5. Mapping conflicts of prioritization

National parliamentary discourses on urban greening and biodiversity implementation in Germany and Italy

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Introduction

Climate change and its effects on people's lives are among the biggest challenges of the present times. A recent report jointly authored by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss (Pörtner et al., 2021). While urban development has been identified as one of the leading causes of biodiversity loss (McDonald et al., 2018), cities themselves offer opportunities for developing solutions to address urban greening and biodiversity through ad hoc policies that recognize the prominent role of nature in combating climate change (Grimm et al., 2008). However, addressing climate change implies that diverse issues should be considered simultaneously, that uncertainties drive actions undertaken, and that conflicting interests are involved when changes are envisioned (Meadowcroft, 2011: 72). These challenges are exacerbated as the notion of nature 'is culturally invented and reinvented', thus contested and open to interpretation (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005: 178). Hence, the debate on urban greening and biodiversity, as they are related to climate change, is highly controversial, as political actors have different opinions on the problems, solutions, and actions to take.

In this chapter, I propose analysing political debates to explain climate governance policy-making processes within the context of global targets, national commitments, and local actions. Specifically, I investigate the conditions and reasons for conflict concerning urban greening and biodiversity policies in the German and Italian national parliaments as the appointed

authorities that translate supralocal recommendations into national decisions (Scharpf, 2009). I ask: What are the conditions of and reasons for contestation in the debate on urban greening and biodiversity at the national level? I deploy a discourse network analysis (DNA) to delineate the evolution of actors' discourses on the implementation of urban greening and biodiversity policies (Leifeld and Haunss, 2012). Stemming from discourse analysis and network analysis, DNA makes it possible to build networks of actors, called discourse coalitions, which are based on their agreement and disagreement patterns on a particular issue. The greater the polarization between these coalitions, the more detectable the conflicts become. After reflecting on the importance of discourses in environmental politics, I elaborate on the opportunities to study political debates in national parliaments in the European Union (EU). I also briefly present recent insights on EU urban greening and biodiversity policies. The third section of this chapter depicts the cases of Germany and Italy as two paradigmatic examples in the EU. The results reveal a general agreement among political actors on the relevance of implementing urban greening and biodiversity policies. However, conflicts become evident when other issues are deemed more urgent than urban greening and biodiversity interventions. In the fourth section, inspired by work on discourses of climate delay, which comprise various strategies that actors deploy to 'justify inaction or inadequate support' (Lamb et al., 2020: 1), I illustrate five 'latent conflicts' behind an apparently unanimously agreed upon policy solution. These conflicts result from a prioritization activity involving the deployment of climate delay discourses.

Localizing discourses in environmental politics

If, in Western countries, climate change is somewhat accepted by political parties of both the right and left (Ghinoi and Steiner, 2020: 216), disagreements on the most appropriate ways and tools to cope with climate change remain observable (Hulme, 2009). On one side, national governments are urgently asked to act (see Haarstad et al., 2023); on the other, dealing with climate change obligates national governments to weigh different priorities, debating on 'what action should be taken, how fast, who bears responsibility and where costs and benefits should be allocated' (Lamb et al., 2020: 1). Analysing the political debates on climate change can help to interpret policy-makers' choices of prioritization and their communication strategies (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004).

Maarten Hajer has amply discussed the importance of discourses in environmental politics. Introducing the argumentative turn in discourse analysis, he sees actors producing and reproducing storylines based on shared ideas and beliefs through discourses (Hajer, 1995). Storylines serve to orientate actors' arguments in favour of or against a specific issue, forming discourse coalitions (Hajer, 1993). The more an issue is invested with ideologies and beliefs, as in the case of nature (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005), the stronger the relationships among the actors in the coalition who will attempt to impose their storylines over those of other coalitions. Hajer's argumentative discourse analysis shows that discourses do not occur in a void but are dependent on their context in a continuous dynamism whereby different coalitions engage permanently in discourse activities. The advocacy coalition framework (ACF), theorized by Paul Sabatier, describes an advocacy coalition as a network of actors that agree on a set of core policy beliefs. According to ACF, the dynamics between different coalitions tend towards the establishment of one definite storyline in the pursuit of a stable equilibrium (Zafonte and Sabatier, 2004). In doing so, different coalitions try to dominate the storylines of others, giving rise to conflictual situations. However, ACF is often criticized because it offers a relatively static picture of coalition dynamics, failing to explain the reasons for policy change (Schmid et al., 2020: 1114–15).

Conversely, the discourse network analysis (DNA) methodology provides a dynamic and longitudinal study of political discourses together with qualitative and quantitative social network analysis (Leifeld and Haunss, 2012). The unit of analysis of this method is the statement expressed by an actor concerning an issue. DNA can be used to find correlations between statements and the actors that utter them to provide a picture of the evolution of discourses on a specific issue based on agreement and disagreement patterns (Leifeld, 2017). Through DNA, it is possible to create three main types of networks (Leifeld, 2017). The *affiliation* network describes the relationship between actors and concepts at a given time. The *congruence* network shows how actors co-support or co-reject a concept: the thicker the tie, the higher the number of times two actors share the same opinion on that concept. Similarly, the *conflict* network shows the negative relation between actors and concepts, highlighting the most controversial arguments. Thus, analysing actors' relations through DNA can help identify potential conflicts among actors over time.

