength of the strategic narratives' approach, which could be further applied and explored by other disciplines. On the other hand, the strategic narratives' approach would benefit from conceptualisation and generalisation of climate change narratives in other disciplines both for identifying the status quo of actors' climate change narratives and proposing the path to follow.

2.2. Projection of strategic narratives in media ecology and narrative alignment

Media is a common arena where strategic narratives are projected. There are different views among scholars on the role the media play in transmitting the official political narrative to the public. Theories of media effect such as media indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) and PMP principle (Wolfsfeld, 2013) provide primacy to the political process. The media indexing theory claims that the issues that are widely debated in political circles and have a high-level political attention will find a way into the news, whereas the issues, which are less politically resonant, will be avoided (Lawrence, 2014). According to the theory, climate change will most likely not be reported by the media if the topic is not a subject of high-level political debates. The PMP principle allows for more media independence suggesting that the media have capacities to transform political realities into the news that can change the political outcomes (Wolfsfeld, 2013). The PMP principle explains the political process in a cyclic way considering how variations in political environment influence variations in media coverage, which, in turn, can provide further variations in political environment (Wolfsfeld, 2013). Nevertheless, the point of departure for both theories is a political process, which is projected by the media following the supply from political agents; alternative voices from society, business or representatives of science would not be their concern.

The strategic narrative theoretical framework assigns a more independent and active role to the media. On the one hand, the media provide channels to disseminate strategic narratives either to international or domestic audiences, while on the other hand, they represent and raise alternative views, contesting the strategic narratives. The media ensure the "spreading activation" of a particular challenge by framing — "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2003). Yet the media do not necessarily spread the official framing; instead, "news media can amplify and reinforce narrative mis-alignment" (Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2017) by bringing up various, sometimes controversial, narratives. For example, Osička et al. (2020) have found several narratives on the future of coal in the media of the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland. In the German media, narratives such as "Sustainable change", "Technological change", "Local context" and "Coal defence" are present, each defended by different actors; in the Polish media, divisions arise among "Coal continuity" and "Local smog problem" narratives; and in the Czech media, the controversy develops around "Damage control" and "Environment or employment" narratives. Controversial narratives can also be put forward by the media with different ideological backgrounds. Ruiu (2021) demonstrates that over time, a decrease in alarming and uncertain storylines can be observed in the centre-left British newspapers, whereas the narratives that mock the effects of climate change are characteristic of right-leaning newspapers.

The above-mentioned suggests that in democratic societies, the media are not passive mediators; editors and journalists play an active role in the narrative construction and transmission by choosing which aspects to highlight and which voices to represent. The strategic narrative conceptual framework recognises that media project not only top-down but also bottom-up concerns. In the realm of climate change, the media thus work both as agents of the domestication of climate change, potentially reducing the geographical, temporal and psychological distance in societies that are not explicitly impacted by climate change, and as providers of the arena of contestation, thus bringing to political attention the expectations and fear of societies on the path of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

However, it has to be acknowledged that in contemporary media ecologies, the agenda-setting capacities of the media have become complicated, as various types of media compete for the audience attention and the audience itself has acquired more independence in content-creation with the spread of the Internet. Moreover, new variables have appeared in the flow of socio-political information and frames, which Entman and Usher (2018) call "pump-valves": platforms, analytics, algorithms, ideological media, and rogue actors . Alongside the opportunities provided by digitalisation, they interfere with the established patterns of communication, disturbing the relatively stable top-down flows of information from political elites to the media and further to the public. In the new media ecologies, the information flow has been flattened, allowing for multifaceted interplays between information producers and information consumers, not necessarily involving professional and institutionalised media who could act as objective gatekeepers. As a result, the public sphere faces growing risks of fragmentation and polarisation. The above-mentioned implies that narrative alignment in the contemporary media ecologies may be almost impossibly achievable, therefore the dynamics between different narratives rather than static narratives should be the focal point of the research.

3. Resonance of climate change in the EU central and eastern part

3.1. Latvia as a regional case study in the EU climate debate

The EU has set a goal to cut its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 55% by 2030, (compared to 1990 levels) and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, thus being among the first to enter the global race for emission reduction. To match words with deeds, the legislative proposals under the "Fit for 55" package are elaborated, revising the EU 2030 climate and energy framework, and setting concrete goals for each member state. Member states are the key actors in implementing the EU's ambitions, yet they are not unitary actors. Their success towards net-zero emissions will depend on stakeholder engagement: national and local administrations, industries and households must buy in to transform production and consumption patterns.

Latvia has been barely visible in the EU climate and environmental debate. Ruse (2013) names Latvia a "hesitant" nation, when climate change adaptation and mitigation issues in the EU are addressed. Such hesitancy is puzzling, provided that in the mid-1980s, ecological concerns paved the way for large-scale societal mobilisation in Latvia which eventually led to the restoration of national independence, lost after the forced incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940. Media, though state-controlled, played an instrumental role here.

Several studies exist, revealing evidence and the potential effect of climate change on Latvia (Avotniece et al., 2017), including rising sea levels and an increase in the average air temperature and frequency of extreme weather conditions. Even though, since 1990, Latvia's total GHG emissions have decreased by an impressive 55% (EEA, 2021), this was mostly achieved due to the collapse of the Soviet-based industry at the beginning of the 1990s rather than deliberate action. In the last decade, the total annual GHG emissions have stabilised at around 11 Mt CO_2-eq. (with $\pm 3\%$ yearly fluctuations). This is in contrast to the trend in the EU, where the average amount of emissions has decreased by 11% (EEA, 2021). Emissions in Latvia per capita are lower on average than those of the EU-27 (in 2019, 5.8 and 8.0 t CO_2-eq., respectively), yet emissions per gross domestic product (GDP) are higher (in 2019, 404 and 272 t CO_2-eq. per GDP in Euro at 2015 prices, respectively) (EEA, 2022). In the EU, Latvia has the second-highest share of GHG emissions in the sectors not covered by the Emissions Trading System (ETS), notably – transport, agriculture and waste management (Timma et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Latvia's energy and transport sectors are dependent on fossil fuel imports, mainly from Russia, as a result of which Latvia's energy security has always been tied to geopolitical aspects. To reduce Latvia's energy dependency on Russia, Latvia increasingly uses wood biomass, considered a perspective resource in the transition towards carbon neutrality, and hydropower. In 2019, Latvia's share of renewables in gross energy consumption reached 35.5%, representing the second-biggest source of energy after oil products (40%), well above natural gas (23.5%) (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2020). Wood fuel represents 82% of the consumption of renewable energy resources in Latvia (Ministry of Economics, 2020). However, wood biomass has facilitated controversy and contestation of wood as a carbon-neutral and renewable resource (Argos, 2020). Forests are an efficient means for carbon capture and storage, yet deforestation both releases these emissions and reduces the forests' capacity to absorb them. Besides, intense logging destroys ecosystems and endangers biodiversity. As the logging and wood pellet trade has rapidly increased in recent years in the effort to replace fossil fuels with renewables, scientists and environmental activists have urged the European Commission to exclude wood from the list of renewable energy sources (Abnett, 2021). Alongside energy consumption, wood and its products are the most significant of Latvia's export commodities, amounting to around 20% of Latvia's exports; and around 71% of Latvia's forestry-sector output is exported (Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, 2020). As a result, Latvian forests are heavily affected by the intensification of logging (Kuresoo et al., 2020); and partly due to logging, CO_2 removal by forests has decreased by 81% in the period from 1990 to 2019 (EEA, 2021). It adds additional vulnerability concerning Latvia's commitments towards climate neutrality in 2050.

