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GOVERNING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT: EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT AMBASSADORS AND THE POST- POLITICAL GREEN TRANSITION**

Abstract. The article critically examines European Climate Pact Ambassadors as a concrete mechanism launched by the European Commission as part of the European Green Deal framework. Through an analytical Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach and discursive analysis of 839 ambassador profiles, the study investigates two key aspects. First, it demonstrates how the ambassadorship does not merely function as a support tool, but as a mechanism of power that exercises governance through a post-political form. Second, the research reveals how the Ambassadors construct environmental and climate problem-solution frameworks that reinforce neoliberal economic rationalities, depoliticise the green transition, and systematically constrain alternative possibilities for ecological action.

Keywords: European Climate Pact, ambassadors, eco-governmentality, discourse, post-politics.

INTRODUCTION

Even though the European Union's green agenda may appear shaken and destabilised by the current geopolitical constellations, which are often used to justify a realignment toward economic competitiveness, the heightened security discourse, and increased militarisation, it nonetheless remains a key strategic framework for the European continent's continued development. A case in point is Ursula von der Leyen's reaffirmation of this commitment in the European Commission's recently published political guidelines for 2024 to 2029, namely: "We must and will continue to pursue the objectives set out in the European Green Deal" (von der Leyen 2024, 8).

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The European Green Deal was presented by the European Commission in December 2019 as a ground-breaking strategic framework aimed at delivering several transformations in the European space, with the central objective of creating a climate-neutral EU economy by 2050 while simultaneously driving economic growth and improving social well-being (European Commission 2019). At the outset, the Green Deal envisaged transformations in numerous areas through a set of policies and measures intended to restructure the economy and various industries to achieve environmental goals. As Samper, Schockling and Islar (2021, 8) critically assess, the Deal must be recognised as an effort to consolidate “the extension of the neoliberal hegemonic formation”, not only because it reinforces the dominance of market logic in addressing environmental and climate issues, but because it represents a continuous attempt to reconcile diverse political, economic and social values with environmental concerns. By building a consensus that this is a “just transition” to a more sustainable and resilient economy (European Commission 2019), a governing field is being formed on the European level “to assuage risks and devise roadmaps for the future” (Molek-Kozakowska 2024, 185).

As a manifestation and materialisation of the idea to democratise and promote collective ownership of the European Green Deal, the European Commission launched the European Climate Pact along with a call to “empower citizens for a greener Europe” (European Commission 2020). Thus, since its inception, the Green Deal has placed strong emphasis on public participation. It has positioned citizens’ participation as both a response to the growing significance and visibility of environmental concerns among the European population and an active strategy to enhance ecological awareness. Perhaps the most prominent and concrete mechanisms in place today are European Climate Pact ambassadors as a select group of individuals with diverse backgrounds coming from, for instance, NGOs, businesses, and local authorities who “inform, inspire and support climate policy and action in their communities and networks” (European Union 2025b).

The Ambassadors as well as the whole European Climate Pact framework exemplify what some scholars refer to as an expanding governance apparatus mobilised in the name of environmental sustainability and climate action (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007; 2015). This development is symptomatic of a broader dispersal of power, exercised and negotiated through a “huge diversity” of actors, networks and institutional configurations (Marquardt 2017, 167). Governance in this context operates via an assemblage of knowledge forms, discourses, practices, technological in(ter)ventions and subjectivities, where each contributes to the construction of heterogeneous issues like environmental concerns and dominant climate mitigation imperatives (Machen and Nost 2021; Oels 2005).

Eco-governmentality is one of the most insightful critical analytical approaches for interrogating these emerging forms of power (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007; Rutherford 2007; Valdivia 2015; Fletcher and Cortes-Vazquez 2020). Building on Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality, it holds a dual

meaning. On one hand, it refers to the operations of power – how power is exercised within and through nature-society relations. It examines the way environmental governance is enacted by way of an assemblage of techniques, institutions, and knowledge systems that mediate, shape and manage human interactions with the natural world. In turn, eco-governmentality provides an analytical framework, analytics of power, that interrogates how ‘the environment’ has been constituted as a rationality of rule (Luke 1995). Eco-governmentality critically examines how environmental issues are problematised and governed through (scientific) knowledge dispositions, discursive formations, institutional mechanisms, and technologies of power.

As highlighted just above, eco-governmentality focuses on problematisations of environmental and climate issues, which needs a little more explanation. Governing mechanisms are not neutral and are instead deeply embedded in historically and politically contingent problematisations – the way specific socio-environmental issues are framed as problems requiring intervention (Bacchi 2023). The process entailed not only responds to existing problems; instead, it actively constructs the conditions in which certain issues become governable (Foucault 2011; Deacon 2000). By structuring the field of possible solutions, eco-governmentality delineates what is permissible, desirable and meaningful in environmental governance while simultaneously marginalising alternative perspectives or systemic critiques.

The goal of this paper is to critically examine how the European Climate Pact Ambassadorship functions as a governing mechanism and a discursive framework that enables, co-constitutes and promotes specific forms of climate action, while reinforcing dominant narratives of the green transition and ecological solutions fundamentally tied to the European Green Deal. Two key aspects of the Climate Pact Ambassadorship are addressed via the lens of eco-governmentality.

The first aspect concerns the exercise of power through problematisation. It is contended here that the ambassadorship is not simply a mechanism designed to legitimise the green transition or foster public engagement, but profoundly and fundamentally a mechanism operating as a form of institutionalised post-politics. Following Swyngedouw’s (2010b; 2019; Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014) (drawing, among others, from Mouffe and Rancière) conceptualisation of the post-political condition, we argue that ambassadorship reflects a consensus-oriented, technocratic and expert-driven mode of climate and environmental governance. In this post-political framework, the space for contestation, and alternative imaginaries of green solutions and transition, is systematically narrowed.

