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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of sustainability for the cruise industry, as a rhetorical/semiotic construct in the companies' promotional campaigns. It offers some reflections from the perspective of cruise tourism management, and highlights the need for responsible tourist service providers to balance rent-seeking activities with the need to preserve natural and cultural resources. As part of an innovative, multi-disciplinary approach, and from a broadly critical perspective, it asks whether the concept has any meaning as used in these contexts, or whether the notion of corporate greenwashing (Ramus and Montiel 2005) must be invoked to account for its use. Linguistic analysis focuses on the strategies for marketing sustainable tourism in the worldwide web, through slogans, buzzwords, lists of environmentally friendly practices and other semantic and multimodal features that occur on the sites.

Key words: *Tourism, Sustainability, Framing, Multimodality, Critical Ecolinguistics*

1. Introduction

Tourism is recognized as a global industry, and as a significant contributor to economies, employment, and the development of countries. An ever-increasing number of destinations worldwide have invested in tourism, turning it into a key driver of socio-economic progress. As a rough indicator, there were 1186 million international arrivals recorded in 2015, an increase of 52 million over the previous year, representing a total value of 1,260 billion US dollars. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide is expected to increase by an average of 3.3% a year over the period 2010 to 2030, to reach 1.8 billion by the year 2030 (WTO 2016).

Tourism development potentially provides many benefits, but these can be realized only if tourism is managed in order to maximise positive, and

minimise negative, impacts. These latter may include degradation of the environment, pollution, waste of resources, disturbance to wildlife and landscapes, cultural commodification and trivialisation, displacement of host communities and introduction of undesirable activities (Black and Crabtree 2007). For this reason, associating the paradigm of sustainable development with the principles and practice of tourism might represent a practical solution to the problems facing the industry.

The notion of sustainability, which first became widely diffused with the Brundtland Report (United Nations 1987), traditionally concerns the protection of natural environments, since it is based on management of the world's resources, and equity in the ways those resources are used. In line with this concept, sustainable tourism, which has grown in popularity over recent years, is often defined as tourism that meets the needs of present generations, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It has been proposed as a development strategy that aims to increase economic opportunities and enhance quality of life, while preserving the destinations' natural resources and cultural heritage (McCool and Lime 2001).

Despite the complexity of the concept of sustainability, there is a general consensus that, for tourism, it involves at least three different dimensions: the minimization or elimination of negative impacts, making positive contributions to the destination and host community, and the provision of a quality experience for the tourists (Weaver 2000). Hall (2011) showed that a sustainable tourism policy paradigm involves a balance between three dimensions; namely economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability. According to Tourism Concern and WWF (1992), tourism can be considered as sustainable when it guarantees the regeneration and future productivity of natural, social and cultural resources and recognizes the role of local stakeholders and host communities in the tourism experience, with both sharing in the economic benefits of tourism. Sustainable tourism may thus include both mass tourism and a niche market segment, balancing environmental, economic and sociocultural aspects. The supply of a tourist product has, therefore, tended to accentuate eco-friendly aspects, interaction with natural environments, minimisation of tourist impact and respect for the authenticity of the culture of places.

Although it would be possible for tourism to embrace principles of sustainability, by showing social responsibility, respect for an environment's carrying capacity, and integrating tourism with local culture, in many cases, the concept has instead been applied indiscriminately to a different kind of product. Hunter (1997) noted that, in many studies, the concept of tourism sustainability is never explained, as if the meaning is intuitive or obvious, while the notion of sustainable tourism is addressed in vague language. In consequence, sustainable tourism currently represents an unstable paradigm, its meaning contested between interested social actors such as the tourist companies, advertisers, environmental pressure groups, local communities and, last but not least, consumers. In a context of rising awareness of the importance of sustainability, there is greater demand for tourist products with fewer negative impacts, and this is reflected in the increasingly diversified range of products on offer.