3.2. Latvia's official political narrative on climate change

It is crucial to have enforcing legislation and financial support in place to assist technological innovation to address climate change and ensure a just and inclusive transformation. However, the discursive environment in which the action is expected to take place is equally important: there must be trustworthy and enabling narratives at a national level to foster stakeholder engagement in the emission reduction initiatives. The EU has announced the EGD as its new climate change adaptation and economic growth strategy for the upcoming decades (European Commission, 2019), aiming to assume leadership in the world in the reduction of GHG emissions The EGD provides a complex and integrated narrative of reshaping the EU economy towards climate neutrality, where the EU and its member states take an active role as actors. Climate-neutral growth involves not only abatement of atmospheric pollution by reducing the use of fossil fuels and introducing energy-efficient and environmentally friendly alternative energy solutions, but also a series of measures related to changing lifestyles and habits, both in business and in households. These include adoption of the principles of circular economy, smart and sustainable mobility, production and consumption of environmentally friendly food, preservation of biodiversity, renewal of forests and reduction of toxic pollution. However, the EU's strategic narrative recognises that transition towards climate-neutral economy should be inclusive and just, therefore a financial mechanism is offered to assist regions and sectors negatively affected by the EGD.

Following the announcement of the EGD, politically, Latvia has embraced a narrative of climate change as an economic opportunity. "Up to now, we have passively, rather reluctantly adopted […] the climate policy with a perception that it somehow disturbs or hinders us," said Krišjānis Kariņš, Prime Minister of Latvia from the liberal centre-right party "New Unity", on his joining of the core group of European leaders in Sibiu, Romania, calling for a more ambitious climate strategy for the EU (Cabinet of Ministers, 2019). Yet, in his words, climate change "is one golden opportunity to make sure that we can channel more money, including into our economy, so that we can develop our economy so that we can participate in that value chain to deliver solutions, technologies and services" (Konohovs, 2019). By this, Latvia changes from a country "that reluctantly accepts the decisions of other countries, to a country that is one of the main promoters of the climate policy in the EU" (Cabinet of Ministers, 2019). This insight into the rhetoric of the Prime Minister of Latvia reveals a turning point at the official political level of Latvia concerning climate policy, and this is reflected in Latvia's strategic and policy planning documents since 2019.

Previous research suggests that Latvia follows a pragmatic narrative at official political level. The global character and inevitability of climate change sets the scene for Latvian action. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, responsible for tackling climate change in Latvia, underlines the speed and frequency with which climate change affects Latvia:

> "Climate change is taking place and is currently the fastest in the history of meteorological observations, including in Latvia. […] In Latvia, we will encounter heat and drought waves more often, which will affect not only the health and safety of the population, but also a large part of the economic sectors and, of course, Latvia's nature" (Cabinet of Ministers and Pūce, 2019a).

A study on pre-election programmes of the Latvian political parties for the 2019 European Parliament and 2018 parliamentary elections finds that gradually climate change is acknowledged as a threat to Latvia also by Latvian political parties (Metla-Rozentāle

et al., 2022). Moreover, for the first time since the 1990s Latvia's main strategic planning document – Latvia's National Security Concept 2020 (Saeima, 2019) recognises climate change as a threat thus paving a way for a strategic narrative of global insecurity (Kleinberga, 2021) at the system level, which recognises the fragility of the global ecological order and the endaggereness of the "self".

At actors' level, Latvia's strategic narrative considers the institutional constraints of Latvia's membership in the EU and aims to establish Latvia "as a pragmatic and equal partner in the EU", simultaneously benefiting from the economic opportunities that climate change and EU policies provide (Kleinberga, 2021). In the official narrative, the EU plays an instrumental role both as an initiator of climate action and as a body within which Latvia is recognised as an equal member and respected. Previous research demonstrates that since 2019 climate change has emerged as an essential topic in Latvia's annual Foreign Policy Reports and debates (Kleinberga, 2021). The EU dimension differentiates the approach towards climate change in the 2019 report in comparison to the previous ones. Whereas climate change was mentioned mostly as a background information beforehands illustrating differences in opinion between the US and the EU, describing emerging threats to the Arctic or Africa, or revealing the ongoing process of implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, from 2019 onwards climate change emerges as part of Latvia's agenda in the EU. Describing Latvia's role as an active and responsible partner in the EU the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development Juris Pūce from the liberal "Development/For!" states: "Latvia wants to be among those countries that are at the vanguard in climate policy, not lagging behind" (Cabinet of Ministers and Pūce, 2019b). Following Olausson (Ölausson, 2010), the political rhetoric can be regarded as an effort of the political elite to discursively construct Latvia as part of the European "us". The action takes place within the framework of the implementation of the EGD, comprises the targets of climate neutrality and involves interaction with the EU policies (not least in terms of funding), institutions and member states, and involves a time perspective up to 2050. With this, Latvia internalizes the EU's narrative of leading the world in the fight against climate change and assumes the role of an active actor in defining and achieving EU goals.

At action level, economic benefit from climate change mitigation activities is the main motivation behind the action. A cross-sectoral approach is advocated, integrating climate and sustainability aspects in all sectoral policies and investment priorities in the future. Latvian National Development Plan for 2021–2027 (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre of Latvia, 2020), a mid-term planning document for public investment in Latvia, puts climate change mitigation under one of its four priority directions. An economy that works for people and uses opportunities provided by climate change is emphasized as Latvia's path towards green growth and competitiveness (Kleinberga, 2021). In this path, it is expected that Latvia takes advantage of economic opportunities from climate change creating new jobs, inventing green technologies and high value-added products and thus enhancing its export capabilities and competitiveness. Latvia's Prime Minister Kariņš underlines the role of the EU single market in supporting transition to green economy:

> The EU "with directives and regulations guarantees – guarantees! - the market of 500 million people for technologies that will be able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ensure energy efficiency and renewable energy production" (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020).