The second aspect of the analysis pertains to the question of which specific environmental and climate problems and solutions in the green transition Climate Pact Ambassadors articulate and address. Employing a Foucauldian discursive analysis, an attempt is made to identify and critically reflect on how these issues and solutions are framed and discursively constructed in ways that both reflect and support the reproduction of neoliberal economic rationality within

the green transition framework of the European Green Deal. Another aim is to show that these solutions function within a post-political articulation of green governance: they contribute to a structured consensus on environmental measures, delineating the boundaries of what is permissible while silencing alternative possibilities.

The theoretical-methodological framework is elaborated in the following, integrating eco-governmentality as an analytical lens with discourse analysis to examine European Climate Pact Ambassadors. The first section locates the European Green Deal and Climate Pact within their broader economic-socio-political and institutional contexts. The next section explores how European Climate Pact ambassadorship is arranged as a governmental mechanism, functioning as post-political form of governmentality, shaping participation and other forms of activities through consensus-building, technocratic solutions, and depoliticised engagement. In the final analytical section, discourse analysis is used to examine the key problem-solution nexuses articulated by Climate Pact Ambassadors.

ECO-GOVERNMENTALITY, POST-POLITICS, AND DISCOURSE: A FOUCAULTIAN FRAMEWORK

Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality as part of his broader investigation into the mechanisms by which power operates in modern societies. He most extensively developed it in three of his lecture series: *Society Must Be Defended* (1975–1976) (Foucault 2003), *Security, Territory and Population* (1977–1978) (Foucault 2009), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978–1979) (Foucault 2008). Applying genealogical methodology, which could be summarised here as a historical/philosophical practice of tracing contingent discursive and institutional regimes, Foucault delineates a shift from sovereign power, rooted in territorial domination and the right to take life or allow to live, toward a diffuse exercise of power oriented to managing populations.

Foucault labels this transformation the “governmentalization” of the state (Foucault 2009, 109; Dean 2010, 122). Rather than relying primarily on coercive or juridical forms and formats, this emergent mode of power is aimed at shaping and directing individual and collective behaviours by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of subjects. As Foucault theorises it, governmentality is a modality of power that operates through and for the population, targeting not simply individuals but the overall biological, economic and social processes that constitute them as a governed collectivity (Foucault 2009, 70–71). Dean (2010, 18) encapsulates this idea when stating that government comprises any “more or less calculated and rational activity” undertaken by a multitude of authorities, employing various techniques and knowledges to regulate conduct. The “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 2001, 341) thus denotes the way power permeates institutions, discourses, and everyday practices in a diffuse, networked and capillary manner. Governmentality should therefore

be understood not as a monolithic or top-down apparatus but as an interplay of multiple elements, including traditional juridical frameworks and more dispersed technologies of power, whose effects both stem from and simultaneously target collective and individual levels.

For our purposes, it is vital to stress that Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality operates in a dual register. Namely, it is both a modality of power and an analytical framework for critically interrogating the rationalities and techniques by which power permeates modern societies. As scholars like Dean (2010) and Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke (2011) show, this dualism allows governmentality studies to transcend the prevailing traditional descriptions of governance structures, instead interrogating, for example, the epistemic and normative presuppositions and regimes which render certain forms of governing thinkable and actionable. By foregrounding the *how* of power, along with its mechanisms, logics and contingencies, governmentality as analytics exposes the interplay of political rationality (the conceptual frameworks justifying the exercise of power) and political technology (the instruments that enact it).

This perspective proves particularly useful and analytically productive when applied to contemporary environmental and climate issues and concerns. Namely, Foucault (2003; 2009) also saw governmentality as being closely interwoven with what he called biopower (Erlenbusch-Anderson 2020). By situating the population as the primary target of government, biopower shifts the focus from individualised bodies to aggregated biological processes: birth rates, disease prevalence, resource consumption. In this sense, governmentality's analytical scope expands beyond human collectivities to encompass the governance of the natural environment, climate systems, and the broader entanglements of society–nature relations.

Broadly speaking, eco-governmentality (Luke 1995; Rutherford 2007; Valdivia 2015; Zevnik Tomazin 2025), as an extension of Foucault's analytics, views the environment as both a site and instrument of governing, directing attention to how certain ecological imperatives are enmeshed within broader matrices of power. This provides a starting insight that environmental concerns are not simply technical or ethical issues but are profoundly shaped by the rationalities and technologies that make them legible as objects of intervention. From a Foucauldian perspective, these expansions and materialisations of power in the human–environment relationship prove especially significant. By tracing how various knowledge systems and techniques converge to govern ecological as well as social domains, such an analytical framework allows for a critical perspective on the heterogeneity of the elements (discourses, institutions, practices, natural processes) encompassed by governmental rationality (Luke 1995; Wang 2015).

This means we may argue that a key analytical focus, particularly in the context of society–nature interactions, is examining how the apparatus of power, including discourses, forms of knowledge, mechanisms, technologies, and reflective practices, emerges and takes shape (Valdivia 2015). Here, Foucault's

(1997) concept of “problematization” offers a critical method for illuminating these processes, understood as the “development of domains of acts, practices, and thoughts” (Foucault 1997, 114), that define specific issues and prescribe practical modes of intervention. In this framework, environmental and climate challenges, for instance, do not manifest as purely objective phenomena and instead are constituted as governable terrains through policy frameworks, expert evaluations, and targeted discursive formations. What one must also bear in mind is that these problematisations are also anchored in what Dean (2010, 38) calls “particular regimes of practices of government”, each characterised by distinct techniques, languages, analytical schemas, evaluative grids, and bodies of expertise. Such regimes effectively transform ecological concerns into domains amenable to governance, shaping both how societies conceptualise environmental predicaments, and the strategies deployed to address them.

