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# *How Have International Business Discourses on the Environment Changed over the Last Decade?*

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**ABSTRACT** One group of discourses often neglected within the study of international environmental politics are those of business actors. Comparing two key events in international environmental politics, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit, provides an excellent opportunity to examine the changing character of business discourse over time. This article systematically analyses and compares the business–environment discourses of two books written for the summits respectively, representing the view of the international business community: *Changing Course* (1992) and *Walking the Talk* (2002). The comparison of both texts reveals some continuity but also major changes. One area of continuity is that business discourses on the environment attempt to mask a traditionally antagonistic view of environmental issues. Major changes include an increasing willingness to reach accommodation with environmental non-governmental organizations and a desire to overcome business's traditionally defensive, reactive role. Characterizing this is the adoption of a proactive approach to shaping the international environmental agenda. The article also discusses the significance of these findings for our understanding of the environmental role of business in a globalized society.

**KEYWORDS** *business, discourse analysis, hegemony, sustainable development*

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*Introduction*

International business generally has a lot to say about the environment and the role business can play in stabilizing global ecological degradation. The initial questions for this article were inspired by attending the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit. One defining characteristic of this global environmental gathering was the high level of observable business activity. Here some chief executive officers also highlighted their conversion to realizing the 'triple bottom line' concept of sustainable economic, environmental and social development. From a business perspective, there was a pronounced sense of sincerity and commitment. The range of issues tackled was impressive, and included poverty, clean water, motor vehicle pollution, traffic congestion, climate change, consumption patterns, wealth disparities and biodiversity. There was also a willingness to implement the Kyoto Protocol and consistent calls for the urgent necessity of greater cooperation between traditional adversaries. The message was clear and concise: 'words need putting into action' and business intends to be at the forefront of this.

Beneath this lofty rhetoric a few unanswered and puzzling questions remain. Of particular interest is the level of change within business environmental discourses (BEDs). Which aspects of business discourse on the environment have altered and which have remained relatively constant between the 1992 Rio and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits? In addition, is business attempting to synthesize various national and sectional discourses to produce one coherent business-oriented master discourse? Given the relative longevity of business engagement with environmental discourse, an appreciably higher level of environmental symbols, imagery, rhetoric, concepts and so forth should be readily identifiable within the 2002 Johannesburg discourse, and less so within the Rio discourse. The contention here is that BEDs consist of parallel processes of representation. International business continues to portray itself as a positive, caring and sound environmental actor, while also constructing representations of the environment that have shifted more towards the interests of business. This is reflected in the use of pro-business definitions, procedures and general concerns about future profitability and operational stability. Underlying business pronouncements on environmental issues is a non-negotiable core set of macro assumptions. These are based on promoting property rights and the pricing mechanism as workable solutions for reversing environmental decline.

The first section of this article sketches out the impact that global earth summitry has had on the 'greening' of business discourse. The second part looks at some of the theories that could help account for this phenomenon. After this, the third part expands upon the main research questions, the data and the discourse approach used. This is followed by the detailed empirical analysis of the two texts chosen to compare the development of BEDs

between the Rio and Johannesburg Earth Summits. The article is concluded by discussion of the key components of BEDs within a theoretical framework that considers business discourse as a hegemonic discourse.

### *Business Environment Discourses and Global Summitry*

This section identifies and loosely maps out the main organizational arrangements and initiatives that illustrate the emergence of an internationalized dimension in BEDs. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit was a decisive moment in the formation of a more coherent and internationally focused BED. Traditionally, business approaches to environmental discourse tended to adopt a reactive approach that also contains anticipatory elements. This aspires to create a pro-business discourse around specific issues (Eden, 1996). The general business contribution to this trend was its involvement in a series of reports and meetings that focused on the need for increased state and business cooperation to address global ecological problems (Sachs, 1999). This included business inputs into the 1972 UN Stockholm conference (United Nations Environment Programme, 1972), the *Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972), the first Brandt Report (Independent Commission on International Development, 1980) and the influential report *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Internationally, the main pre-Rio business-lobbying organization handling environmental issues was the European based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). Its central remit is to advance trade and market liberalization. A part of this task also involves promoting the use of voluntary codes of practice to instil an environmentally/socially responsible operating standpoint among international business. In 1974 and in 1981, the ICC published the voluntary *Environmental Guidelines for World Industry*.

International business produced some of its most significant environmental organizational initiatives, self-regulatory mechanisms and general commitments during the period associated with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.<sup>1</sup> Rio served as the catalyst that propelled business into a series of primarily reactive measures that reflected the increasing global focus the summit accorded to transboundary environmental issues. Some of these responses included globally orientated initiatives, such as the chemical industries 1990 Responsible Care Programmes (International Council of Chemical Associations, n.d.); the ICC-backed voluntary *Business Charter for Sustainable Development* and the Global Environmental Management Initiative to implement the charter (International Chamber of Commerce, 1991; Global Environmental Management Initiative, n.d.). More significant was the request made by Maurice Strong, then secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), to Stephan Schmidheiny to bring together an official business delegation for the

summit (Bruno and Karliner, 2002: Ch. 2).<sup>2</sup> Duly obliging, Schmidheiny formed the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD). This ended up as the main organization for coordinating business responses to the internationalization of environmental issues. The BCSD remit required its members to endorse and promote the twin concepts of sustainable economic and environmental development. In 1992, membership of this organization initially consisted of 50 multinational/transnational corporations and was a subsidiary project of the ICC. The BCSD featured high-status corporations from the US, Asia and Europe, operating primarily in the extraction and chemical industries. The aforementioned developments all occurred in the context of the Rio Earth Summit. Since then, business has noticeably increased its focus on improving its environmental communication strategies and incorporating an environmental dimension into many of its political activities.