Alongside the market, the EU is requested to make adequate financial contribution in order the economic benefits from addressing climate change could be maximized.

To demonstrate Latvia's commitment to action middle and long-term sectoral policy documents have been adopted. By submitting to the European Commission an updated National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021–2030 Latvia enhances its national ambitions for 2030. Latvia commits to GHG reduction of 65% and a share of energy produced from renewable resources of 50% in its final energy consumption by 2030 (Ministry of Economics, 2020). Latvian Strategy for Carbon Neutral Development until 2050 advocates Latvia's carbon neutrality by 2050 (MEPRD., 2019), strategically achieved by reducing GHG emissions across all sectors of economy and by absorbing larger amounts of CO2. The adopted planning documents indicate that time dimension of Latvia's official political narrative involves a period from 2021 till 2050.

3.3. Media attention towards climate change in the Central and East European EU member states

There are illustrative studies on the discursive environment for climate and energy policies in the EU itself (Dupont, 2019; Bain and Chaban, 2017), Germany (Osička et al., 2020; Kleinen-von Königslöw et al., 2019; Lück et al., 2018; Schäfer and Nisbet, 2018), Finland (Lyytimäki and Tapio, 2009), France (Greenland, 2019), Sweden (Ölausson, 2010; Berglez and Lidskog, 2019; Olausson, 2014) and pre-and-post-Brexit United Kingdom (UK) (Bushell et al., 2017; Roselle et al., 2014; Soutar and Mitchell, 2018; Ruiu, 2021; Ganowski and Rowlands, 2020; Norton and Hulme, 2019). Meanwhile, climate and energy communication and evolving narratives in the EU member states from the Central and Eastern European countries are less covered in scientific literature, focusing mainly on the Czech Republic (Lehotský et al., 2019; Osička et al., 2020), Lithuania (Rabitz et al., 2021), Poland (Osička et al., 2020; Kundzewicz et al., 2019, Żuk and Szulecki, 2020) and in a recent study, Latvia (Kleinberga, 2022). These studies suggest that Latvia is not unique in the region in its reserved attitude towards climate change issues. Overall, the media devote comparatively minor attention to climate change there (Kundzewicz et al., 2019; Painter et al., 2016). Media passiveness in Poland has been attributed to the factors internal to media (lack of reliable sources including politicians, adequate training and resources, lack of country-specific research and editorial priorities) and external to society (support for coal, a low level of concern about climate change) (Kundzewicz et al., 2019). Another issue concerns domestication —, the media either discuss global developments without putting them into local contexts, thus pursuing a practice of "counter-domestication", as Olausson (2014) refers to it, or report about local issues without attributing them to climate change ("introverted domestication"). For instance, the phasing-out of coal receives high media attention in coal-intensive countries

such as Poland and the Czech Republic, yet the media hardly ever associate the issue with climate change (Lehotský et al., 2019; Osička et al., 2020). Instead, a framing of economic loss, environmental damage or domestic controversy prevails. On the contrary, a study on Lithuania shows that media prioritise the global over the domestic, though the practice of depicting climate change as a globally and locally interconnected phenomenon is also common (Rabitz et al., 2021), thus suggesting that the Lithuanian media also pursue the "extroverted domestication" (Olausson, 2014) of climate change. The findings on Latvia suggest that two discursive environments – the "geopolitically deterritorialized" and the "geopolitically disconnected" ones (Olausson, 2014) co-exist in the Latvian media space (Kleinberga, 2022). Whereas climate change figures as a distant phenomenon not associated with Latvia in the first case, domestic activities not associated with climate change prevail in the second.

There are many factors that influence if and how the media domesticate climate change. Berglez & Lidskog (2019) point to Sweden's long-standing domestic consensus on climate change, as a result of which the media treat climate change related issues as an internal affair. Schmidt et al. (2013) demonstrate a correlation between a relatively high interest of the media in reporting about climate change and the country's vulnerability to climate change and/or its obligations for climate action (for instance, under the Kyoto Protocol), and/or its dependency on carbon. Case studies of Poland and the Czech Republic (Lehotský et al., 2019; Osička et al., 2020) suggest that domestication occurs unintentionally and is rather a result of the media's interest in the economic and environmental side-effects of phasing-out coal than the deliberate efforts of journalists to report on climate change. However, research on audience segmentation has shown that reporting on climate change related issues, without mentioning climate change, suit approaching the climate change deniers (Hine et al., 2018), therefore such an "introverted domestication" may be used in cases where climate change policies have controversial perceptions in society.

4. Methodology

4.1. The sample of analysis

The media coverage of climate change in Latvia was analysed by selecting articles from four digital news media – Delfi, Tvnet, Latvian Public Broadcasting (Latvijas Sabiedriskais Medijs, LSM), and Baltic voice (Baltijas Balss, BB), both in Latvian and Russian languages. The news media were selected following several assumptions. Research shows that 81% of the Latvian population gets information about actual political events from Latvian-speaking internet portals (Valtenbergs et al., 2018). Three of the selected online news platforms are the Latvian-speaking portals and the most popular online news media in Latvia, having the widest audiences: Delfi reaches an audience of 882 thousand (46% of Latvia's total population of 1.9 million in 2021), LSM – 738 thousand, and Tvnet – 732 thousand (Gemius, 2021). In addition, LSM is the largest public electronic media consortium in Latvia, representing the Latvian Public broadcaster, including Latvia's Radio and Latvia's television. As Latvian society is multi-ethnic, with ethnic Russians representing 25% of Latvia's population, the biggest news portals (incl. Delfi, Tvnet and LSM) report both in Latvian and Russian. In addition, there are news portals that address only Russian-speaking audiences. Given the ethnolinguistic structure of Latvia, BB – the most popular online news portal providing news in Russian and oriented towards Russian-speaking audiences – is added to the selection. BB reaches an audience of 313 thousand users (Gemius, 2021).

For this analysis, articles published in the media from August 1, 2020 until January 31, 2021 were selected to cover a period before and shortly after the end of 2020, which was determined as a deadline for the submission of nationally-determined contributions for climate action by the signatories of the Paris Agreement. However, a disclaimer should be made on the overall circumstances during the selected time period. At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread in Europe. By the end of 2020, all European countries had experienced high infection and death rates, and had gone through numerous restrictions to restrain the spread of COVID-19 and to prevent the health-systems from collapse. The COVID-19 pandemic might have worked as a strong interfering factor and competitor for the media attention, which has to be considered in the analysis of the media coverage of climate change.