This paper explores the notion of sustainability for the cruise industry, examining it as a rhetorical/semiotic construction and branding resource in the companies' promotional campaigns. It offers some reflections that are relevant from the perspective of cruise tourism management, highlighting the need for responsible tourist service providers to balance rent-seeking activities with the need to preserve natural and cultural resources. As part of an innovative, multi-disciplinary approach, and from a broadly critical perspective, it deploys methodologies from the field of linguistics in the perspective of tourism management, to ask whether the concept has any meaning in these contexts, or whether the familiar notion of corporate greenwashing (Ramus and Montiel 2005) must be invoked to account for its presence. It also draws attention to the use of semiotic and textual resources in branding, and other practises of commercial self-representation that involve the concept of sustainability, whose ecological connotations have been threatened by indiscriminate use of the term.

2. Global Cruise Tourism

Global cruising is an industry that began as a form of élite tourism in the 1920s, declined following the Second World War due to competition from airline companies, but has since begun to reach an important and ever-growing share of the popular tourism market (Johnson 2002). Today, the most popular cruise destinations are the Caribbean and the Bahamas, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Islands and Northern Europe. However, due to the constant increase in numbers of cruise tourists in recent years, cruise lines need to develop new destinations around the world (WTO 2012). As some data from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) shows, the cruise industry has experienced impressive levels of growth. In the last ten years, demand for cruising has increased by about 70%. In 2014, cruise passengers recorded to have cruised worldwide were more than 22 million, generating an economic impact of \$119.9 billion, while 24 million were expected in 2016 - a 4% increase compared with 2015. Cruise ship capacity grew by 18% from 2009 to 2013. Against this background of growing popularity and increasing ship size in cruise tourism, many studies have highlighted problems concerning waste generation and disposal, associated with pressures exerted on fragile environments and host communities. Cruise tourism, indeed, is characterized by the concentration of huge numbers of people in limited areas for brief periods, thus multiplying negative impacts that may lead to the loss of precious biodiversity, and destruction of natural and cultural resources. According to Weaver (2005) production and consumption on board supersized cruise ships exhibit traits that are inconsistent with the five core principles of McDonaldization - efficiency, calculability, predictability, control, and the 'irrationality of rationality' - since numerous types of risk can pose problems for cruise ship companies (Lois et al. 2004).

Due to the rapid increase in the growth of cruise tourism, sustainability is now a major issue for the cruise industry, which has moved towards the wholesale adoption of sustainable principles in its development, operations and branding (Liu 2003). Johnson (2002) highlighted the fact that cruise tourism increasingly requires management solutions, which include: (a) taking a long-

term view by fostering holistic integrated actions that involve international agencies, cruise line operators and host communities; (b) safeguarding destinations by reducing the impact of cruise activities; (c) sharing increasing profits more equably between cruise line operators and destination communities; and (d) raising the environmental awareness of passengers. According to Klein (2006), in order to keep the cruise industry focused on the issue of sustainability, it is necessary that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other interest groups should redouble their efforts in the areas of media management and influencing legislative processes. However, a number of sustainable issues such as waste disposal, visits to sensitive areas, and passenger-host relations in the destinations visited are still critical. Although the major cruise lines have apparently embraced environmental good practice, and efforts are being made to respond effectively to the environmental challenges they face, much remains to be done to ensure that the rapidly growing demand for cruising does not exceed the natural limits of the environment. The concept of sustainability, therefore, is a crucial locus for observing, and problematising, the impact of the cruise companies in the tourist destination areas (Dowling 2006). It has also been noted that cruise tourism options vary according to the size of the ship, which may range from yachts to large vessels, and the type of experience offered. Many factors therefore need to be considered by the companies, in developing sustainable cruise tourism strategies. Impacts vary widely and, therefore, cannot be treated uniformly (UNWTO and APTEC 2016).

Currently, cruise tourism encompasses a variety of facilities and amenities in addition to its traditional function of providing transport and accommodation, making sea travel much more comfortable and enjoyable for travellers. Quatermaine and Peter (2003) described modern cruises as 'cathedrals of entertainment', where destinations resemble the intervals of an ongoing show. Similarly, Ritzer (1998), used the expression 'cathedrals of consumption' to emphasize the structured and ordered nature of production and consumption within cruise ships, which are similar to the repeated contents of theme parks and enclave resorts. Cruise tourism has come to be associated with marine resorts, competing with traditionally marketed destinations, offering tourists an alternative form of holiday. In the literature, many researchers have explored cruise tourists' motivations for choosing a cruise holiday. In this regard, Cartwright and Baird (1999) say that the most common reasons are the search for luxury and entertainment. Others have suggested that a cruise holiday allows tourists, for a short period of time, to enjoy a life of privilege (Teye and Leclerc 2002), to escape their daily routines (Qu and Ping 1999), and to be in a different world (Yarnal and Kerstetter 2005). Hosany and Witham (2010) investigated the relationships among cruisers' experiences, their degrees of satisfaction, and their subsequent intentions to recommend the line to others.