By the time the 2002 Earth Summit arrived in Johannesburg, business had consolidated and broadened its environmental discourse. After Rio, the BCSD changed its name to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), reflecting its new international reach.<sup>3</sup> By 2002, the WBCSD counted approximately 160 global corporations among its members.<sup>4</sup> The WBCSD now occupies a more legitimate position at international environmental forums than its predecessor did. There are several reasons for this. The first is that the WBCSD has implemented a widespread and sophisticated communication strategy. This involves the publication of policy-orientated research, which reflects the general 'business case for sustainable development' and the concerns of specific sectors (including transport, mining, biotechnology and oil). Another facet of this is that the WBCSD also has a dedicated managerial structure that provides its representatives (mainly CEOs) with the financial resources to achieve a high level of observable activity. This includes attending and making speeches at numerous local, regional and international environmental gatherings.

At the Johannesburg summit, the WBCSD also received recognition as the official representative of the business community, who were then able to provide input into the Prep. Coms. and at the summit plenary sessions. Reflecting this status was a specific lobbying 'initiative' organized by the WBCSD/ICC called Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD). This proved to be a more focused means for business to present a unified front at the summit.<sup>5</sup> The WBCSD/ICC/BASD trinity also used the 'public' platform at Johannesburg to put forward clear and simple messages. These appealed to the pricing and property rights assumptions of other state and business elites and a more general audience (particularly the media and other non-state actors).

BASD speakers at Johannesburg also expressed a general feeling of inevitability regarding the increased role of state institutions and non-state actors in incorporating environmental criteria into their regulatory and

pressure-orientated activities. In addition, their message to other business delegates was that companies that do not actively seek to define the regulatory terms and conditions under which this change occurs are going to experience economic, political and technological ‘uncertainty’ and problems with legitimacy. Levy and Newell (2000) suggest that groups such as the WBCSD/ICC/BASD use public opportunities to impose uniformity and predictability in their response to environmentalism. At the core of this message was a persistent emphasis on the transformative role of superior management systems, technological innovation and ‘eco-efficiency’ (that is economic as opposed to ecological) to business production processes. Complementing this is a desire to recast the role of governments as a facilitator and a limited regulator of business activity and a belief in the superiority of non-binding voluntary and negotiated agreements.

### *Business Environmental Discourse and Global Summits: The Theoretical Dimension*

This section outlines some of the theoretical positions on the greening of international BEDs. The relationship between international business firms and political issues is traditionally characterized as one where marked variations exist across time and between institutional structures (Grant, 2000; Hacker and Pierson, 2002; Wilson, 2003). One reason for this is the role that different national capitalist styles, e.g. American liberalism and European corporatism, play in shaping the strategic activities of business (Wilson, 2003). As Scott (2001: 57) notes, business ‘pressure is exercised in relation to certain issues or areas of policy and it is often quite difficult to transfer this power from one area to another’. However, it is also possible to argue that sectors of the business community have incorporated a more internationalized focus into their environmental promotional/lobbying efforts. What is being emphasized here is the notable international shift in business communication strategies during the periods before and after the Rio Earth Summit (Sklair, 2000: Ch. 2; 2002: 53–7, 72–4). This occurred on the following three levels:

1. There was a transfer of environmental discourse from individual business sectors into industry-wide initiatives. This suggests that the business environmental paradigm had increased its internal consistency.
2. Individual companies and their sector organizations continued to operate at the regional/national level. Added to this was a concerted shift towards international lobbying, particularly at the UN.
3. The organizational actions and activism undertaken within these two areas allowed business to incorporate environmental discourse into its lobbying and public relations activities.

The concept of hegemony offers one possible avenue of explanation for the changing nature of business discourse (Gramsci, 1973; Ransome, 1992). In the simplest of terms, business occupies a structurally privileged position that is also relatively unstable and likely to experience continuous legitimization crises (Levy and Newell, 2002; Lindblom, 1977; Newell and Glover, 2003; O'Connor, 1987). Ecological problems have produced new political struggles between business and other non-state and state actors over the form in which environmental discourse is institutionalized (Levy and Egan, 1999). Business uses its privileged position to ensure that the institutionalized environmental discourse is conducive to their economic interests. It is able to do this because of its direct and immediate access to discourse resources (expertise, status, money, organization, insider status and so on). These resources enable business to shape *what* people talk about and *how* they talk about them.

Two main points are worth extrapolating from the hegemonic perspective. The first is that business elites have a limited range of discursive repertoires due to foundational premises that locate their BEDs within the logic of capitalist accumulation. Within a hegemonic relationship discourse is a flexible resource that business elites seek to appropriate and direct towards legitimating and expanding what they perceive to be the general interests of business. Business must continually circulate and stabilize pro-business meanings and at the same time reduce their definitions to a shared understanding among other business elites. Its ability to carry this out is dependent on the level of relinquished discursive power to collective bodies (e.g. entrusting discourse articulation to trade associations) and displays of an outwardly unified public discourse (e.g. holding workshops to promote the benefits of business environmental 'skills' and 'expertise' at the Johannesburg Earth Summit) (WBCSD, 2002; World Resource Institute, 2002). In turn, this also increases the probability that more structured forms of discourse production will characterize BEDs (Cox, 1983).

The second point is the increased likelihood of internationally focused interaction, at both the informal and formal levels between business elites. Sklair (2000) develops this and suggests that business is now part of an internationally focused 'sustainable development historical block'. Other affiliates of this loose voluntary coalition include elites from state institutions, international regulatory bodies and selected NGOs. The primary aspiration of this block is to devise and coordinate policy approaches that help to 'ecologically modernise' capitalist institutions (Mol, 2000). A part of this also involves better coordination (or in their parlance governance) between business, states, non-state actors and the environment. As such, the emphasis is on developing policy mixtures that promote market-orientated and trade rules based approaches. The overall goal is to harness the (presupposed) future benefits associated with economic growth and technological development through creating policy-making conditions that function within a depoliticized consensus.