The articles were selected when containing the following keywords (in all cases) in Latvian and Russian languages: climate change, global warming, environment (natural environment, environmental protection, preservation of environment, pollution of environment, environmental catastrophes, impact of climate change on environment). Following the keywords and using an information search and analysis tool Station (station.lv), 345 units were initially selected. Units focusing exclusively on environmental protection and having no contextual association with climate change (21) were omitted. The remaining 324 units were divided into four groups, representing their level of centrality of climate change in the relevant unit depicted as the major (102), secondary (157), minor (61)

Table 1
A codebook for analysis of the Latvian media narratives on climate change.

Code groups (elements of structure)	Categories of analysis
Scene	Centrality of climate change
	Evaluation of climate change
	Thematic frames of climate change
	Domestication of climate change
Actors	Centrality of actors
	Evaluation of actors
Action	Events
	Conflict, solution
Time	Past, present, future

and contextual (4) issue. Overall, the sample includes 248 articles in Latvian and 76 articles in Russian. There is only a slight difference regarding centrality of climate change in the articles in Latvian and Russian: climate change as a major topic figures a bit more in the articles in Latvian, whereas it is more a secondary topic in the articles in Russian.

4.2. Analysis of the narrative structure

This study applies a qualitative content analysis of media articles and broadcasts. Media narratives were coded using a codebook consisting of four code groups and relevant categories of analysis (Table 1). The code groups, adapted from Roselle et al. (2014) and Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2017) reveal such elements of the narrative structure as (1) scene, (2) actors, (3) action and (4) time.

Scene demonstrates the centrality and thematic framework of climate change in the narrative, its emotional evaluation, as well as the level at which climate change is domesticated. In our study, thirteen thematic frames have been deduced using a pilot study of 32 articles from the first month of media monitoring and tested (in alphabetical order): Domestic politics, Climate, COVID-19, Economy, Education, Energy/Transport, Environment/Nature, Health, International efforts, Normative issues, Research and innovation, Security, Society.

Actors are the main characters in a narrative, embodying agency and certain characteristics and behaviour. Given Latvia's geopolitical location and accounting for the global character of climate change, the focus of this study is on the interplay of the following actors: Latvia, the EU and its member states, the US, Russia and China. Other international actors are grouped under the heading "Other countries, regions and organisations". To complement the strategic narrative framework that focuses on states as actors, this study invents four subgroups of actors – political, societal, business and scientific, to account for the variety of agents that operate within a particular country or region.

Action reveals events around which the interaction of actors, often involving conflict, takes place, leading to a potential resolution.

Time dimension indicates a path from the past, through the present towards future options for actors.

All elements of structure result in the narratives, which have been grouped and named as follows (in alphabetical order): Apocalypse, Duty, Economic losses, Saviour, In search of lost time, International cooperation, Justice, Opportunities, Recognition, Personal threat, Technology and Uncertainty. The titles of the narratives were chosen by inductive reasoning, identifying the result of an action or a conflict described in the article. The titles reveal what the solution would be in the interaction of climate change with actors or relationships between actors in addressing climate change.

In this study, the content analysis was performed manually by two coders. They were trained to ensure inter-coder reliability. At the end of the coding, a third coder carried out a comprehensive screening of the results, assuring the compliance of data throughout the codebook.

5. Latvian media narratives on climate change: findings and discussion

5.1. Setting the scene

The results show relatively high visibility of climate change in the analysed units, though the interest of journalists has not always been driven by the climate change issue per se but rather by the conflict it involves, for instance, controversy between Donald Trump and Joe Biden on the US global commitments, including the Paris Agreement. It points rather to the importance of the US as Latvia's strategic partner than the importance of climate change in the agenda of the editors.

As regards emotional framing, more than half of the articles (54%) frame climate change negatively, 44% frame them neutrally, meaning that they do not provide emotional evaluation, and 2% – both positively and negatively. Negative framing is associated with the disastrous impact of climate change on the planet, environment, biodiversity, and countries in the future. Neutral framing is dominant in units that recognise climate change as a persistent problem to be dealt with in the concrete or unspecified future. Both positive and negative framing can be observed in the articles, which demonstrate the effects of climate change while emphasizing the opportunities for the economy, innovative production or reproduction of species.

Thematically, the international effort to address climate change is the dominant thematic frame (present in 32%), closely followed by an impact of climate change on the environment, ecosystems and biodiversity (30%), and climate change per se as represented by changing weather conditions (26%). Also, the impact of climate change on society, its lifestyle and habits, as well as societal initiatives to fight climate change figure as a prominent thematic frame (24%), followed by economic opportunities and benefits or losses from climate change (20%). Importantly, most of the articles contain more than one thematic frame, for example, climate change, environment and society are often interacting. In addition, in articles that describe the effects of climate change both on the environment and society, climate change is evaluated negatively. The articles using the thematic frame of international efforts, however, frequently provide no evaluation, as climate change is considered an established phenomenon that international negotiations take place on. Regarding the level of domestication, a slightly bigger share (56%) of the articles do not depict locations in Latvia or refer to Latvian personalities, while 44% do.

There is a difference between the articles in Latvian and in Russian on the thematic frames: the latter use the thematic frame of climate change per se, environment and society relatively more frequently than the articles in Latvian, where international efforts are the dominant theme. As for the emotional frames, it was found that in the articles in Russian (61%), a negative evaluation of climate change is relatively more observable, while the articles in Latvian are balanced between negative (53%) and neutral (46%) evaluation. The thematic orientation largely explains the relatively higher level of negative evaluation in the articles in Russian, as these articles describe the effects of climate change both on the environment and society, which are evaluated negatively. As for the level of

domestication, the articles in Russian more often than the articles in Latvian make no associations with Latvia (75% and 50%, respectively).

Overall, the findings of the scene suggest that climate change is projected mostly as a negative or self-evident phenomenon in the Latvian media and as a global challenge either in terms of changing weather conditions or their effects on the environment and societies. In the media narrative, international efforts rather than domestic politics dominate the scene. With such a focus, the media narrative both aligns and differs from the official political narrative. One the one hand, the global scope of climate change is recognised. On the other hand, climate change is not framed solely as an economic opportunity.

5.2. Uncovering actors

The findings demonstrate that regions and countries that are ideologically close to Latvia and are its main strategic partners – such as the EU and its member states and the US, receive relatively higher media attention than the countries, which are among the largest GHG emitters in the world but follow an ideologically opposite path, such as Russia and China.