Certain characteristics of the sea cruise seem to align the product with green values: the experience brings passengers into contact with sea, sun and open air, while additional marine attractions such as encounters with dolphins and whales feature large in promotional material. However, its eco-friendly profile has increasingly come into question, especially over the last decade, which has seen the emergence of floating cities in the form of super-cruise ships, able to carry over 5,000 passengers. Sweeting and Wayne (2006: 327) express a

popular conception of the cruise industry, which is still current ten years on, in their phrase ‘a polluter, spilling oil and dumping garbage at sea’, though they also point out that many cruise lines are now implementing practices and procedures to address their environmental impacts. Against this negative picture, some authors (e.g. Ritter and Schafer 1998) have argued that, because it is an organized and spatially confined leisure activity, cruise tourism can be viewed as ‘sustainable’. It therefore appears necessary to conduct proper assessment of the potential benefits, risks and impacts of cruise tourism, so that its future development can be effectively managed. For cruise tourism development to be genuinely sustainable, the implementation of environmental protection measures would be necessary, involving all the stakeholders of marine tourism destinations, not just the cruise line operators (Lester and Weeden 2004; UNWTO and APTEC 2016).

This paper explores these issues by looking at the strategies used to market sustainable tourism in the worldwide web, through the use of slogans, buzzwords, lists of environmentally friendly practices and other semantic and multimodal features that occur on the sites. The intention is to identify the role of environmental values, for which the notion of sustainability appears as a proxy, in this discourse, asking the question: is there any real substance to sustainability in this context, or is it simply a means of greenwashing a range of practices that are, by their very nature, anything but ecological?

3. Methodology

The Discourse-Historical approach, developed by Ruth Wodak (Weiss and Wodak 2007; Wodak 2001) offers many useful points of departure for an interdisciplinary paper of this kind. In particular, it offers a model for the deployment of specialised knowledge from another field, as in this case is represented by Tourism Studies. Wodak calls this process of interdisciplinary exchange ‘triangulation’, and argues for the systematic inclusion of insights from other fields alongside purely ‘linguistic’ analytical techniques: ‘Depending on the respective object of investigation, it [the D/H Method] attempts to transcend the pure linguistic dimension and to include more or less systematically the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimension’ (Weiss and Wodak 2007: 21-22). This is not just a proxy for the notion of context in discourse analysis; rather, it is a recognition that approaches and methodologies from sister fields in the humanities, as well as the specialised knowledge of the area in question, may enrich analysis of a linguistic type, as well as providing a further check against the pitfalls of subjective interpretation. The notion that Critical Discourse Analysis is a socially engaged paradigm, and therefore not necessarily objective in its evaluations, has been amply debated (Fairclough 1996; Toolan 1997; Widdowson 1995, 1996). Wodak (2001: 64) makes no apology for the fact that the D/H Method is a ‘problem-oriented science’, i.e. one that focuses on a specific social problem, in order to improve the situation in the real world or at least, to raise awareness around the issue. In the case of this paper, from an Ecolinguistic perspective, the choice to explore sustainability in cruise tourism is the result of our concern for the environment, and about the damage to it caused by cruise vessels. There is nothing wrong with the company using the

notion of ‘sustainability’ in their advertisements, we suggest, as long as their practices in this area live up to the images they present.

Wodak suggests that analysis should involve three levels: from the broadest to the most fine-grained these are topics, discursive strategies and linguistic means (Wodak 2001: 72). In terms of topics, we are dealing with sustainability, primarily, and with ecological matters such as environmental protection, pollution, waste disposal, etc. Considerations of the discursive strategies involved relate to the areas of genre (webpage), multimodal resources (image, colour, film) and linguistic devices (slogan, buzzwords). Finally, at the level of linguistic means, analysis focuses on processes of framing, in the terms originally described by Goffman (1974), and subsequently developed by others, in the context of discourse analysis (Coupland and Yläne 2006; Hart 2014). In a critical perspective, framing is seen as the organisation of information in a way that encourages a particular reading of the message (Edwards 2005: 15).