According to Levy (1997: 131), one way in which corporations maintain their hegemony is to 'ameliorate their environmental impact sufficiently to blunt serious challenges to their hegemonic position'. Here narrative story lines, symbols, imagery and metaphors are blended together to produce a 'therapeutic alliance' to communicate 'symbolic reassurance' or generate mystification (Edelman, 1977, 2001; Tombs, 1993). This involves telling a reassuring 'story' about the causes and consequences of a particular state of affairs. Similarly, Eden (1996) labels this form of public environmental rhetoric as 'opportunity speak', in which the successful management of the environment is both a political challenge and a way for business to develop new areas of profitability. Bridge and McManus (2000) concur and suggest that the sustainability discourse also allows business to continue with environmentally exhaustive practices under sets of 'new' discourse concerns and justifications. Luke (1993, 1999) goes one step further and notes that dominant groups have the power to colonize discourse. He talks about the emerging discourses of eco-labelling, trading and bargaining for emissions credits, market mechanisms and so on as examples of how business interests saturate mainstream environmental discourse.

### *Research Questions, Data and Discourse Analysis*

The previous section suggested that some multinational/transnational companies have taken the initiative and placed business at the forefront of the international sustainable development debate. Evidence for this is found in the increase in internationally focused trade associations, an overabundance of promotional literature, policy input research that is more technical and a higher business presence at international forums. The following two hypotheses can be derived from these changes.

- The increasing attention displayed towards environmental issues by international business corporations suggests that there should be a progressive rise in environmental symbols, imagery, rhetoric and concepts within business discourse on the environment.
- We would also expect that the gradual acknowledgement of the environment as an international policy problem has forced business to articulate and coordinate its discourse at a more generic anticipatory level. This would suggest a move away from using traditional responses that favour reactive approaches to high-profile issues.

#### SELECTION OF TEXTS

The data used for this article consist of two book-length sustainable development reports authored by key business actors. The first is *Changing Course: A Global Business Perspective on Development and the Environment* (Schmidheiny



with the Business Council for Sustainable Development, 1992) and was specifically published as the business input to the Rio Earth Summit. Stephan Schmidheiny, a 'leading Swiss industrialist', authored this with non-attributed members of the BCSD. The second book is *Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development* (Holliday, Schmidheiny and Watts, 2002) and was published by the WBCSD to coincide with the Johannesburg Earth Summit. Its purpose is to present a 10-year follow-up evaluation and position statement. The three authors are Charles O. Holliday Jr, chairman and CEO, DuPont; Stephan Schmidheiny, now honorary chairman, WBCSD; and Philip Watts, ex-chairman of the committee of managing directors, Royal Dutch/Shell.

Several reasons governed the selection of these two books. Both set out the main business 'case' within a descriptive and prescriptive analytical framework for corporations embracing, rather than opposing, the inexorable rise of environmental issues. The books were produced by the only international business-lobbying organization dedicated to sustainable development. Hence, the books also reflect the interests and intentions of companies from different geographic regions and operating sectors. Overall, the texts are among the few examples of book-length collaborative statements that set out how some companies interpret the sustainable development discourse. It is no coincidence that many of the companies in the WBCSD also have dubious environmental records and are routinely targeted by pressure groups (Sklair, 2000).

Clearly, this material does not constitute a sample that represents the entire range of environmental discourses within the business community. However, the books do represent the output of an organization (the WBCSD) that is increasingly positioning itself as *the* voice of international business on sustainable development. Nevertheless, the books do not offer any indicative statements that detail the business position on specific environmental issues. Consequently, there is a tendency to gloss over the role of national states in setting operating contexts and the lack of enthusiasm among business for sustainable development and numerous sector and intra-company rivalries and differences.<sup>6</sup> Instead, these texts primarily function within the context of global environmental summitry and the evolving business relationship with the UN. The two Earth Summits focused on areas of direct concern to multinational/transnational companies seeking to expand their operations. Therefore, these texts are one facet of a wider desire by certain companies to pool their resources and advance their own globally focused environmental discourse.

#### METHOD

Discourse analysis is an eclectic approach to doing research. As such, there is no defining set of procedural rules. Instead, there are broad assumptions about the social world. One of the main claims is that objects of knowledge,

social practices and institutions undergo a discursive construction through the choices made in assembling a discourse. What actors say and do is organized around a set of discourses that structure, dictate and modify different courses of action. Business employs discourse to represent their version of contemporary events and processes and to project imagined possibilities (Fairclough, 2003: 124). Therefore, at its most basic level discourse analysis tends to consider 'talk and texts as social practices' and focus on the 'resources that are drawn on to enable those practices' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Similarly, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) outline discourse in a more general way as a 'particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)'. However, to counter some of the more relativistic approaches to discourse there is also the suggestion that 'institutions and social context . . . play an important determining role in the development, or maintenance and circulation of discourse' (Mills, 1997: 11). The discourse analyst is, in the Foucauldian metaphor, 'the "archaeologist" uncovering and reassembling . . . meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr, 1995: 48). Perhaps the common bond is the idea that power is present within all social activity and is asymmetrically distributed. In the simplest of terms, discourses have power and accord certain actors with the power to alter discourse and impose their representations of the world.

The method employed to evaluate the research material uses a comparative discourse approach to explore the main thematic change in BEDs across a 10-year period. The first objective was to establish how business talks about the environment by undertaking a detailed reading and rereading of the material. This also allowed for the identification and comparison of prominent arguments and their narrative forms, important terminology, metaphors and symbols. From this, it is possible to construct a basic coding frame to identify the main themes running through BEDs (Boyatzis, 1998). Obviously, this is a very broad and interpretative application of discourse analysis. Hence, the focus is not so much on using discourse analysis to identify what remains unsaid within the substance of the discourse. Instead, the focal point is on highlighting the manifest thematic continuities and discontinuities and relating these to the background role of extra discursive factors (wider political economic and social events and relations). These play an important role in shaping the textual construction of BEDs (Hook, 2001: 536). In order to address the main research hypotheses it is necessary to use four general subquestions as a way of outlining any change and continuity in the discourse, these are:

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

The intention is to discuss the material in relation to these four areas and link this to the research questions. This involves describing the material as it attempts to represent itself (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 189) and a more probing redescription that considers whether the material is sufficient to sustain or weaken the research questions.