Latvia figures as an actor in 41% of the analysed articles, slightly lesser than it is depicted in. Such a discrepancy is explained by the fact that sometimes Latvian experts appear in articles where Latvia does not take part as an actor, for example, commenting on Donald Trump's politics. The 41% share demonstrates that the Latvian media only partly project Latvia as a strategically important actor regarding climate change mitigation or adaptation, which is contrary to the official political narrative where Latvia is an actor throughout the narrative. However, when Latvia is mentioned, Latvia figures as a major actor in the majority of media articles (82%) (Fig. 1), suggesting that the journalists tend to see Latvia as an active actor in cases they decide to report on.

Importantly, Latvia figures as an actor relatively more in the articles in Latvian than in Russian (46% and 24% respectively), which arguably reflects the effect of the linguistically divided information environment that exists in Latvia (Rožukalne, 2020), where the Russian-speaking information space tends to follow the agenda of the Russian information channels.

The most frequent international actor is the EU or its member states (33%), followed by other countries, regions and organisations (such as Australia, the Antarctic and the Arctic, Canada, Japan, the UK, the UN, etc.) (27%), the US (22%), Russia (6%), and China (3%) (Fig. 1). The total is more than 100% because more than one actor operates in some of the articles. If compared to the official political narrative, the media depict a wide spectrum of international actors instead of focusing on the EU.

As to the interaction of Latvia with other actors, the findings show that Latvia acts alone in slightly more than half of the articles (52%), where it is an actor. Latvia acts together with the EU and member states in the majority of remaining articles (36%). These articles refer to the EU negotiations on the EGD, EU funding for implementation of climate-friendly activities, public discussions and educational activities with the participation of the representatives of the EU institutions and point to the recognition of the EU as Latvia's inevitable instrument for the attainment of climate goals. A relatively low level of depicting Latvia together with the EU points to the misalignment with the official political narrative emphasizing Latvia as an ambitious EU partner on climate change. If in the official political narrative Latvia is represented as an integral part of the EU acting in the name of the EU, in the media narrative Latvia only partially acts as a bearer of the EU ideas. Meanwhile, Latvia's interaction with other international actors is represented even less. Importantly, the articles in Russian pay relatively more attention to other countries, regions and organisations than the articles in Latvian (33% and 26%, respectively). The findings demonstrate that the EU is the partner the journalists associate with Latvia the most, and the relatively low-level coverage of Latvia's and the EU's relationship in the achievement of climate goals could be rather related to the hesitancy to report about the EU in general (Bain and Chaban, 2017).

Regarding the emotional evaluation of actors, the findings demonstrate that, except in the US, in the majority of cases actors receive a neutral evaluation (Fig. 2) —in most cases they act neither as heroes nor villains but are mentioned in the articles descriptively and factually. However, a relatively high share is left also to actors' positive evaluation, which paves the way for a "hero" narrative (Janda and Topouzi, 2015) to develop. Proportionally, the US receives the highest share of positive evaluation (46%), which is by and large a result of journalists' positive reporting on Joe Biden's activities concerning the Paris Agreement.

Importantly, this study acknowledges that there are multiple agents within one country or region, which do not necessarily act uniformly. The findings demonstrate that majority of articles report on climate change and its related policies from the political actors'
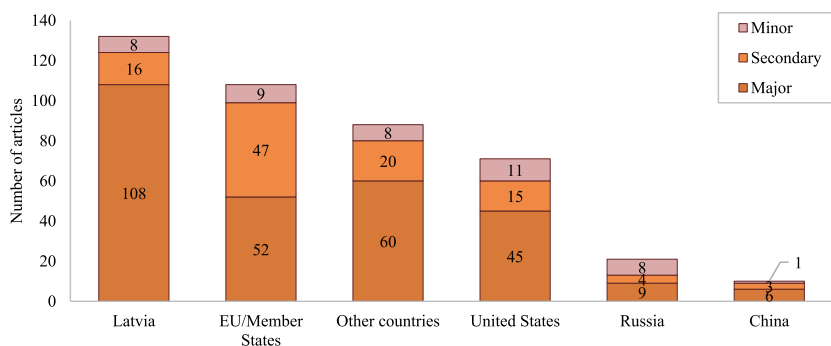

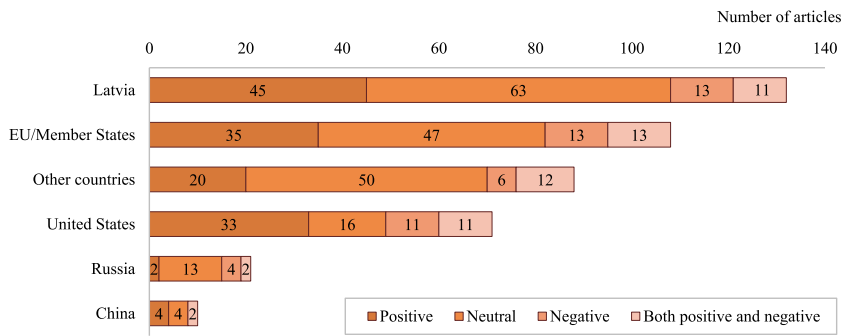**Fig. 1.** Actors and their centrality.

Fig. 2. Actors and their emotional evaluation.

point of view (41%) and slightly less from the perspective of scientists (35%) and society (29%). The least represented is the business perspective (15%). In the majority of articles, the journalists use only one perspective, yet in part of the articles (15%), more than one perspective is incorporated, mixing the views of politicians, scientists, representatives of society and entrepreneurs.

As to the actors, the findings reveal that political perspective is dominant where Latvia, the EU and member states, the US and China are actors (Fig. 3).

The scientific perspective is proportionally more visible in the articles that report about other countries and regions, the planet on the whole, as well as Russia. The articles, written from the point of view of society, take the second place concerning all actors, except the US and other countries and regions. The business perspective is the most visible with regard to Latvia.

Importantly, the articles in Russian pay considerably more attention to the scientific dimension than the articles in Latvian (51% and 29% from the total in each language, respectively), which potentially explains their relatively lower level of domestication mentioned previously, whereas the political perspective is more visible in the articles in Latvian than the articles in Russian (45% and 28%, respectively).

The findings suggest that media focus not only on the "top-down" but also on the "bottom-up" perspectives of climate change, which is the most striking difference with the official political narrative. By potraying multiple actors within one country, the media provide an arena to introduce elements of contestation to the official political narrative. However, a detached depiction of actors and a focus on global actors does not allow for a consistent alternative narrative to develop – a narrative, which would increase the concerns of the Latvian society and hold "politicians accountable to their public pledges" (Brüggemann and Engesser, 2017). Moreover, high numbers of neutral and positive evaluations of actors indicate that the dichotomy in the media space between the good and the evil, or "us" and "them" has not yet developed. Olausson (Ölausson, 2010) argues that the fostering of a sense of inclusion and belonging requires the construction of the "other". By constructing such an "other" in the fight against climate change the important question of why (de Graaf et al., 2015) would be more easily answerable.