Critical Ecolinguistics can be seen, on one level, simply as the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to ecological themes (Harré et al. 1999; Mühlhäuser 2003; Stibbe 2014, 2016). Like CDA, it is a would-be transformational approach, one that aims to offer solutions to the problems it analyses. For example, in the case of cruise tourism, the interests of two large and heterogeneous bodies of social actors are involved. Firstly, there are the people of the planet, most of whom would probably prefer, given the choice, to live in a healthy environment rather than one ruined by pollution. Secondly, there are those involved in the cruise industry, who are driven by the need to maximise profits and guarantee the future of their industry. However, the interests of these two groups are not as incompatible as might be thought at first; in fact, it must be in the long-term interests of the cruise companies to protect the environment on which their economic activities depend. By encouraging them to respect their rhetorical pronouncements on sustainability, therefore, a critical ecolinguistic voice is only urging them to do what is in their own best interests.

Ecolinguistics also takes critical reflection one step further and considers the rights of what some have called ‘Gaia’, and others know by a variety of names - planet Earth, Nature, the environment. From a broader perspective, both human groups just indicated are not adversarial but aligned on the same side, that sees ‘human interests’ constantly prevail over those of the natural world (Fill and Mühlhäuser 2001; Stibbe 2012).

Some techniques developed in the field of multimodal analysis are used to explore the webpages. Multimodality views language not as the communicative resource par excellence, but as another semiotic resource available for meaning-making, alongside other visual elements such as colour, design, movement, image, etc (Baldry and Thibault 2006; Bateman 2008; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996).

4. Data

In order to assemble a manageable corpus, we selected the first ten websites that emerge from googling the phrase ‘sustainable cruises’. As a glance at the

table below reveals, the issue of sustainability interests some of the biggest names in the field, who also number some of the largest vessels in their fleets. Several brands belonging to the Carnival Corporation, the world leader in the cruise market, were found among the results (Carnival, Costa and P&O Cruises), along with some from Royal Caribbean, one of their closest rivals. There are two companies which operate in Alaska, which, after the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas, is one of the most popular among global cruise destinations (Boat Company and Discovery Voyages). There are also some companies that operate sustainable river cruises (The Treadright Foundation and Lüftner). The first of these belongs to a group of companies that includes Uniworld, engaged in a so-called ‘Sustainable River Cruising Project’, aiming to minimise negative environmental effects that derive from cruising. Finally, there is a company offering canal cruises in Amsterdam (The Blue Boat Company), and the EcoShip project. This last case merits special attention, because it attempts to apply sustainable principles to the design of a cruise vessel, using conventional eco-friendly design features such as wind generators, photovoltaic cells and solar panels, as well as some that are ahead of their time, such as the ship’s ‘hydrodynamic hull inspired by the whale’, a design approach for which they use the term ‘Biomimicry’.

In terms of market share, figures for the first two named company groups alone, in 2014, were 42.8% (Carnival) and 21.75% (Royal Caribbean) (Statista.com, 2016). Clearly, then, their practices in the area of sustainability may provide models for their competitors to imitate.

COMPANY	LOGO	SYMBOL	SLOGAN	BUZZWORD
Costa	✓	Rubbish bin	The 3R's of shipboard sustainability; Our route to the future	Sustainability Environment
Royal Caribbean	✓	Turtle	Save the waves	Sustainability Environment Community
Carnival	✓	x	X	Sustainability
Treadright Foundation	✓	x	Sustainable river cruising; Responsible cruising	Sustainable
Boat Company	✓	Green plaque	Eco cruise; When the only sound is the splash of your paddle	Eco
EcoShip	✓	x	X	Peace Eco
Discovery Voyages	✓	x	Eco-friendly cruising; Alaska's finest wilderness cruise	Eco-friendly
Lüftner	✓	x	Respect for our nature	Nature
Blue Boat Company	✓	Paper boat	Environmentally responsible	Environment, environmentally
P&O Cruises	✓	x	Like no place on earth	x

Table 1. Multimodal/content features of the websites

Analysis focuses on the first page only, specifically on that portion of the homepage which meets the reader on navigating to the page, before scrolling down (see appendix). The homepage is seen as the ‘gateway’ to the interactive experience, and constitutes an important stimulus to the viewer in terms of

exciting their curiosity to continue investigation of the site (Baldry and Thibault 2006: 118).