### *Breakdown of the Business Discourse*

#### HOW DOES BUSINESS DEFINE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS?

*Changing Course* (CC) sets out a definition of sustainable development that favours the version proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its report *Our Common Future*. In this text, 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the future without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43). In spite of significant changes in how business utilizes the meanings associated with the definition, this same meaning has remained unaltered. In *Walking the Talk* (WTT), the emphasis is more on working towards improving general business 'sustainability'. I now consider several other changes in the way WTT and CC use sustainable development in their discourse.

CC linked sustainable development with the idea that economic growth is a necessary and contingent condition for realizing positive environmental change. The main proviso is that 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' should characterize future business performance. The World Commission on Environment and Development definition appeals to business, due to the emphasis on prescriptive solutions that are based on fusing environmental and social development with business profit-seeking objectives. WTT illustrates how unproblematic the appropriation and reconfiguration of this definition has been for business. WTT now considers this as a definition that only 'corporations have understood and actively promote' and that governments, NGOs, academics and the public lack an appreciation of the concept. Their comprehension of the concept lags 'well behind business actions' and since Rio 'business has been championing a term that is unknown to most of the world's inhabitants but is universally known amongst environment and development actors and thinkers, where it seems to mildly annoy them all' (Holliday et al., 2002: 12–15).

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

into developing the necessary confidence required to capitalize on market opportunities in developing countries, many of whom are often sceptical of multinational/transnational business motives.

Chapter 1 of *WTT* develops further the thesis that sustainable development is a concept liberated by business. Doing this involves questioning the perceptions and motives of other non-state actors and institutions. Generally, *CC* believes that these groups have shown a clear lack of commitment to the 'appropriate' WCED definition. This includes viewing business as a negative environmental actor and refusing to acknowledge the business conviction that economic growth leads to environmental protection. Yet, there is only a casual retrospective acknowledgement of the limits of business actual commitments to the 1992 definition:

We must admit that sustainable development is still largely unknown among most businesses around the world. Nor do those who know about it necessarily accept it readily or understand what it means for their companies (Holliday et al., 2002: 14–15).

In *CC*, the pro-growth reading of the definition allows business to posit an immutable linkage between economic growth and environmentally oriented sustainable development. Now in *WTT*, the subordination of sustainable development to the business 'bottom line' objectives is now emphasized in much starker terms. 'Some business leaders were drawn to the concept as they realised that not only was it not antigrowth but also it called for some serious economic growth to meet the needs of the current population' (Holliday et al., 2002: 15). In *WTT*, sustainable development is now part of an economic, environmental and social 'triple bottom line'. However, these components do not receive equal ranking. Instead, the economic takes precedence over the environmental. The economic codification of sustainable development suggests that 'nature' is a commodity that can be valued and priced. Additionally, the environmental and social dimensions that now constitute this 'triple bottom line' lack robust definitional criteria.

#### HOW DO THE TWO BOOKS DISCUSS AND FRAME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES?

Within both texts, the thematic 'glue' that organizes the business 'solutions' to environmental exhaustion is the active dissemination of a business-oriented 'vision' of environmental progress. This vision surrounds itself with descriptive and prescriptive assumptions about what kinds of outcomes are feasible and desirable. Generally, *WTT* has developed a much clearer and simplistic discourse on environmental issues and outcomes than its predecessor. In *CC*, there was more emphasis on spelling out the future benefits of progressing towards 'free market environmentalism'. Largely absent was the incorporation of a detailed discussion of how self-interest and economic growth could promote specific issues and outcomes, including corporate accountability,

human rights, poverty eradication and abatements in pollution. Now there is more emphasis on framing environmental issues within action-oriented language that sees corporations working towards delivering 'clearly defined' and 'realistic' objectives. Obviously, these objectives revolve around business-centric 'eco' concerns, such as economizing resources, injecting efficiency into production processes and putting in place managerial systems to allow business adaptability. Despite these differences, the change towards integrating an environmental 'vision' into managerial practice has its foundational roots in *CC*.

In *CC*, the 'issue is not whether the vision looks good on paper, but whether behaviour and outputs change' (Schmidheiny et al., 1992: 85). As such, 'only firm leadership from top management can reconcile the goals of long-term sustainability and short-term profit' (Schmidheiny et al., 1992: 85). Such statements contribute to the self-perception that business elites have the capacity to use a discourse that privileges environmental issues over economic accumulation and that strategic and creative 'leadership' and 'beliefs and values' act as agents of environmental change within business. This mode of argument also embodies a persuasive rhetorical device used by 'enlightened' business elites. The aim is to convince other (consistently unspecified) business elites that their deep opposition to environmental issues is outweighed by the 'win-win' benefits associated with implementing a pro-growth interpretation of sustainable development.

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

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

In contrast, this kind of quasi-apocalyptic imagery (as utilized in *CC*) is absent from *WTT*. Instead, there is a more ‘controlled’ approach to environmental issues. As previously stated, the socioenvironmental dimension remained (at best) marginal to the business ‘case’ presented in *CC*. Now business incorporates a wider discussion of social and ecological issues into the discourse and tends to view these through a ‘win-win’ prism. This growing confidence is reflected in *WTT*, which explicitly links concepts, such as justice, equity, opportunity, morality and social responsibilities, as tangible byproducts of market liberalization, technological change, globalization and growth-oriented forms of business greening. Now sustainable development ‘is partly about social justice’ and is something that ‘involves considerations of justice between generations’ (Holliday et al., 2002: 13). Additionally, in *WTT*, business has now fully acknowledged sustainable development ‘as an important moral concept’ (Holliday et al., 2002: 18) as companies must develop a ‘business model that integrates ethics, social responsibility as well as concern for the environment’ (Holliday et al., 2002: 13, 106).

#### WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS DOES BED CONSIDER?

*CC* identifies a series of environmental trends that set out the main agents and causal processes contributing to a potentially threatening state of affairs for business. One of the ‘the most complex and potentially serious of these threats is a change in climate and in the stability of air circulation systems’ and population growth (Schmidheiny et al., 1992: 1–3). These trends tend to be organized within a broader business-oriented discourse that combines traditional business language (resource inefficiency, threats and stability) with some environmentally oriented language that favours ‘population diagnoses’. This includes concern about the negative impact that a rising population will have on depleting resources and the fact that this may generate wasteful practices that are ‘inefficient and ill planned’. High population growth also leads to climate change and a ‘permanent’ loss of biodiversity. Here population growth pressurizes the environment more than unrestrained economic growth (Thompson and Rayner, 1998: 301–3). *CC* takes these assumptions and questions the ability of existing institutional and organizational arrangements to address environmental issues. Governments lack the administrative and organizational capacity to manage these issues. *CC* also makes numerous linkages between the ‘normal’ operation of business activities and the permanent resolution of environmental issues, such as global warming and poverty. This discourse has little to say about the role of business agency in

harmful and destructive environmental activity. More significant is the ring fencing of increasing consumption as a necessary means for generating solutions to the long-term 'challenge' of 'decoupling' inefficient resource use and environmental degradation.

In *CC*, the linkage between population growth, consumption and environmental degradation appears to indicate a mirroring of the general Rio concerns with the impact of increased consumption on the environment. At this point, it is possible to identify clear indications that a modicum of environmental concern filtered into traditional business discourse. However, these features of the discourse also undermine the impact that such acknowledgements have had on the progressive development of BEDs. Both *CC* and *WTT* frame such concerns within a broader context that suggests increased consumption is a necessary axiom if organized around 'eco-efficient' growth, increases in 'greener' production methods and the promotion of 'responsible' consumption through the price mechanism. The business contribution to the causes of environmental problems is only ever circumstantial and tends to be replaced with easier targets, such as population growth. Additionally, the environmental crisis imagery and rhetoric utilized in *CC* to set out the 'trends' is absent from *WTT*. When *WTT* discusses the trends, these are portrayed as both given and open to change. The reasons for acknowledging environmental issues do not automatically reside in the impact of environmental trends on BEDs (although this may be a factor). A more determining factor is the perception that, despite business efforts, policy action in the regulatory arena is inevitable. Therefore, the best solution is to stay 'one-step ahead' of this by setting in place a range of voluntary and negotiated mechanisms that do not impose legal rules or interfere with trade.

#### IN WHAT WAYS DOES BUSINESS PORTRAY NON-STATE ACTORS IN ITS DISCOURSE?

*CC* initially developed and *WTT* subsequently expanded upon the proposal for increasing channels of communication with groups and institutions traditionally perceived by business as being counterproductive to their economic and political interests. This area has undergone a significant amount of change. Initially, the idea was that outside groups could simply 'help' business – on an ad hoc and strictly limited basis – by contributing towards drawing up 'green action programmes'. We have to be clear that *CC* did not advocate that business relinquish control over any perceived 'deals' with external bodies, nor was there a desire to fully hand over implementation and policy monitoring roles to non-business actors. Rather the emphasis was on ensuring that other groups work within the concepts and policy mechanisms favoured by business. In *CC* (Schmidheiny et al., 1992: 87–8), four essential frames characterized business willingness to acknowledge other 'voices':

1. *Public acceptance of corporate activity*: This emphasizes the continuous requirement of business to normalize the extraction and depletion of resources and the accumulation of capital.
2. *Reduced risk and liability*: Business is aware that the production of goods and services involves developing new ways of externalizing costs. This includes transferring costs onto third parties such as NGOs and regulatory bodies.
3. *Self-regulation rather than legal regulation*: Business favours the use of voluntary mechanisms that provide a general framework for individual companies to interpret and implement. The emphasis is also on ensuring that 'free' trade is not hampered by legal rules-based regulation.
4. *Better policy advice*: The liberalization of public goods (particularly within new markets) establishes different levels of governance between business and other actors.

In *CC*, these four components reflect a very basic range of pro-business benefits and the first three courses of action tended to lack an explicit environmental dimension. Such concerns reflect the self-interested preoccupation of business with legitimating their economic activities. Of particular importance is the constant search to redefine legitimacy and assimilate external pressures on the growth-orientated 'business model'. One technique put forward in *CC* for stabilizing legitimacy is the incorporation of those non-state actors traditionally predisposed to a disparaging view of corporations. More specifically, in *CC* the focal point for integrating 'environmental concern' into BEDs is located within the very general and widely practised business notion that outsiders could provide business with constructive dialogue and better quality environmental knowledge. However, the BEDs' treatment of other environmental actors in *CC* remained at the embryonic stage. The main predicament was the persistence of a perception deficit: there was a discursive shortfall between the given justification for business environmental mobilization, e.g. legitimacy and altruism, and the actual things sought from non-state actors, e.g. help with importing greater 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' into business operations. In *CC*, BED still lacked a sufficient set of justifications for increasing 'dialogue' that did not resort to defending narrow self-interest.

*WTT* develops this move towards 'dialogue' based upon the four criteria outlined in *CC*. However, in *WTT*, there is more emphasis placed on the benefits of business environmental communication with critical voices. To this extent, the 'dialogue' metaphor now encompasses two novel domains. First, there is the utilization of a 'listening' and 'understanding' discourse to facilitate the business move towards working with other actors on environmental issues, and second, attributing a wider range of possible environmental/ecological objectives to the 'dialogue' metaphor. The list of key terms used by *WTT* highlights the main expressions associated with the two dimensions of the dialogue metaphor used (see Table 1).