Now, the question is, if we adhere to eco-governmentality’s focus on the *how* of the government, in which way is power exercised? The concept of post-politics, as theorised by scholars like Jacques Rancière (1999) and Chantal Mouffe (2005), and critically applied to environmental governance by Erik Swyngedouw (2011a; see also Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014), provides an additional lens here for interrogating the strategies and solutions propounded within contemporary ecological and climate governance. At its core, post-politics denotes a mode of governance that evacuates, expels, and shies away from the political proper, understood as a space of antagonism, dissensus, and transformative possibility, by relegating contentious issues to the realm of techno-managerial consensus (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014). Swyngedouw (2010b) argues that under a neo-liberal hegemony crises like climate change are discursively constructed as existential threats demanding urgent yet depoliticised action, thereby shutting down debates about alternative socio-economic systems. This post-political framework hinges on the “perceived inevitability of capitalism and a market economy as the basic organisational structure of the social and economic order, for which there is no alternative” (Swyngedouw 2010a, 215). In this schema, environmental governance becomes a project of crisis management more than systemic transformation, reinforcing existing power structures under the guise of ecological necessity. Instead of a space where mixed viewpoints are allowed and produced, what we have is a framework in which issues such as climate change and resource depletion are recast as technocratic challenges to be managed by experts, with participatory processes confined to narrowly predetermined outcomes (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014).

These critical insights and approach intersect with Foucault’s (eco-)governmentality as analytics (Blühdorn 2014). Post-political eco-governmentality operates by framing, for example climate change, as a problem so vast and complex that it appears to necessitate apolitical, expert-driven solutions. Political contestation is supplanted through the production of specific knowledges, discourses and the setting up of concrete programmes, mechanisms and more

or less institutionalised agencies, by participatory rituals (like, for instance, stakeholder consultations, citizens' assemblies) that simulate inclusivity while circumscribing outcomes within preordained neoliberal parameters (Taskale 2016). This post-political rationality is among others sustained through what Foucault termed regimes of truth (Foucault 1977): the amalgamation of expert knowledge, institutional practices, and discursive norms that naturalise specific problematisations and establish knowable objects to be managed, controlled, directed, framed and governed.

The analysis proceeds by applying Foucauldian analytic premises to these observations, using them as a basis for critical inquiry into the configuration of power on the EU level. In particular, European Climate Pact Ambassadors are interpreted as a specific mechanism of what may be called post-political eco-governmentality.

As mentioned, not only established agencies, institutions and practices, but also concrete knowledges and discourses are part and parcel of the exercise of power in modern contexts. Therefore, the analysis of discourse (Cheek 2008; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017) must be seen as a central methodological manoeuvre in eco-governmentality as an analytical strategy (Pey and Islam 2017). To engage with Foucault's discursive analytics is to recognise that environmental governance operates not just through more or less visible and coherent legal instruments and policies that supposedly capture, address and resolve objectively given issues, but through the production of truth – regimes of knowledge, language, and subjectivity that render certain realities legible and actionable while limiting or even preventing others. Applying such a Foucauldian discursive framework aims at the critical interrogation of the circulation of narratives, terminologies and concepts act to limit which forms of 'green' intervention appear legitimate, urgent or feasible (Jäger and Maier 2015). These discourses do not simply exist alongside practical measures; they actively shape how environmental problems are defined, whose voices are recognised, legitimate and valued which strategies are held up as rational or inevitable.

We contend that as nodal actors on various levels within the green regime, European Climate Pact Ambassadors exemplify how power circulates by way of discursive formations that establish, co-construct and naturalise specific problem-solution frameworks, thereby influencing what is seen as ecologically possible. A central aim of the present analysis is to dissect the statements, terminologies and concepts used by the Ambassadors, especially as regards how potential actions are framed and directed. The Ambassadors themselves have a pivotal role in this process: they publicly articulate (and thereby help constitute) both the environmental issues deemed worthy of attention and the corresponding solutions that appear to be the most reasonable or effective. In this process of discursive articulation, climate-oriented problems are turned into areas of policy intervention, reinforcing certain responses while sidelining alternative understandings or approaches (see Vodovnik 2025).

To extend this inquiry to how post-political governmentality materialises in the European Climate Pact, we assembled a dataset derived from self-presentations of the Pact's Ambassadors. The dataset was systematically collected from the European Commission's official repository of Ambassador profiles (European Union 2024), retrieved on 7 September 2024. This corpus comprises 839 entries, each documenting an Ambassador's self-described responsibilities, activities and thematic focus. The dataset includes metadata such as names, nationalities, and institutional affiliations.

Following the data collection, the methodology entailed a systematic review and close reading of each Ambassador's self-presentation. The goal was not simply to discern the content of their messages but the ways in which problems are defined, solutions proposed, and specific terms of engagement laid out. In line with the approach proposed by Thoma (2017, 26–27) and Hajer (2006), focus was given to heuristic questions concerning four core dimensions of discourse: (1) the constitution of each issue/topic; (2) the explanations provided; (3) the categorisations employed; and (4) the solutions proposed to the articulated problems. By critically interrogating and interpreting these dimensions, we analysed how the Ambassadors' self-presentations set the boundaries of climate and environmental issues, assign responsibility or urgency, and act to support particular solutions.