We analysed the following multimodal features: logo, symbol, slogan, buzzword, image and colour scheme (see Tables 1 and 2).

5. Findings

5.1 Logos, Symbols

The purpose of a company logo is to ‘make the brand visible’ (Lury 2004: 74), and most incorporate the company name or some other fragment of text with a visual element to create a memorable design. These visual elements generally connect the brand name with the company’s activities in some way (see Baldry and Thibault 2006: 31). For the cruise companies this takes the form of using natural objects such as the sun (Discovery Voyages, Lüftner), nautical symbols (Costa, Royal Caribbean), or place maps (The Boat Company).

Though not strictly a cruise ‘company’, the Treadright Foundation (2018) logo serves as a useful illustration of the general principles involved in logo design in this sector. It has an abstract pattern, a yellow dot encircled by two coloured lines. The central yellow dot clearly indexes the sun, while the two surrounding lines are green and light blue, classical environmental colours. The image as a whole is suggestive of a drop of water, and the subliminal ecological overtones are further deepened by the dark blue of the background. Finally, the foundation’s name is exploited, the implicit wordplay signalled to viewers by the use of highlighting: the verb ‘to tread’ is in bold type, ‘right’ in ordinary capitals. Viewers used to the conventions of visual advertising will have no difficulty reading the subliminal message here, i.e. that there are right and wrong ways to tread – to explore natural pathways on foot - with the former being determined by respect for the environment. Thus, the logo becomes a concentrated visual metaphor (Kenney 2005: 159) which signals the group’s values; or at least, the values with which it wishes to associate itself.

The logos of some of the companies use symbols of comparable type: the Blue Boat Company uses an origami paper boat - made, in other words, from a bio-degradable material – which has the function of emphasising the lightness of their product in terms of environmental impact. Royal Caribbean use a turtle, a species which has become endangered by human activity, and one whose habitats are threatened by the cruise companies. To choose the animal as their symbol shifts blame for its plight away from the company, associating them with the green values of wildlife protection.

5.2 Slogans and Buzzwords

Slogans are brief texts that play important roles in most forms of advertising, as well as in political or commercial branding. They are pithy and value-laden, and encapsulate the essence of a political or commercial message. The slogan aims at persuasion; it indexes a certain implicit narrative, and reinforces positive connotations for the company. The literature has dealt at length with

the power of slogans in various contexts, for example political (Bolivar 2007), and that of advertising (Fuertes-Olivera et al. 2001; Goddard 1998). Woods (2006) discusses their effectiveness in both fields. Most of these studies confirm that slogans have a persuasive function, and that they convey ideologies, values and messages in a subliminal way (Hodges 2014). The Treadright slogan, for example, 'Sustainable river cruising', exploits the ecological overtones of the term 'sustainability', while that of P&O, 'Like no place on earth', emphasises the uniqueness of the company's product.

The slogans' messages are generally backed up on the web-pages by the presence of one or more buzzwords (Dahl 2008). Similar to the slogan, the buzzword arguably offers the same type of interpersonal effect in a more concentrated form. Where the slogan dilutes the essence of an evaluative or deontic text in a few words, the buzzword does this in a single lexical item. Sometimes slogan and buzzword combine, for example in the case of 'sustainability', as used in the Costa slogan 'the three r's of shipboard sustainability'. In other web pages the buzzword is simply included as a heading (Royal Caribbean) or somewhere in the co-text (Ecoship).

It is useful to ask what is presupposed (Fairclough 1989; Renkama 2004) by the buzzwords (Sustainability, Community, Environment, Eco, Peace, Eco-friendly, Nature). All, arguably, are examples of the types of word Orwell (1946: 133) identified as often used 'in a consciously dishonest way'; words associated with universal praise, but whose precise meanings are unclear in the specific context. Each articulates a condensed discourse, of the kind: 'our practices are sustainable/environmentally-friendly/peaceful/natural', etc. However, when 'retrieved, formulated and challenged' (Chilton 2004: 64) in this way, the extent to which presupposition is involved is apparent from the rhetorical questions which immediately arise ('what do you mean by sustainable?', 'how is it possible that these massive cruise ships can be environmentally-friendly?', 'in what sense are you using the word 'nature'?', etc.).