TABLE I *Key terms associated with business working with non-state actors*

<i>Domain 1</i> <i>'Listening and understanding' discourse</i>	<i>Domain 2</i> <i>'Objectives and outcomes' discourse</i>
'Giving other stakeholders a voice and listening to what they have to say'	'Collaborative partnerships'
'Being prepared to act or react accordingly'	'Joint ownership of difficult situations'
'Acknowledging and valuing different needs and interests'	'Building trust'
'Trade-offs'	'Serious discussion that ultimately leads to real change'
'Synergy'	'Tri-sector approaches between business government and NGOs'
'New ideas'	'Multi-stakeholder engagement'
'Transparency and accountability'	'Stating a company's values and principles'
'Empathy and compromise'	

The emphasis in *WTT* on instigating a 'listening and understanding' discourse and 'action-orientated' set of objectives also encompasses a strong conservative dimension (Austin, 2002; Himmelstein, 1992). This appears in *WTT* (as previously expressed in *CC*) as a desire to maintain business organization and control over the discourses produced through 'stakeholder' interaction. For instance, *WTT* states that dialogue 'does not mean that a company need involve other stakeholders in every decision or that every stakeholder request will be met' (Holliday et al., 2002: 152). The reformulated business approach to dialogue also remains constant in the recognition that concessions are viable strategies *if* business can exercise guardianship over the terms and conditions under which compromises occur. What differs is that while *CC* advocated very 'loose' consultation-based mechanisms for realizing 'stakeholder' incorporation, *WTT* advocates the utilization of different levels and points of contact and a more coordinated effort to produce a general set of arrangements for dealing with non-state actors. Hence, the range of environmental objectives and outcomes flagged by *WTT* includes a broad-based assortment of universal principles and action-orientated terms. All of these are considered as shared and unproblematic concepts and as terms to inspire organizational change in how business responds to other environmental actors.

*WTT* specifically emphasizes the role of business in harnessing the expertise and knowledge within the NGO sector to implement and monitor 'developmental partnerships'. This reasoning appears in both texts and is exemplified by the changing types of case study based evidence utilized. In *CC*, case studies primarily highlighted modifications in commodity production and extraction processes and managerial know-how. By contrast, in *WTT*, case studies encompass additional details of successful business partnerships with the voluntary and NGO sectors. There are also numerous examples of BED

enhancing 'dialogue' and 'promoting' internationally focused corporate environmental social responsibility. Some of these include signing up to global charters, such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and promising an adherence to voluntary global codes of conduct such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines for multinational companies and the Global Sullivan Principles (GSP). The UNGC is the most significant of these mechanisms as this offers business a broad set of social and environmental principles, which will allow individual companies or sectors to formulate their own sustainable development strategies. Additionally, closer collaboration between business and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also legitimates the application of global standards derived from voluntary case-by-case orientated approaches.

*WTT* favours business applying globally focused voluntary initiatives, in part to harmonize the environmental aspects of their operations by providing a framework of general principles and declarations that business can use across national boundaries. This is an area of substantive change. In *CC*, there was little indication that business was willing to sign up to globally focused codes and charters or commitments to implement environmental and social concerns into 'business models'. *WTT* appreciates that such pledges represent important changes in how business will deliver its environmental discourse. First, these initiatives require a degree of centralized and coordinated reporting (a prime function of the WBCSD). Second, broadening the discourse to include a listening and understanding dimension exposes companies to greater criticism if they fail to implement their public obligations. The wide range of universal objectives and outcomes postulated in the 'listening and understanding' discourse also permits business to put forward these measures as substantive evidence of actual environmental commitments.

Another noteworthy feature of the discourse used to portray non-state actors is the retention of market metaphors and the use of these to realign NGOs within economized relations. An interesting discursive feature of the *WTT* discourse is that NGOs have now moved closer to business ideas and values, rather than vice versa. Here business is at the same time a protagonist wanting to 'reach out', and an agent capable of instigating profound environmental change. We can identify these themes in a short quote from *WTT*:

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

## *Discussion*

The first question considered suggested that the intensity of public commitment and concern among business elites and their lobbying groups for

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

Notable change has also occurred in business perceptions of the strategic role of non-state actors. Epitomizing this area of change was the identification of a set of 'action' oriented and 'listening and understanding' discourses, which broadly emphasized the desire to 'value' and ultimately 'work with' a broad church of non-state actors. To this extent, there has been a change in BEDs towards advocating non-economistic forms of environmentally oriented disclosure, transparency and accountability. Business groups these changes under the rubric of corporate environmental social responsibility.

Another interesting area of change is in the transformation of the environment from a policy problem into a managerial challenge. Therefore, the *WTT* discourse contains a wider range of environmental agents, processes and outcomes and a substantive array of environmental rhetoric and symbols. The use of apocalyptic imagery, and with this the idea that irreversible environmental changes could cause earth-threatening disaster, has been replaced. Taking its place is an emphasis on harnessing the reflexive abilities of elites to project an enlightened self-interest into business practice, the need to consider the environment as a business opportunity to increase market share, legitimate their general business activities and anticipate regulatory activities. This is apparent in the *WTT* discourse and the continuous linkages made between legitimization and the need to harness short-term profitability with long-term business sustainability.

The second question suggested that the gradual acknowledgement of the

environment as an international policy problem has forced some multinational/transnational companies to articulate and coordinate its discourse at a more generic anticipatory level. There appears to be sufficient grounds to assert that business is attempting to present a unified and coherent international environmental discourse. Certainly, sector differentiation, numerous operating contexts and variable state–business relationships all remain important. Yet, the material in the texts considered here also highlighted serious endeavours by a globally focused business-lobbying group to define sustainable development across different company sectors and export the business interpretation of the concept across geographic borders.<sup>7</sup> Yet, this does not encompass all of the discourse, as reaction still plays a significant role. Generally, greater cohesion has occurred around the perception among international business that they need to position companies as a capable and concerned environmental agent.

Preliminary results of other documents produced by business for the Rio and Johannesburg summits also confirm that the trends and themes identified in the two books are similar to those produced by other business-lobbying associations and individual companies. This suggests that business has developed a specific discourse for Earth Summits that shares some basic commonalities. At the international level, a cross-section of companies are heading towards developing a more coherent form of ‘global’ public environmental discourse that also appears to successfully paper over some of the significant differences within the views of the business community as a whole. This does not mean that business will automatically use the same discourse at other policy-making forums (e.g. the UN conference of the parties) or that all business will automatically subscribe to its central tenets. Rather, BEDs now contain a set of generic themes that help push sustainable development towards a distinctively pro-business direction.