THE GREEN DEAL AND THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT

To fully grasp the way the European Climate Pact Ambassadors mechanism functions as a specific enactment of eco-governmentality on the European level, it is necessary to address, at least briefly, the broader socio-political and economic regimes that both enable and sustain such mechanisms while simultaneously relying on them for their own constitution. As Dean (2010, 32) argues, Foucauldian analytics of government seeks to “identify the emergence of that regime, examine the multiple sources of the elements that constitute it, and follow the diverse processes and relations by which these elements are assembled into relatively stable forms of organization and institutional practice”.

The European Green Deal (European Commission 2019) is the outcome of a long historical interplay of political, economic and cultural contexts, also emerging in response to various crises (see also Vrečko Ilc 2025) and as part of an search to justify continuation of the paradigm of constant growth and reproduction inherent to the capitalist mode of production. To point out just a few among numerous illustrative episodes: the initial, sporadic scientific, civil society, and political articulations of awareness concerning the broader dimensions of environmental degradation in the 1960s and 1970s (Carson 1962; Pruitt 2023) were followed by the breakthrough and imposition of the sustainable development concept (Brundtland 1985), and establishment of a more robust, globally oriented framework for governing environmental and climate matters (United Nations 1992).

On the European level, the formation of environmental and climate governance began soon after the end of the Second World War, although was initially characterised by sporadic and unsystematic developments (Delreux and Happaerts 2016; see also Toplak 2025). Crucially, these developments should be viewed as integral parts of the establishing of a broader power regime on the European level (Banjac and Pušnik 2025). A significant continuous framework consolidating environmental discourses and practices on the European level since World War II has been the European Environment Action Programmes (Hey 2007). From our perspective, these programmes, first adopted in 1973 and with eight currently in force, are integral source of issues being labelled a problem. They serve as strategic guidelines for defining programmatic foundations, constructing knowledge, and organising the concrete governance mechanisms by which European societies produce, manage, control, steer and ‘resolve’ environmental issues (Banjac and Pušnik 2025).

Further, the more immediate formative conditions which shaped the preparation, adoption and implementation of the European Green Deal and European Climate Pact can be traced and taken into account. One major influence was earlier attempts to establish a green “New Deal” as a strategic policy framework in certain countries, notably the United States and the United Kingdom (Bloomfield and Steward 2020, 772). These initiatives were directly inspired by the historical legacy of the original “New Deal” under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which aimed to address economic crises through large-scale public investment and social reforms.

Another broader contextual factor is the rise of the “green growth” discourse (OECD 2011; Wanner 2015). Although already present in earlier European environmental policies, the green growth discourse was explicitly defined as the conceptual framework of the European Green Deal. It gained particular momentum in the European Union during the global financial and European debt crises, emerging partly in response to the perceived shortcomings of the Lisbon Treaty (European Council 2000; Benson and Adelle 2012) and the sustainable development agenda associated with it (European Commission 2001). Initially promoted by international organisations like the United Nations, OECD, and World Bank, this discourse was later adopted by the European Union (Jacobs 2013, 197). The OECD (2011) especially played a vital role in consolidating green growth within the dominant capitalist frameworks (Wanner 2015).

Another critical factor enabling the European Green Deal was the continued accumulation of scientific evidence on climate change (Haas, Syrovatka, and Jürgen 2022, 248), which has strengthened the perception that decarbonisation is urgently required and provided a scientific foundation for policy measures on different (also European) levels. At the same time, it is essential to critically acknowledge that civil society collectives, particularly NGOs and movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion, have consistently emphasised the need for ambitious policy measures on both national and European

levels (Blühdorn and Deflorian 2021, 259). It was also, at least in part, a response to such civil society pressure that the European Green Deal was articulated as an answer to the ever greater calls by the public for a far-reaching strategic framework.

Ursula von der Leyen first announced the European Green Deal as a central component of her presidential candidacy programme (von der Leyen 2019), presenting it in more detail to the European Parliament in July 2019. Since its inception, the Green Deal was articulated as both a strategic framework and an urgent call to action aimed at engaging all societal sectors and stakeholders. The Commission Communication (2019), which outlines the Green Deal's elements and framework, identifies several core objectives, either explicitly stated or implicitly embedded in the text. From our perspective, an important overarching goal of the European Green Deal is to realise a specific vision of transformation, one that stresses technological innovation, economic restructuring, and societal change. In this, we observe the strategic architecture of an approach designed to reshape, and thereby govern, Europe's economic and social systems in alignment with and in the name of ecological imperatives. A second key objective is the pursuit of decoupling "economic growth from resource use" (European Commission 2019). Importantly, this decoupling does not signify a departure from the growth paradigm. Instead, it reflects an attempt to reconcile continued economic expansion with the urgent need to address environmental and climate challenges. In this sense, the European Green Deal seeks to redefine growth, embedding it within the constraints of planetary boundaries while maintaining a commitment to economic progress (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020).

The European Green Deal strategically addresses multiple domains, including energy efficiency, the circular economy, resource-efficient construction and renovation, sustainable and smart mobility, transformation of the food system, biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction (European Commission 2019). Given the wide range of domains the Deal intends to address, it functions as both a formal legal framework and a specific rationality, deploying micro-political strategies aimed at managing what may be called the "climate change aggregate" (Banjac and Pušnik 2025, 215). This aggregate encompasses physical environmental resources, economic structures such as capital and market mechanisms, technological developments, and diverse social actors and segments of the European population, from consumers to entrepreneurs.