The presuppositions and framing strategies of the slogans also require closer inspection. For example, that of Costa, whose phrase evokes a frame relating to Anglo-Saxon education (the three R's being 'Reading, Writing and Arithmetic'). Costa are thus associated with educators, in this case in the field of environmental issues. Pragmatically, the aim could be to achieve legitimisation, in Chilton's sense (see Chilton and Schäffner 1997; Chilton 2004). Though this term is generally used in a political context (Charteris-Black 2005), it applies wherever, as in this case, it is desired to show the favourable aspect of any individual, social actor or institution. Costa's three 'R's' relate to the Reduction, Recovery and Recycling of on-board waste, and they provide a lengthy explanation of their practices in this area. However, once more, a critical perspective exposes crucial limitations: when compared with the environmental havoc linked to cruise tourism, the circumstance that one line employs 'environmental' practices in disposing of on-board waste is relatively trivial. Costa use the slogan to create an impression that their whole enterprise – rather than just one comparatively minor aspect of it – is sustainable.

The metonymical slogan, 'save the waves', of Royal Caribbean, also relies on presupposition, and has comparable effects at the rhetorical level. A webpage

gives details of the company's commitment to ecological practices, including the use of features like Led lights and tinted windows to reduce environmental impact. However, if such measures are viewed from the perspective of the real threats posed by the cruise vessels, outlined in our introduction, i.e. 'degradation of the environment, pollution, waste of resources, disturbance to wildlife and landscapes', their comparative triviality is apparent. The reader is allowed to take for granted that what the company means by 'save the waves' is identical with what s/he means; to presuppose, in other words, that the practices summarised by the slogan will indeed result in significant ecological effects.

5.3 Image, Colour

Table 2 illustrates the images and colour schemes used on the web pages:

SITE	IMAGE	COLOURS
Costa	Foreground of wine bottles in a rack, a shipboard environment	Blue panel on l/h side White background Red bottle-tops
Royal Caribbean	Foreground a wind-blown palm tree, a rocky bay behind. An unspoilt coastal scene.	White background, Bright blue sea, sky
Carnival	Two giant cruise ships moored to a jetty	White ships, Blue sea and sky
Treadright	A natural wilderness with a broad river moving from centre to bottom left corner	Shades of blue of sky and river Green of hills
Boat Company	A swathe of green trees on l/h. side, on r.h.side a greenish stream with a bear	White background Green trees Black/blue text
Ecoship	Large picture of a futuristic ship	White ship and background Tints of purple and pink
Discovery Voyages	A natural landscape. A pine forest on l/h.side, a heath in the centre, misty mountains background	Grey background, Green trees Brown/green heath
Lüftner	Camera moving; a luxury boat appears at r/h.side, on a wide green river, green hill behind	Grey-Blue sky White boat Green hill, river
Blue Boat Company	A chart of future sustainable cruising targets	White background, Blue/black text Red highlighting
P & O Cruises	No image	White background Blue/black text

Table 2. Image content of the websites

Two of the pioneers of multimodal discourse analysis, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2002) have drawn, for their descriptions of the significance of colour, on the work of painter Wassily Kandinsky. Of blue, for instance, he wrote that it is 'the typical heavenly colour... the ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest' (Kandinsky 2008: 83), of green that it is 'the most restful colour that exists' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 84). White, meanwhile, commonly symbolises 'joy and spotless purity' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 85).

The colour schemes that feature in many of these webpages, then, may have strong interpersonal effects, offering potential clients the solace of nature for the stressed conditions they endure in their modern lifestyles. The clean white

vessels, when they do appear, represent the antithesis to urban pollution. Blue and green, of course, are the typical colours of nature, and it is no surprise that they feature in many sites, while white is a standard colour used for neutral backgrounds, but could also, as the typical colour of the ships, be seen as a semiotic index for the vessels.