Cohesion and strategic thinking are also evident in the disproportionate concern with linking environmental protection with ‘normal’ business activities (e.g. resource extraction, profitability and market capture). Further cohesiveness has been added by business producing what they believe to be an authoritative set of concepts, terminology and policies for talking about the environment. This includes concepts such as eco-efficiency, using the terminology of a triple bottom line of economic social and environmental growth, and policies that favour liberalization and voluntary self-regulation. These also help embed the general belief among business elites that they can retain guardianship and control over the environment. The latter can be found in the emphasis on implementing different forms of corporate environmental social responsibility, which would include companies making controlled disclosures of environmental information, promoting companies’ ‘ecological values and beliefs’ and a willingness to work with non-business groups. The ‘listening and understanding’ discourse used to engage with other non-state actors also suggests a greater degree of strategy. Business constructs the

'partnership arrangements' that emerge from this discourse that views other groups as willingly coalescing around business perspectives on the environment. A part of this has to involve establishing the appearance of dedicated action. With this in mind, international business is running parallel corporatist arrangements with NGOs and the UN (Arts, 2002; Bendell, 2000; Murphy and Bendell, 1999).

Transferring and maintaining BED into a more cohesive, internationalized form relies on business shaping its discourse in reaction to perceived threats. Therefore, the shift towards utilizing a generic environmental discourse could initially occur within the reactive dimension. The gradual incorporation of environmental and social dimensions into BEDs reflected a perceived inadequacy within business circles of earlier simplistic linkages between sustainable development and economic growth. Consequently, established meanings available to business (those from the economic domain) were insufficient for managing the gradual social institutionalization of environmental issues. However, equally important is the changing context of business discourse. Generally, the structural power of business has increased since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Clapp, 2003; Rowlands, 2001). Reflecting this is the lack of extensive environmental controls imposed on business and the preferential treatment of business at both summits (Beder, 1997; Bruno and Karliner, 2002; Caldwell, 2000; Gillespie, 2001). These developments have provided a relatively safe platform for organizations such as the WBCSD to extend the property rights discourse into other areas.

The modification of BEDs towards the idea of using proactive social and environmental 'dialogue' suggests that the more business 'reacts' to environmentalism the more measured and considered is its discourse. This is evident in the increased importance placed on using promotional and lobbying activities that contain a prescriptive message. This helps ensure that business preferences enter international policy formation processes at an early stage. Potentially, this may indicate the opening up of business discourse to other possibilities and courses of action, resulting in a softening of the deeply economic pricing and property rights dimensions. This is also the broad argument put forward by mainstream advocates of business greening (see Marsden, 2000; Piasecki, 1995; Prakash, 2000), the environmental 'management gurus' (see Elkington, 1999; Hawken, 1993), the ecological modernization literature (see Hajer, 1997; Mol, 2000) and even some of the 'critical literature' (see Livesey, 2002; Livesey and Kearins, 2002). All of this literature shares the contradictory business assumption that the same processes that cause environmental degradation (globalization, technology, growth) can also 'save' the global environment (Finger and Kilcoyne, 1997).

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## Conclusion

This article formulated two hypotheses. The first considered whether the growing intensity of public commitment and concern among international business has been matched by a progressive rise in environmental symbols, imagery, rhetoric and concepts within their discourse. The empirical material consisted of two books that detailed the environmental position of companies affiliated with the international business environmental lobbying group the WBCSD. These were produced, respectively, for the 1992 Rio and the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summits. A discourse reading of the two books suggests that there is support for this hypothesis. Indicating this is the emphasis placed on a property rights discourse, which organized and dominated the discussion of ecological problems within both books. This is a master discourse that proposes the transfer of neoliberal policy tools into the international environmental policy arena. Some of the policy tools this encompasses are market liberalization, public–private partnerships and using voluntary approaches to environmental policy. Bolstering this was the assumption in both books that sustainable development could only be realized through economic growth and that this has to be organized around the efficient and effective management of resources.

In addition, further support for the first hypothesis was evident in the way that the 1992 book, *Changing Course*, portrayed environmental problems. This book pointed towards the prospect of an impending ecological disaster for business and society. Yet in the 2002 book, *Walking the Talk*, these negative trends are talked about as a set of manageable ‘dilemmas’ and ‘challenges’. However, there has not been a complete decline in the use of environmental images, rhetoric and symbols. Instead, comparing the two books indicates that what may have actually altered is how business manipulates discourse. Therefore, this article also found that *WTT* attributes a wider range of environmental and social outcomes to property rights and economic growth. This book was much bolder in its claims of eradicating poverty and treating nature as an equal business ‘partner’. It is also worth remembering that increases in the use of such rhetoric often lack supporting empirical evidence that goes beyond unsubstantiated and anecdotal ‘best practice’ case studies.

The second hypothesis suggested global environmental summits have compelled multinational/transnational companies to rearticulate and coordinate their BED at a more generic anticipatory level. The data suggested that there is only partial support for this proposition. The most significant finding supporting this hypothesis was how the two books diverged on their views on non-state actors and their role in the international environmental policy arena. In *CC*, there was little emphasis on developing strategies for ‘reaching out’ to these groups. Instead, there was more of a tactical emphasis on using such groups to gain legitimacy. In *WTT*, there is more enthusiasm about developing strategies for reaching an accommodation with non-state actors

(particularly NGOs) and institutions (especially the UN). I have labelled this as a 'listening and understanding discourse'. This would indicate a more anticipatory element to BEDs. It is more beneficial for business to incorporate some of these actors' concerns as a viable means of securing and reproducing legitimacy. Therefore, *WTT* places more emphasis on promoting the social aspects of business activities than *CC*. It is also possible to suggest that business environmental discourses are becoming more generic. Demonstrable areas of continuity are required as evidence of such a trend and this was identified in the fixed definition of sustainable development. Particularly important are the various ways that this is used to frame and construct the different types of responses favoured by business. *CC* initially defined the concept as favouring economic growth and property rights and *WTT* has simply continued this trend.