5.3. Locating action in time and space: emerging narratives

The interaction of the actors on the scene described in the previous sections results in several narratives, each involving a certain configuration of actors, action in time and space, and potential resolution (Fig. 4).

Recognition narrative is the major media narrative and is observed in nearly half of the articles (43%). It acknowledges climate change as a real and persistent phenomenon, recorded in increasing air temperature and manifesting itself in the melting of glaciers, rising water levels, forest fires, the extinction of species or the spread of invasive species. This narrative provides visible proof of climate change and describes the consequences for the environment, species and humanity. In a way, the recognition narrative challenges the political narrative focused on growth by requesting that the consequences of climate change (and industrial production) are recognised and the environment is prioritised (again – as in the 1980s). Scientific actors are the main actors in this narrative (63%), followed by societal (33%), political (12%) and business (7%) actors (Fig. 5).

In almost half of the articles, only international actors operate in this narrative (47%), with Latvia interacting with other actors in 14% of the articles and acting alone in 23%. In 16% of the articles, the planet alone works as an "actor". In the recognition narrative,

	Political	Societal	Business	Scientific
Latvia	56	40	32	28
EU/Member states	67	32	15	18
Other countries/ regions	30	27	7	43
United States	45	13	11	16
Planet	6	17	4	36
Russia	6	7	1	15
China	7	1	1	5

Fig. 3. Subgroups of actors (number of articles).

Number of articles
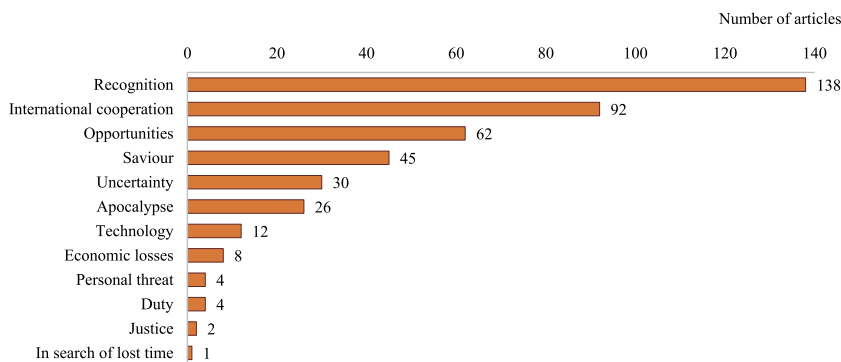
Fig. 4. Media narratives on climate change.

	Political	Societal	Business	Scientific
Recognition	17	45	10	87
International cooperation	76	14	6	10
Opportunity	34	10	27	9
Saviour	13	26	2	9
Uncertainty	20	10	8	7
Apocalypse	4	8	1	17
Technology	2	1	6	6
Economic losses	2	2	3	2
Duty	3	1	2	0
Personal threat	0	3	0	1
Justice	0	1	0	2
In search of lost time	0	1	1	0

Fig. 5. The share of subgroups of actors in media narratives (number of articles).

climate change per se and its effects on the environment, biodiversity and societies are the main focus, and the plot develops around the unprecedented increase in the effects of climate change in the last decade and its forecasted implications until the end of the 21st century. However, the articles embedding this narrative are in most cases descriptive, reporting scientific discoveries; solutions or agents, who should enact solutions, are not provided. As such, this narrative represents the scientific consensus, yet focusing on the negative effects of climate change and not providing positive examples of adaptation and mitigation activities offers the "doom and gloom" perspective, which Hinkel et al. (2020) and Stoknes (2014) have found counter-productive, and do not offer a "learning" narrative (Janda and Topouzi, 2015) which praises active participation and reflection. Moreover, the dominance of international actors and the planet alone points to the practice of "counter-domestication" (Olausson, 2014), as a result of which the narrative promotes a "geopolitically deterritorialized" (Olausson, 2014) discursive environment on climate change. With such a narrative, climate change as a geographically distant phenomenon is being promoted, yet distance in time and space have been noted as contributory factors to people's low commitment to engaging in activities to fight climate change (McDonald and Nisbet, 2018).

International cooperation narrative is the second most popular Latvian media narrative (present in 28% of the articles). It envisages global or regional cooperation, for example, at the EU level, as a precondition for fighting climate change, therefore the narrative evolves around the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the commitments of international actors to reduce their impact on climate. This narrative envisages a role for Latvia as an ambitious EU partner and in a few cases, Latvia's efforts to identify with the North European region are underlined. In the international cooperation narrative, political actors are the main actors (83%), followed by societal (15%), scientific (11%) and business (7%) actors. International actors act alone in 72% of the articles, Latvia acts together with international partners in 24% of the articles and alone in 2%. The conflict revolves around international ambitions to reduce GHG emissions in the short and medium-term and the best mechanisms for it. Conflict resolution is seen in negotiations and the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement that all world countries should be part of. This narrative creates a vivid, sometimes contradictory, interplay between various actors, both at political and societal levels, to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. Competition to be the first to reach climate neutrality is part of the storyline. Altogether, this narrative searches for a responsible perspective towards the future, highlighting the "heroes" (countries, communities, individuals, etc. that implement and fight for implementation of the Paris Agreement) and blaming the "villains" (countries, entrepreneurs, personalities, etc. that deny climate change). However, such "hero stories" (Janda and Topouzi, 2015) frequently lack the reflection on how certain measures are implemented, what their impact on specific places or segments of society is and if the words match the deeds, thus the credibility of the narrative may be contested. Moreover, in Latvia's context, "extroverted domestication" (Olausson, 2014) has only partly taken place and similarly, as in the recognition narrative a "geopolitically deterritorialized" (Olausson, 2014) discursive environment emerges that is dominated rather by

global than domestic actors, which further on promotes a perspective of climate change as a geographically distant, internationally negotiated phenomenon.