The images can be analysed in more detail using some of the tools outlined by O'Halloran (2008: 457), who discusses 'visual discourse' in terms of the participants and events in a particular scene. We can focus, for example, on the 'figures', 'objects' or 'settings' in the various pictures, what 'actions' or 'events' are taking place, as well as considering the perspectives from which the various images are shot.

In general, there is a striking lack of human actors. There are a few ships to be seen, but no sailors, nor captains. In most of the images, indeed, the chief protagonist is nature, the perspective that of an invisible observer. In many images, the main participants are trees, doing what trees do - growing, waving in the breeze - or other natural features like mountains, and rivers. In one there is a bear, fishing in a stream. From an ecolinguistic perspective, it is possible to see these objects as equally important compared to human agents (Stibbe 2012), though it is the absence of human agents, arguably, that appears to be significant here. The subliminal message conveyed by these images is that nature is 'sustainable' in the absence of humans. Sustainable cruising, as represented in these images, is a form of cruising that downplays the monster cruise ship with its plentiful human cargo. Apart from the EcoShip, which as has been explained, is a special case, the only cruise ship visible appears unobtrusive against the imposing natural shapes of mountains in the background (Lüftner). Sustainable cruising therefore, in these pages, appears as a form of cruising that has minimal environmental impact, and the representational patterns elide elements that might call up notions relating to that impact – anything, in other words, involving the presence of people.

6. Discussion

The environmental controversy surrounding their activities has not prevented the cruise companies from branding their products as 'eco-friendly' or 'sustainable'. It therefore becomes important to enquire how far such initiatives are substantial, or far they can be interpreted as greenwashing strategies, just as the Shell oil company has frequently presented itself as a friend to green values (Vasta 2005). Friends of the Earth (2016) provides an independent check on the companies' claims, grading the most important companies, and producing an annual report on the parameters of sewage treatment, air pollution and water quality. For several years, the major companies collaborated, but recently withdrew cooperation, leading to a failing grade for most for 'transparency' in the latest report. This means that the public, currently, is mainly dependent on reports provided by the companies themselves for information about their ecological profiles.

The need to harmonise the interests of tourism companies with those of the populations and ecosystems they visit is the principal focus of an influential UNESCO report on this commercial sector (Robinson and Picard 2006).

Other research has compiled a long list of potentially harmful environmental effects associated with cruise ships, most of which are exacerbated with the increasing size of the vessels: anchor damage, air and water pollution, damage to local natural and cultural eco-systems (Carić 2011; Hall 2001; Johnson, 2002). As Hall (2001) notes, ocean and coastal tourism faces a fundamental paradox that seems to menace the sustainability of the entire paradigm: it is the very lack of development in remote areas, their unspoilt character and the distinctive local cultures that render them attractive destinations. Yet, if they are to attract mass tourism, these essential features seem destined to disappear. In terms of its long-term sustainability, cruise tourism seems to epitomise the critique of tourism in general advanced by Glasson et al. (1995: 27): 'Tourism contains the seed of its own destruction; tourism can kill tourism, destroying the very environmental attractions which visitors come to a location to experience.' What emerges from the foregoing analysis of the companies' sites is their use of textual and multimodal elements in patterns that associate their products with the underlying, socially approved philosophy of eco-friendliness. Sustainability, in fact, is not used in any technical sense but simply as a positive buzzword which could be substituted for any other in the ecological paradigm (eco-friendly, green, environmentally-friendly, natural, renewable, etc). As Halliday (2001: 195) points out, in fact, the concept of sustainability represents a leitmotiv of post-modern discourse, a touchstone of universal applicability. By framing their offer in terms of sustainable, environmentally-friendly products, the tour companies downplay the negative aspects of their activities. The cruise ship is generally elided from the pictures on the web pages, which feature instead natural paradises unspoilt by anchor damage or pollution, uncontaminated even by the presence of what must, perforce, be present in any cruise - hundreds, even thousands of human beings. Where the cruise ship does appear in the image, as in the Carnival page, it is represented as proportionate to a dominant landscape, rather than - as would be the case with a cruise ship at dock in a city like Venice, for example - as the dominating factor in a subordinate townscape. As Krippendorf (1987: 138-148) presciently noted, tourism depends heavily on the business policy and marketing of the 'holiday makers', the companies who not only shape tourism but have special responsibilities because they deal in people, cultures, and landscapes.