Turning attention now specifically to the European population's envisioned role in contributing to the European Green Deal, the European Climate Pact was conceived as a complementary framework designed to engage diverse segments of the population in the green transition (European Commission 2019). The discourse surrounding the Climate Pact, as articulated in the Communication on the European Green Deal (European Commission 2019), views public and citizen engagement as indispensable and essential for the transition's success: "game-changing policies only work if citizens are fully involved in designing

them". This framing implies that the ecological crisis' complexity requires not only top-down policy measures but also the active participation of individuals and communities. As the Communication states, "The Climate Pact will build on the Commission's on-going series of citizens' dialogues and citizens' assemblies across the EU, and the role of social dialogue committees" (European Commission 2019). However, from the perspective of eco-governmentality, it is precisely this emphasis on engagement that has a strategic purpose: to counteract possible resistance by fostering a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the transition. In this respect, the Climate Pact may be understood as part of what Swyngedouw (2019) describes as the post-political condition in which participation is often reduced to a declarative or symbolic level, lacking substantive political agency or transformative potential.

The formal launch of the European Climate Pact was marked by the Commission's 2020 Communication published at the end of that year (European Commission 2020). While this document officially established the Pact, it also outlined its operational structure, including new organisational mechanisms like a dedicated secretariat and knowledge centres. These institutional supports are designed to assure the systematic dissemination of knowledge and the management of the initiative, reflecting a highly structured approach to fostering citizen engagement. From our perspective, it is essential to recognise that the promotion of democratic action and involvement of EU citizens and residents is not a spontaneous or organic process. It is instead a process that the Commission seeks to guide and frame in certain ways, aligning participation with predefined policy objectives and governance frameworks.

Dean (2010, 29) reminds us that understanding power through the lens of governmentality does not negate the existence or importance of centres of authority. Instead of that, it highlights how more centralised forms of authority are often aligned, and compatible, with other modalities of power operating by way of diffuse mechanisms that shape behaviours, norms and subjectivities. In this vein, the European Climate Pact can be understood as a mechanism of eco-governmentality, regulating socio-political realities via institutional frameworks that legitimise and enforce particular actions and policies. While the Pact declaratively promotes democratic participation (European Commission 2020), it does so in a context in which the possibilities for free and transformative expression are constrained. The result is the creation of post-democratic spaces where participation is carefully managed. Moreover, the European Climate Pact should not be viewed solely as an institutional framework for the technical or 'mechanical' enactment of policy measures; rather, it is explicitly designed, as the document itself states, to cultivate new, greener attitudes across Europe (European Commission 2020). Here the Pact serves as both a strategic commitment and a form of power that operates through normative exemplification: "The Climate Pact will encourage democratic, science-based, hands-on, transparent, locally grounded, inclusive and long-lasting action on climate change [...]" (European

Commission 2020). By establishing what are presented as exemplary standards of environmentally responsible conduct, the Pact encourages individuals and communities to internalise and replicate these ideals, thereby aligning their actions with the values it advances. What we are confronted with is, in fact, an eco-governmental mechanism wherein power is exercised not by explicit command, order or dictate, but by the normalising of specific behaviours and subjectivities.

EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT AMBASSADORS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF A GOVERNING MECHANISM

While the Commission's (2019) Communication on the European Green Deal explicitly mentions and foresees the creation of a European Climate Pact, as was critically interpreted in the previous section of this paper, ambassadorship is still not mentioned. It first appears and is defined in the European Climate Pact document (European Commission 2020). In that text, ambassadorship is presented as one of the core instruments for promoting the Pact's objectives and stimulating climate-related engagement across European society (European Commission 2020, 4).

We first consider the general role that ambassadors are intended to play. In this context, the Commission describes them as essential actors and catalysts of climate action, selected to represent a wide range of fields, disciplines and geographical settings (European Commission 2020, 5). This emphasis on diversity suggests a broad and inclusive approach to participation, apparently reflecting the multiplicity of voices and perspectives in European societies. Yet, from our viewpoint this rhetoric of inclusivity is precisely the space in which pluralism functions as a managed framework, one that defines and limits the scope of action and expression available to ambassadors. Along with Chantal Mouffe (2005; see also Swyngedouw 2011b), who argues that the prevailing alignment of various voices in liberal regimes often leads to the loss of genuine diversity, we can claim that such a framing of heterogeneity actually produces consensus-oriented arrangements with particular effects. Inclusivity, in this sense, can serve to depoliticise engagement by subsuming difference within a pre-established order. In this case, while the diversity of the ambassadors' profiles may seem to add to their legitimacy and visibility, it does not translate into a plurality of political positions.

Another important aspect of the Climate Pact Ambassadors setup is that their role is not permanent, but limited to a period of 1 year, with the option for individuals to renew their title annually (European Union 2024). This limited time frame, combined with the precise renewal conditions, may appear as a benign form of regulation, but should in fact be viewed critically as a mode of governance grounded in responsabilisation. That is, the requirement for ambassadors to continually renew their status is also a demand to continuously perform and demonstrate their engagement in order to retain their position. This turns their

role into a site of ongoing self-assessment and productivity that reflects what Foucault describes as modern forms of power that “incite, induce, seduce or prohibit certain forms of behaviour” (Foucault 1982, 789). Along these lines, we can see that the limited terms and renewal conditions function as techniques to ensure the “appropriate”, “effective”, and “continuously valuable” contributions of ambassadors.