The third most popular is the opportunity narrative (19%), which is the narrative that projects the official political narrative the most. It focuses on the benefits that climate change provides for the economy in terms of funding provided by the EU recovery and resilience facility, new sources of energy production, new construction methods and materials, improved waste management and geopolitical involvement in the Arctic, as well as research and innovation. In this narrative, 55% are political actors and 44% are business actors, which underlines the important role of entrepreneurs in operationalising the opportunities from climate change. Societal (16%) and scientific (15%) actors play a less prominent role. Latvia takes a relatively more prominent position than in the previous narratives: Latvia is a major player, acting alone in 37%, and together with the EU in 34% of the articles (but without interacting with other international players). International actors operate alone in 24%, and the planet alone is depicted in 3% of the articles. In this narrative, the conflict and the resolution develop around the necessity to invest in sustainable solutions for climate change and the long-term gains from it both in terms of climate and profits. Another plotline concerns the use of EU funding to foster green transition. This narrative develops around the neoliberal (Stibbe, 2021) or the green growth (Hinkel et al., 2020) paradigm, which sees climate change as providing new opportunities for economic growth and industries. Instead of asking for reduced production and consumption or degrowth (Hinkel et al., 2020), this narrative looks for innovative solutions to adapt production patterns to provide less harm to the environment and climate.

To a lesser extent, the saviour (14%), the uncertainty (9%), the apocalypse (8%) and the technology (4%) narratives are present. The saviour narrative embeds the confidence that with the appropriate actions, humanity can save the world, and these actions include both certain societal habits and protest actions of environmental activists as well as brave domestic decisions, such as the decision of Germany to close their first coal-powered plant. Societal actors (58%) dominate in this narrative, followed by political (29%), scientific (20%) and business (4%) actors. In 45% of the articles, only international actors operate in the narrative, but in 4% of the articles, Latvia works together with international actors. In 33% of the articles, Latvia acts alone. Climate change per se is at the heart of the conflict and the solution lies in the hands of ambitious, responsible and brave countries and individuals. This narrative, though not domesticated, provides the transformative (Hinkel et al., 2020) perspective or the so-called "narrative of change" (Wittmayer et al., 2019), indicating that change is possible and certain agents by their positive or provocative examples can initiate it.

The uncertainty narrative doubts climate change as a phenomenon itself and its anthropogenic component, as well as the honesty of intentions to combat climate change. It looks for negative side-effects of technology production on climate, controversies of policies, potential corruption as well as coherence between words and deeds. The majority of the articles depict political actors (67%), while societal (33%), business (27%) and scientific (23%) actors are less prominent. Latvia acts alone in 23% but together with international partners in 17% of the articles. International partners operate alone in 47% of the articles. The conflict in the narrative arises around the essence of climate change itself and the honesty of related policies, and the solution, though not always clearly expressed, would lie in the abandonment of the passion with which climate change ambitions are put forward. This narrative indicates that climate scepticism is not thoroughly domesticated, and, if present, by and large echoes sceptical voices from abroad.

The apocalypse narrative evolves around the plot that the effects of climate change are catastrophic and the existential threat to all living organisms is growing at an unexpected rate. A narrative uses scientific evidence from the past to forecast what humanity can expect in the future, such as a new ice age. Scientific actors (65%) dominate in this narrative, whereas societal (31%), political (15%) and business (4%) actors play a lesser role. In this narrative, the planet itself figures as a prominent "actor" (42%). International actors alone operate in 46% of the articles, whereas Latvia together with international partners and Latvia alone figure only in 4% of the articles. This narrative tells the "horror" narrative (Janda and Topouzi, 2015) of the planet's future and promotes the inevitability of collapse, further exacerbated by its low level of domestication and little role attached to an agency.

The technology narrative emphasizes the importance of technological innovation in the process of climate change mitigation and adaptation and sees it as a prime solution for emission reduction and as such embeds a "hero" narrative (Janda and Topouzi, 2015) praising green growth (Hinkel et al., 2020). Scientific and business actors (each 50%) play the most visible role in this narrative, with lesser visibility of political (17%) and societal (8%) actors. International actors operate alone in the majority of the articles (83%), while Latvia acting alone is depicted in 17% of the articles.

Several narratives appear in much fewer articles: the economic losses narrative (2%) envisaging that climate change as a phenomenon causes economic costs or hinders activities; the duty narrative (1%) implying that Latvia has no other choice than to implement the EGD; the personal threat narrative (1%) talking about effects of climate change on a persons' health; the justice narrative (1%) emphasizing the dilemma of climate justice, embedded in the controversy between the rich, who are the polluters, and the poor, who have to deal with the consequences; and in search of lost time narrative (<1%) that embeds the nostalgia of times when fossil-fuelled cars were on the rise and admired and emphasizes that cars are not the sole producer of emissions. Given their low number, they are not further analysed in detail in this article.

In summary, a variety of narratives can be observed in the Latvian media and no significant differences were identified in the narratives projected in Latvian and Russian languages. Only the opportunity narrative – and partly the international efforts narrative – align with the official political narrative. By spreading the perspectives of scientific, societal and business actors, the Latvian media foster the "mis-alignment" (Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2017) of narratives. However, in democratic societies, such a process is part of the public deliberation, therefore further research would be necessary to see if the media narratives provide an impetus for a change in the official political narrative or if the political and media spaces continue to narrate separately. The lack of coherence or at least complementarity in the formation and projection phases of the strategic narratives on climate change, however, may have implications on the effects of the narrative, as large fragmentation may confuse the reception side of the narrative. On the other hand, specifically-designed narratives targeted towards specific audiences may have a positive effect, as people have different experiences

and expectations regarding climate change. It suggests that strategic narrative formation in the sphere of climate change may be more complicated than in cases of, for instance, armed conflicts, where villains and victims (from the perspective of the narrator) and the "common thread" are more clearly identifiable.

6. Conclusions

The media are not passive actors in transmitting the political agenda to the public. They play an active role in internalising the climate change mitigation obligation and fostering public support, as it is through the media that audiences learn about scientific facts, political decisions and the effects of climate change. The media's projection of climate change related challenges plays a fundamental role in strategic narrative formation and reception, as the media provide a space for strategic narratives to spread while raising alternative, often contradictory perspectives on climate change. Narrative alignment in such circumstances is challenging and is further exacerbated by a complex media ecology requiring a considerable effort at all levels – political, media and society, to identify the "common thread" that would mobilise for action.

Using Latvia as a case study, this paper demonstrates the challenges the political elites face when their strategic narratives are projected in the new media ecology. Firstly, it is a challenge of narrative fragmentation. Latvian digital media outlets only partially project the official political narrative of climate change as an economic opportunity and Latvia as an active and ambitious EU partner on climate change. Instead, a variety of narratives exist in the media space, each with its own narrative structure. Arguably, in countries that lack environmental awareness and long-standing traditions of climate-friendly policy-making, the media is short of experience in accommodating the political rhetoric on climate change emerging as a result of pragmatic reasons to cope with the EU institutional obligations. Given that climate change is on the international and national agenda, the media cannot ignore it, but rather than providing a deliberate perspective, it brings up various, oftentimes contesting narratives, frequently following the supply side — news produced by foreign news agencies.