Finally, what do these findings tell us about the general development of BED? One interesting implication is that international business may be developing transboundary environmental discourses. Therefore, more theoretical work should focus on whether or not the generic set of concepts associated with the property rights discourse is sufficient to transcend regional and sector differences and regulatory styles. In essence, this debate revolves around asking whether BEDs are as fluid and dialogically coherent as their pro-globalization protagonists believe and anti-globalization critics claim. Also requiring more sustained empirical investigation is the apparent shift in the international BED from a traditionally antagonistic, defensive and reactive approach towards a more transparent and pragmatic approach. One possible area of investigation opened up by this exploratory research is the extent that these 'new' proactive approaches merely mask traditional business antagonisms towards ecological issues. This also implies that these may be discourses built up to justify minimal and superficial change.

#### NOTES

1. Global earth summitry also helped place corporate activities on the global agenda. This was reflected in the (albeit voluntary) United Nations Code of Conduct of Transnational Corporations produced by the UN Centre for Transnational Corporations (United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, 1988). Although this code took 16 years to develop, it was abandoned and the department closed down in 1992. Bruno and Karliner (2002: 24–7) consider this as evidence of the structural power of corporations.
2. Cairncross (2000: 167) describes Schmidheiny as the 'leader of the green-business movement'.
3. In 1995, the BCSD merged with the ICC-sponsored World Industry Council for the Environment (WICE) and became the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). To all intents and purposes the WBCSD is now a subsidiary project of the ICC.
4. Although the WBCSD is still a relatively small group, dominated by North American, European and Asian (particularly Japanese) companies, it boasts a

multi-sector membership that encompasses some high-profile companies. Since the Johannesburg summit, companies from other regions such as Latin American, Africa and Oceania are also signing up to the WBCSD. These include the US companies AT&T, Cargill, Chevron Texaco, CH2MHill, Coca Cola, Dow Chemicals, DuPont, Eastman Kodak, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, International Paper, Johnson & Johnson, Monsanto, Pfizer, Proctor & Gamble, 3M corporation, Unocal and Xerox. Some of the European members include Aventis, BASF, Bayer, BP, Deutsche Bank, KPMG, Michelin, Novartis, Rio Tinto, Royal Dutch/Shell group, Renault, Unilever and Volkswagen. Some of the Asian members include Mitsubishi corporation, Nissan Motor, Samsung Electronics and Sony. A full list is obtainable from <http://www.wbcsd.ch/> 'About the WBCSD'.

5. In private, there were disagreements over the seemingly conciliatory tone made towards NGOs and fears that business would be locked into compulsory environmental policies.
6. Generally, US companies are portrayed as environmental laggards who harbour a deep-rooted conservatism towards social and environmental issues (Switzer, 1997). However, research by Levy and Newell (2000) suggests that the gap between the long-term environmental strategies of some US and European companies is narrowing.
7. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/DTIE, 2002) asked 22 industry sectors to produce reports that highlighted their achievements in implementing sustainable development since the 1992 Rio summit. All of these reports expressed a preference for global codes and voluntary mechanisms produced by groups such as the WBCSD and the ICC.

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## RÉSUMÉ

*Le Discours du Privé International sur l'Environnement,  
Comment a-t-il Changé dans la Dernière Décennie?*

Un groupe de discours souvent négligés dans l'analyse de la politique internationale sur l'environnement est celui du privé. Si l'on compare deux événements clés de la politique internationale sur l'environnement, voire le Sommet de la Terre de 1992 à Rio, et le Sommet de la Terre de 2002, à Johannesburg, on aura une opportunité inégalable pour examiner les changements du discours du privé au fil du temps. Ce document analyse et compare d'une façon systématique le discours dans deux livres rédigés pour chaque sommet sur les rapports entre le privé et l'environnement, voire *Changing Course (Changement de route)* (1992) et *Walking the Talk (Tenir la promesse)* (2002). Ces deux publications exposent le point de vue du secteur privé international. Une certaine continuité est présente puisque le discours du privé essaye de cacher son point de vue antagonique aux questions de l'environnement. Les changements les plus

importants incluent une plus grande volonté pour arriver à une entente avec les organisations non gouvernementales de l'environnement, ainsi que le désir d'abandonner le rôle traditionnellement défensif et réactif du privé. Le privé donc adopte une approche proactive dans ses efforts de formuler l'agenda international sur l'environnement. Le document présenté analyse la signification de ces résultats pour mieux comprendre le rôle de l'environnement dans le privé d'une société mondialisée.

#### RESUMEN

### *¿Cómo Ha Cambiado el Discurso Internacional del Sector Privado sobre el Medio Ambiente Durante la Última Década?*

Un grupo de discursos por lo general desatendido en el estudio de la política internacional sobre el medio ambiente es el discurso de los negocios. Si se comparan dos eventos clave en la política internacional de medio ambiente, la Cumbre de la Tierra 1992 realizada en Río y la Cumbre de la Tierra 2002 realizada en Johannesburgo, obtenemos una excelente oportunidad para examinar el cambio de los discursos de negocios con el paso del tiempo. El presente documento analiza y compara sistemáticamente el discurso de dos libros escritos para cada cumbre relacionados al medio ambiente y al sector privado: *Changing Course (Cambiando el rumbo)* (1992) y *Walking the Talk (Cumpliendo lo prometido)* (2002). Ambos libros representan el punto de vista del sector privado internacional. La comparación de ambos textos revela una continuidad pero también cambios sustanciales. Un área de continuidad es que los discursos del sector privado referentes al medio ambiente intentan ocultar un punto de vista antagónico sobre los asuntos medio ambientales. Los cambios sustanciales incluyen una mayor voluntad para llegar a un acuerdo con las organizaciones no gubernamentales dedicadas al medio ambiente y un deseo de superar el tradicional papel defensivo y reactivo que desempeña. Para ello, adopta un enfoque proactivo para darle forma a la agenda internacional sobre medio ambiente. El presente material estudia el significado de estos hallazgos para comprender el papel que desempeña el medio ambiente en el sector privado dentro de una sociedad globalizada.

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