Yet another core activity of the ambassadors is shown by the guideline that they should “lead by example” (European Union 2025b). At the heart of this mechanism is the idea of setting a standard, with ambassadors presenting themselves as role models that prioritise moral conduct and behavioural inspiration over political contestation or collective mobilisation. As Swyngedouw notes, in the neoliberal polity as a post-political milieu we are witnessing “an engineering of the social in the direction of greater individualised responsibility” (Swyngedouw 2011b, 372). The Ambassador is thus becoming an emblematic figure of this shift: a visible, self-activating agent whose role is to model change within the parameters already set by institutional actors. The “leading by example” principle is central to contemporary governmental strategies, which operate not via direct command or strict instructions but the modelling of desirable behaviour. In this framework, governing authorities and affiliated actors do not simply impose rules and instead assume the role of exemplars, demonstrating appropriate conduct in the hope of inspiring imitation. Accordingly, the function of the Ambassadors is not to enforce or legislate, but to embody and disseminate normative green behaviours within their communities and professional networks. As Lipschutz and Kütting (2009, 56) state, the underlying logic of leading by example is that “a successful strategy will be copied and thus spread”. This form of governance relies on the mimetic power of example, where influence is exercised through visibility and repetition.

To maintain the mechanism’s continuity, Ambassadors are required to meet a set of clearly defined obligations, and the European Commission has explicitly outlined what is “expected of ambassadors” (European Union 2025b). These expectations include maintaining an active presence in the Climate Pact’s online community at least once every 3 months, publicly sharing their personal achievements related to the Pact, and participating in events on various levels (local, regional, European). However, from an eco-governmentality perspective, such formalised obligations establish a distinctly post-political arrangement – one that is grounded in and simultaneously reproduces a technocratic logic of governance centred on performance, visibility and output. This is characteristic of neoliberal governmentality where participation is not simply encouraged, but structured via mechanisms of self-monitoring and the continual demonstration of (self-)value. Such a post-democratic space revolves around “a consensual arrangement in which all those that are named and counted take part and participate within a given and generally accepted and shared/partitioned social and spatial distribution of things and people” (Swyngedouw 2011b, 371).

The final point in our analysis of the institutional arrangement of the European Climate Pact Ambassadors concerns the values promoted by the Pact. Ambassadors are required to fully endorse values like science, responsibility, commitment, transparency, knowledge sharing, ambition, urgency, local action, impact, diversity, and inclusiveness (European Union 2025a). These values are invoked to signal legitimacy and urgency, but they also serve to frame climate governance within a discourse of rational consensus and ethical obligation. Even though these values may appear uncontroversial, they play what we would describe as a considerable role in depoliticising climate action by presenting it as a universally shared, scientifically grounded endeavour. The outcome of this is suppressed agonistic dimensions of democratic life (Mouffe 2005).

DISCOURSES OF AMBASSADORS

The discourse analysis revealed that Ambassadors (European Union 2024) identify a variety of environmental and climate-related issues as particularly pressing, framing them as matters demanding attention and concrete interventions. Several clusters of environmental problems and issues can be discerned. First, climate change and global warming emerge as prominent concerns. Other recurring issues include biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, energy-related problems, various forms of pollution (plastic, air, water), unsustainable consumption and waste, the lack of public awareness and climate education, insufficient policy action and implementation, as well as socioeconomic barriers and environmental injustice. In the analysis, we identified a set of solutions to these clusters of problems as proposed by Ambassadors, which consistently stress awareness-raising and climate education, underscoring the perceived need for an informed and engaged public. Apart from this, other recurring recommendations include community engagement and local action, renewable energy and energy efficiency, the circular economy and sustainable consumption, policy advocacy and governance, justice-oriented and inclusive solutions, nature-based approaches, and technological and innovative interventions.

In this section, the interpretation concentrates on three interrelated clusters (nexuses) of issues and corresponding solutions that emerged from the Ambassadors' statements: (1) the lack of public awareness and climate education; (2) climate change and energy-related problems, including unsustainable consumption practices and ongoing fossil fuel dependence; and (3) social and environmental inequalities. These clusters were selected due to their frequent recurrence and perceived urgency among Ambassadors, as well as their value as a possible critical entry points for examining the underlying rationalities and governmental technologies embedded within the Climate Pact framework. Each cluster articulates a distinct yet interconnected dimension of the environmental and climate crisis – educational, ecological-economic, and socio-political. At the same time, they illustrate how these challenges are translated into actionable problems by way of specific, often individualised and consensus-oriented solutions. Our

contention is that by centring the analysis on these domains, it becomes possible to critically interrogate how climate governance is structured, enacted and maintained.

We therefore start with the lack of public awareness and the absence of sufficient climate education that emerged as a problem cluster (European Union 2024). The issues in this cluster are consistently framed as a major obstacle to effective climate action, with ambassadors highlighting the widespread unawareness of the severity of environmental problems and the limited understanding of possible responses. The problems are often associated with misinformation, public disengagement, and the marginal position of climate-related topics within formal education systems. For example, Susanne Ramharter, an Ambassador from Austria, claimed she is “frustrated by the lack of knowledge (and apathy)” of the people on climate crisis (European Union 2024). In response to the perceived lack of knowledge and awareness, ambassadors advocate a broad repertoire of solutions, ranging from educational campaigns and school-based programmes to community workshops, public events, storytelling, and social media outreach. These initiatives are discursively portrayed as inclusive, inspiring and transformative. Ambassadors frame their initiatives as efforts to “educate and empower”, “raise consciousness”, and “equip citizens with the tools to act” (European Union 2024). In this context, Ambassadors assume the roles of facilitators, communicators and informal educators, tasked with translating complex environmental issues into accessible and relatable narratives.