There is something paradoxical about the pages which offer visits to unspoilt, verdant natural landscapes (Treadright, the Boat Company, Discovery, Lüftner). The images on these webpages show scenes of remote areas which might feature in promotional materials for trekking holidays. They are at odds with the realities of cruise ship holidays, as these are generally known. The impression is given that it is possible to visit such places and leave without any impact on nature or local populations - in fact, local populations are elided from these pictures too. Sustainability, therefore, is equated with lack of interaction, with minimal impact on, or even contact with, the environment in question.

7. Conclusions and Implications

The cruise market has expanded in recent decades, with aggressive competition among cruise lines, which have developed distinctive brand positions to differentiate themselves from competitors. Consequently, cruise ships today offer a world of innovative facilities, and services that aim to satisfy the expectations of a growing population of travellers. The industry has responded to the desires of passengers by developing new destinations, ship designs, and on-board amenities. However, in terms of sustainability, the attention of the cruise lines seems confined to relatively minor policies and practices of waste management, water treatment policy, and reduction of air emissions.

Although the major cruise lines have, as we have seen, made some efforts to respond to the environmental challenges facing the industry, much remains to be done to balance the rapidly growing demand for cruising against its negative environmental impacts. It is unreasonable to attempt to justify harmful environmental impacts as due to the difficulties and costs of sustainability assessment. Much of the potential for conflict with the principle of sustainability stems from the cost of the modifications that would be necessary to enable destinations to function as cruise destinations, which would include the construction of infrastructure such as cruise passenger terminal facilities and berthing access. The impact of large numbers of visitors arriving at a destination, and pressure on the local cultures and environments of the cruise destinations, are other key factors that must be considered.

Cruise industry growth seems, therefore, to be in conflict with the sustainability paradigm, against the backdrop of an increasingly fragile ecosystem. The images that the cruise lines offer their passengers do not correspond to an authentically ecological version of cruise tourism development, genuinely respectful towards the environment and natural ecosystems. This would require a long-term management strategy, both holistic and multi-voiced, involving international agencies, cruise line operators and host communities.

We have seen that environmental issues have become pivotal for the cruise companies, as they attempt to increase their already significant share of the tourism market, and that the concept of sustainability apparently occupies an important role in their operations of marketing and branding. At the very least, the companies are today obliged to pay lip service to environmentally friendly practices if they hope to be competitive. Some companies have gone further than others in diversifying their range of products, in order to tap into this potential new field of activity. What is not plain is the extent to which such initiatives represent genuinely new commercial pathways, or how far they can simply be seen as instances of corporate greenwashing.

As for sustainability, we have seen that tourism itself, according to some commentators, has to deal with a fundamental paradox in this area. The more successfully a cruise company promotes the attractions of 'unspoilt' beaches or, from the cultural point of view, the exotic 'other' in the form of indigenous peoples, the more it spoils those beaches and corrupts the locals by the flux of human traffic and capital it drives to the area. The cruise industry seems set on an incremental curve that must, sooner or later, arrive at a critical

crossroads. To welcome these massive cruise vessels, towns must undergo transformations in harbour structures, and introduce many other innovations that may be at odds with the traditional character of the places - with the very circumstances, in other words, that made them suitable tourist venues in the first place. As for economic spin-offs in the various localities along the routes, in terms of supporting commercial activities - restaurants, bars, souvenir shops and the like - which have been proposed as evidence of the existence of a sustainable paradigm, it must be questioned how far the creation of such micro-economies are compatible with the 'authenticity' of the places.

Sustainability, like eco-friendly and other similar terms, has all the hallmarks of a glittering generality, and as such demands critical attention. Its fluid characteristics make it highly adaptable to the marketing strategies of the companies, but if it is to have any meaning in the context of tourism, it must refer to products which benefit local economies without vitiating the unspoilt character of destinations. It should be impossible for cruise companies to promote visions of pristine maritime paradises unless their ships conform with strict standards of environmental tutelage, proposed not by themselves but by reliable external authorities. In short, it remains to be seen whether the cruise companies will keep their own promises in this area, or whether their talk of sustainable tourism will be revealed as empty words.

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Appendix

Top ten sites ‘sustainable cruise’

SITE

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