Secondly, there is a risk of simplification. The media depiction of actors is fragmented and does not provide a comprehensive overview of their interaction. In many cases, actors, including Latvia, act alone and the important aspect of cooperation or mutual dependency is not covered. With this, the narrative projection misses the complexity that the fight against climate change involves and the reflection on the multitude of contributions that climate change mitigation and adaptation requires. Importantly, ten percent of the articles do not involve any actors but depict the situation in the context of the whole planet. From the narrative point of view, these articles are informative but not instructive. They describe a problem, for instance, melting of glaciers, while not pointing to an agency – the actors who can and should act to foster change.

Thirdly, domestication poses a challenge. A discursive environment in which national actors or places are absent is potentially discouraging active action or a change in habits in societies with a low level of concern over climate change. In Latvia, journalists tend to reproduce the global news, especially regarding Latvia's strategic partners, without complementing it with the domestic aspect. Recognition and international cooperation narratives are the dominant narratives in the Latvian media, representing more than two-thirds of the sample. In both narratives, a greater role is assigned to international actors than to Latvia, thus the journalistic practice of counter-domestication prevails. As a result, an image of climate change as a globally distant and internationally negotiated but locally non-resonant topic emerges. Referring to Schmidt et al. (2013), the visibility of climate change in the Latvian media can be attributed neither to the country's vulnerability to climate change nor its obligations under international treaties or its reliance on carbon but rather to the vulnerability of the planet and the international obligations themselves. As such, the reporting is more descriptive than prescriptive —the recipe on what Latvia can and should do is not provided.

Fourthly, there is the challenge of fostering engagement. In societies with low trust in the government, it is important who presents the narrative. In Latvia, news originating locally tends to represent the political perspective, sometimes adding the business dimension but missing the voices of society and scientists. On the contrary, news that frames climate change in terms of society and looks at climate change from the perspective of society is predominantly global. Latvia is an actor in the smallest share of these articles. Such a low level of domestication suggests that global rather than domestic societal experiences and practices are offered as action models to Latvian audiences. Though they reveal a societal perspective in the fight against climate change, they also contribute to the perceptions of climate change as a geographically distant phenomenon and potentially hinder engagement in local climate change mitigation or adaptation activities.

Finally, there is a challenge to offer a transformative perspective. In Latvian media, a hero narrative of countries and individuals taking brave steps towards climate neutrality is represented at a relatively low level, yet such a narrative offers a transformative (Hinkel et al., 2020) perspective or the so-called "narrative of change" (Wittmayer et al., 2019). More reporting on positive domestic political, societal and business achievements in climate change mitigation and adaptation would provide a space both for domestication and for encouraging action.

The above-mentioned suggests that fragmentation, simplification, counter-domestication and lack of engaging and domesticated transformative perspectives characterises the discursive environment constructed by the Latvian media. A consensus on the global character of climate change is arguably the "common thread" that keeps the narratives observed in the Latvian media together. Except for the opportunity narrative, where Latvia figures more prominently than international actors, other narratives evolve around the global dimension of climate change and the global activities to address it, namely, the realisation that climate change is a global problem in its character and cannot be fought by a country or an individual alone. At the media level, more domestication is needed regarding the projection of climate change related challenges and activities. It refers to the representation of political ambitions, asking for political accountability to reduce GHG emissions, as well as embedding the Latvian society and scientists in a narrative that focuses on the global context. A more domesticated media narrative would project the achievements and concerns of the Latvian society and

provide a constructive contestation of political endeavours, thus contributing to development of an engaging public sphere in Latvia.

The failure of the Latvian media to grasp the complexity of climate change, to ask for accountability and to provide a domesticated perspective may be attributed to many factors, which would require further scrutiny. The Latvian media, like their counterparts elsewhere, fight for their audiences in circumstances of fierce competition in the media environment and multiple actors presenting their agendas in the new media ecology. To attract the users' attention, the media have to respond to demand; yet, as indicated beforehand, support for climate change from the Latvian public is not high. The audience attention is even more difficult to attract in cases of overall crisis, which the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be in the observed period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic might have worked as a serious interfering factor in the media portrayal of climate change. Furthermore, the coverage of climate change depends on the editorial and proprietors' policies of an outlet, as well as the financial and human resources that media can direct towards reporting on climate change issues. This study has not identified particular climate journalists devoted to digging deep into climate issues. Many articles have been either republished from global sources or back locally-produced press releases. This suggests that the financial and human resources devoted to climate change coverage are not high, which may also have been subject to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, climate change as a complex issue requires specific knowledge of the phenomenon, which cannot be covered in a manner of passing by. Last but not least, Latvia has one of the lowest levels of confidence in the government among the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: only a third of the Latvian population reports trust in the government (OECD, 2021). Moreover, 62% of the Latvian population agrees with the statement that climate change is a beneficial slogan for politicians Latvian Council of Science (2021). Low trust in the government and the perceived superficiality and corruptibility of politicians could explain why Latvian media are reserved in projecting an official political narrative.

In terms of strategic narratives, this study indicates that the coherence between the formation and projection phases may not be easily achievable for a phenomenon as multi-faceted as climate change. The impetus for strategic narratives on climate change comes from many forces, some of which are predictable – such as obligations from international and EU law – but some not – such as the effects of climate change, changes in the political architecture of a given country or the impact of emission-reduction policies on public opinion. It is a phenomenon in which international and domestic forces interact, and none of them is homogeneous. It suggests that the research of strategic narratives on climate change should explore the mutual dynamics of various discursive practices, analysing if such an interaction contributes to the complementarity or isolation of different narratives. Further research would be needed to evaluate the pros and cons of the formation of strategic "grand" narratives versus the fragmented space of several strategic narratives, identifying which work better as communication strategies in a particular time and space. In addition, further research should be carried out on the impact of a narrator on the effect of the narrative, thus addressing the issue of the credibility of the narrator (Bevan et al., 2020), which, arguably, is a particularly important element in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Last but not least, the perception side of the strategic narratives that are projected in the media space should be addressed to cover the whole spectrum of the life-cycle of the strategic narratives.

Authorship contributions

Conception and design of study: V. Kleinberga. Acquisition of data: V. Kleinberga, A. Palkova. Analysis and/or interpretation of data: V. Kleinberga, E. Dace. Drafting the manuscript: V. Kleinberga, A. Palkova. Revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content: V. Kleinberga, E. Dace. Approval of the version of the manuscript to be published (the names of all authors must be listed): V. Kleinberga, A. Palkova, E. Dace.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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