From an eco-governmentality perspective, this particular framing of awareness and education reflects a broader transformation concerning how climate inaction is problematised and governed. Ambassadors predominantly target what they perceive as individual knowledge deficits, positioning the solution within the domain of information provision and moral appeal (as illustrated, for example, by words like “frustration”). From this position, Ambassadors invite individuals and groups to learn, adapt and align themselves with predefined and typically benignly articulated climate objectives. Awareness-raising operates in this way as a post-political instrument: it produces informed, responsible and self-regulating individuals. This dynamic exhibits how power relations, political economy processes, and their “structural arrangements mediate education” initiatives and hegemonic approaches (Meek and Lloro-Bidart 2017, 213). What is missing from the Ambassadors’ approaches is precisely what should be an essential part of any climate and environmental education: the elucidation and explanation of the interrelations between political institutions, the political environment, and the economic system (Meek and Lloro-Bidart 2017). Instead, the Ambassadors offer an “apolitical ecology” (Robbins 2019): their discourse therefore stabilises a particular mode of climate governance grounded in depoliticised action and forms of participation.

The next broad problem-solution nexus concerns climate change and energy-related issues, which form a central axis of concern in the discourse

articulated by European Climate Pact Ambassadors. Our analysis reveals that climate change is largely framed as an urgent and far-reaching crisis, frequently described as a “global challenge”, a “planetary emergency”, or “the most pressing issue of our time” (European Union 2024). The Ambassadors regularly connect this overarching condition to continued dependence on fossil fuels, the slow pace of renewable energy adoption, and inefficiencies embedded in the current energy infrastructures. These concerns are presented as simultaneous and overlapping in nature: they are framed as both global and local, structural and behavioural. In terms of solutions, the Ambassadors promote a diverse array of responses, including the acceleration of renewable energy transitions. As Mohammad Aljaradin, an Ambassador from Sweden emphasises: “Using renewable and clean energy will have a significant influence on climate protection” (European Union 2024). Giulio Troncarelli, an Ambassador from Italy, is even more concrete: “I want to ensure that energy is a shared and exchangeable good, allowing everyone to play an active and informed role leveraging digital technologies” (European Union 2024). Thus, alongside improvements in energy efficiency across sectors such as housing and transport, there is broad support for green (digital) technologies. These technical proposals are often accompanied by calls for changes in behaviour and conduct, inviting individuals to “reduce their carbon footprint”, adopt a “low-impact lifestyle”, and become “environmentally conscious” citizens (European Union 2024). The solutions are articulated in aspirational language: the transition to sustainable energy is presented as both a technological imperative and a collective ethical responsibility that implicates states, businesses and individuals alike.

Interpreting this energy-related problem–solution nexus through our analytical lens, the argument here is that the way the Ambassadors articulate energy-related issues reflects a broader economic rationality whereby climate and ecological concerns are reconfigured as opportunities for innovation, investment and growth. The transition away from fossil fuels is not framed as a challenge to, or an alternative for, existing socio-economic arrangements. On the contrary, as Corvellec et al. (2022) show, solutions within the green transition discourse are framed as technical and inherently positive, centred, for example, on resource-use optimisation. Discourses grounded on this optimistic and economic premise construct solutions as a pathway toward green modernisation where renewable energy, energy efficiency, and technological advancement are seen as engines of sustainable economic development. Within this framing, the climate crisis is depoliticised by aligning it with market-based solutions that promise to reconcile environmental protection with continued economic growth. The construction of energy-related problems is hence closely tied to the types of solutions deemed legitimate – those that foster new green markets, stimulate entrepreneurial activity, and maintain competitiveness. What emerges is a post-political configuration in which the transformation of energy infrastructures is governed through technocratic reasoning and expert consensus.

The final problem–solution nexus in the European Climate Pact Ambassadors’ discourse relates to (in)equalities and (in)justices. Although less frequently emphasised than other issues, inequality and environmental justice nevertheless emerge as critical dimensions of the climate crisis. Ambassadors highlight the unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits, noting that vulnerable and marginalised communities often bear the burden of pollution, climate-related disasters, and limited access to green resources, or are excluded from participation in green transitions (European Union 2024). This problem is presented as both ethical and practical, with Ambassadors stressing that, without inclusivity, the ecological transition would be neither just nor effective. The Ambassador from Sweden, Maria Soxbo, underlines this aspect: “I dedicate my time to raising awareness about the flaws and injustices of our current way of life [...]” (European Union 2024).

As solutions, Ambassadors propose a range of actions aimed at empowerment and inclusion. Through the analysis, we observed that Ambassadors aim to make underrepresented voices heard, ensure access to environmental knowledge and opportunities, promote community-led initiatives, and support policies that recognise the social dimension of climate action. These interventions are described as promoting a “just transition”, “equity”, and “inclusive sustainability”, and framed as efforts to “leave the world as a better place” and build “resilience” for all (European Union 2024). While these discourses hint at systemic concerns, the proposed solutions often stress participatory approaches and local empowerment. The work plan of Zuzanna Borowska, an Ambassador from Poland, is telling here: “In my fight against the most urgent challenge, the climate crisis, I try to put the people and their needs first. As an EU Climate Pact Ambassador, I wish to focus on just transition, climate education, awareness raising, and public participation” (European Union 2024).

From our perspective, the integration of justice discourse, which at first glance appears critical of current socio-political and economic arrangements, into climate action reveals how environmental governance incorporates the language of inclusion and equity without fundamentally challenging hegemonic neoliberal or technocratic frameworks. Sokhi-Bulley (2011; see also Brown 2016) shows how justice (and rights) in contemporary liberal democratic regimes often function as normative notions without concrete substance, deployed in various ways as governmental technologies. We argue that Ambassadors’ framing of justice and injustice is deeply embedded in these practices. In post-political conditions, environmental justice becomes a managed concern, acknowledged but ultimately subsumed within the dominant consensus-driven logic of the green transition, green behaviour, and ‘appropriate’ comportment. Following Brown (2016), one may argue that the green transition functions as a signifier emptied of its political character and, by so doing, neutralises productive conflict (agonism) by creating the illusion of harmony between economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. Rather than politicising injustice through

confrontation or systemic critique, Ambassadors frame justice in intangible and technicist terms of access, awareness and participation, thereby reinforcing a mode of governance that individualises responsibility and promotes procedural inclusion over structural transformation. In this context, eco-governmentality operates by producing “empowered” subjects who are called upon to act within predefined, depoliticised spaces. Justice, in this sense, is rendered governable, stripped of its disruptive potential (Jamal and Hales 2016) and rearticulated within a moral discourse that maintains the appearance of inclusivity while simultaneously supporting the hegemonic European green regime.

CONCLUSION

As this article has sought to demonstrate, the mechanism of the European Climate Pact Ambassadors and the Pact itself must be understood not simply as an inherently positive initiative designed to provide space for and foster the engagement of various actors in realisation of the Green Deal. In our view, the Pact is an effect of a broader and historically sedimented regime of contemporary modalities of power and, more specifically, of European environmental governance. Emerging as a formally supportive participatory framework of the European Green Deal, the Pact operates within a structure that aligns ecological imperatives with market rationality, technological innovation, and economic growth. An additional rationale guiding the Climate Pact is visible in the emphasis on progress and (technical) innovation (European Commission 2020). The Commission prioritises research and development as essential components of change and key drivers of the green transition, while the Pact is grounded in techno-optimism, the belief that technological solutions can address climate challenges (Keary 2016). This perspective both stems from and bolsters the dominant green growth discourse in which environmental concerns are reframed as opportunities for modernisation and economic development. As Pellizzoni and Ylönen (2016) observe, the fusion of technoscience with neoliberal principles frequently reduces the environment to a mere resource for innovation and growth. This is an important insight for our discussion since by foregrounding the role of research and technological advancement the European Commission positions the Climate Pact as a driver of economic progress. As such, the Climate Pact should not be understood solely as a venue for political participation; it plays multiple roles. It also reinforces a paradigm that privileges market-based and technocratic solutions within a broader neoliberal framework. This lends support to the view that the European Climate Pact is an example of the dual nature of contemporary environmental governance. It seeks to construct and shape new green attitudes while simultaneously promoting a narrative of progress that give priority to technological and economic solutions. As such, the Pact is both an effort to engage citizens in the green transition and a manifestation of the post-political condition.

Within this strategic formal instalment of the European Climate Pact, as we have argued, the institutional architecture of the Climate Pact ambassadorship embodies a form of eco-governmentality that operates by way of carefully managed pluralism, individual efforts, and the performative demonstration of green commitment. Far from being a neutral or merely supportive mechanism, the ambassadorship acts as a strategic device that situates and embeds climate action within a depoliticised framework of conduct of conduct, normative values, and technocratic metrics of participation. By way of conclusion, we argue that what emerges is a space structured by consensus. It is a framework that privileges 'exemplary' individuals who align themselves with pre-established objectives. In this sense, the ambassadorship is not simply a mobilising tool; it operates as a form of governing, influencing not only what can be said or done in the name of responding to climate change, but also how climate politics itself is to be imagined, enacted and legitimised.

Finally, our interpretation, based on the analysis of Ambassadors' discourses, is that their narratives construct climate and environmental problems via a set of interrelated framings that give priority to awareness, behavioural change, green technological innovation, and inclusive participation. Across the three selected problem-solution nexuses (public awareness and education, energy-related challenges, and socio-environmental inequalities) a clear discursive pattern emerges in which climate governance is articulated through depoliticised and consensus-oriented logics. Solutions are predominantly positioned as non-conflictual, technical and "empowering", while the political, economic and structural dimensions of the crisis are largely silenced or left unaddressed. What these discursive formations reveal is that they are themselves part of the perpetuation and stabilisation of a post-political eco-governmentality, a mode of governance that redefines environmental action as a matter of informed choice, entrepreneurial initiative, and procedural inclusion. Through the engagement of the Ambassadors as a governmental mechanism, the European Climate Pact not only promotes environmental objectives but also orchestrates the production of governable subjects and compatible solutions that sustain, rather than disrupt, the prevailing socio-economic order.

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UPRAVLJANJE PREK ANGAŽIRANJA: AMBASADORJI EVROPSKEGA PODNEBNEGA PAKTA IN POSTPOLITIČNI ZELENİ PREHOD

Povzetek. Članek kritično obravnava ambasadorje Evropskega podnebnega pakta kot konkretnega mehanizma oblasti, ki ga je Evropska komisija uvedla v okviru Evropskega zelenega dogovora. Z analitičnim foucaultovskim pristopom ekovladnosti in diskurzivno analizo 839 profilov ambasadorjev preučuje in interpretira dva ključna vidika. Prvič, pokaže, kako ambasadorstvo ne deluje zgolj kot podporno orodje, temveč kot oblastni mehanizem, ki omogoča upravljanje glede okoljskih in podnebnih vprašanj v postpolitični formi. Drugič, razkriva, kako ambasadorji konstruirajo okvire mišljenja o okoljskih in podnebnih problemih in njihovih rešitvah, ki krepijo neoliberalno ekonomsko racionalnost, depolitizirajo zeleni prehod in sistematično omejujejo alternativne možnosti ekološkega delovanja.

Ključni pojmi: Evropski podnebni pakt, ambasadorji, ekovladnost, diskurz, postpolitika.