Whereas the implementation of urban policies occurs at the local level, policy-making at the national level can, to a certain extent, influence local-level discourses and practices (Lidmo et al., 2020). This influence largely depends on

the ability of national-level policy-making to provide a clear legal framework, which can be voluntary or binding (ibid.). This legal framework is debated in national parliaments, the official communication channels of national governments' decisions to the broader public (Bhattacharya, 2020: 231). In the EU, national governments have an additional reference layer when making decisions on domestic policies. By translating global climate targets into guidelines for the EU Member States (MS), the EU constitutes a 'government of governments' that provides an in-between political arena wherein each MS takes political responsibility for common issues (Scharpf, 2009: 181). The EU–MS relational system considers actors, bodies, and institutions, building a highly interconnected structure of distributed responsibility among different levels (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006).

Nevertheless, the structure of such a model is relatively unstable, which affects debates at the national level whereby even the most mainstream political parties can feature internal disagreements and insecurity on what action to take (Hooghe and Marks, 2018). Thus, the complexity of EU–MS relations can create occasions for conflicts at the national level beyond domestic problems. One cause of conflict can be the introduction of novel arguments resulting from a policy decision at the EU level. Because novel arguments cannot always be immediately ascribable to a specific political orientation, actors lack a political direction by which to express a clear policy preference on these arguments (Kammerer and Ingold, 2023). Consequently, it is possible to find politicians belonging to opposing political parties sharing similar beliefs or even agreeing on a novel issue (Bhattacharya, 2020). Conversely, disagreements can also be generated from the bottom. Especially in times of crisis, recent research has highlighted that national parliament members do consider public opinion when arguing their position (Degner and Leuffen, 2020). All these considerations make parliamentary debates a vibrant arena for analysing and depicting discursive conflicts among actors and tracing their evolution in political decisions concerning EU affairs.

The cases of Germany and Italy in the context of EU policies on urban greening and biodiversity

In 2019, the EU drafted the European Green Deal (EGD) to embrace globally agreed-upon emission reduction targets and to set the guidelines for a strategy that simultaneously promotes just and inclusive economic growth 'to protect,

conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital' (EC, 2019: 2). The key areas of interventions refer to agriculture, biodiversity, energy, mobility, and the built environment. Successively, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (BDS 2030) aims to operationalize the EGD key area of biodiversity by setting nature at the centre of climate policies (EC, 2020). With the persuasive title of 'Bringing nature back into our lives', the strategy proposes to systematically integrate 'healthy ecosystems, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions' into urban planning (ibid.: 13). These three notions permeate the urban greening and biodiversity interventions in the EU context. Healthy ecosystems generally refer to an ideal, desirable future (Costanza and Mageau, 1999); conversely, green infrastructure (GI) and nature-based solutions (NbS) are more action-oriented solutions, whereby GI refers to a utilitarian framework mainly for human well-being, and NbS focus on nature and the involvement of people (Haase, 2021: 308). GI and NbS belong to a broader discourse that deploys nature and natural elements to simultaneously achieve emission reduction targets, quality of life, and biodiversity protection in cities (ibid.: 315). However, activists have denounced the risks of misusing such brand-new and controversial notions (Seddon et al., 2021; Melanidis and Hagerman, 2022). For example, many private corporations have constructed a narrative of sustainability around NbS while keeping their business-as-usual activities (FOEI, 2021). These misuses have raised a profound debate around the equal and just distribution of benefits supposed to be created through the implementation of solutions that foresee nature as a driving element for urban development (e.g. Cousins, 2021).

Research has highlighted a wide variety of reactions to EU decisions from different national contexts and the political parties composing the national parliaments, underlining the communicative power of these bodies (Auel and Raunio, 2014). Germany and Italy can be considered the two countries that best exemplify the northern and southern politico-economic models coexisting in the Eurozone, thus giving insights into the growing divergence among the EU Member States (Piattoni and Notermans, 2021). These two countries, both members of the G7, have a strong image in the global arena. While Germany is a federation of states, Italy is defined as a devolved state with a relatively strong central government where only some responsibilities are transferred to the local level. Nevertheless, this centralized tendency does not apply to environmental policy and planning: in fact, both countries' governance structures underwent a process of decentralization of competencies from higher levels towards local ones in the early 2000s (ESPON, 2018). Being parliamentary republics, their national legislations are decided within a bicameral system

composed of a lower (parliament) and an upper (senate) house (Parline, n.d.). Because the Bundestag and Camera dei Deputati have similar structures, comparing the two parliaments is possible (see Table 1).

Table 1: Germany and Italy data comparison.

	Germany	Italy
Socio-economic data		
Population, 2023 [million] (Eurostat, 2024)	84.4	58.9
People living in cities, 2022 [%] (World Bank Open Data, 2018)	77.6	71.6
Country territory occupied by settlement, 2021 [%] (Eurostat, 2022)	37.2	39.1
Public debt, 2023 [% of GDP] (Eurostat, 2023)	64.6	142.4
Urban greening–related data		
Public green space per inhabitant [m²/inh.] (Maes et al., 2019: 55)	30	15
Contribution to the Green Climate Fund [billion USD] (GCF, 2023)	1.7	0.3
EU-related data		
European Regional Development Fund, allocated [billion EUR] (EU, 2021)	10.9	26.6
Citizens trusting the EU [%] (EU, 2023)	68	69
Subscribed capital at the CEB funds [%] (CEB, 2023)	16%	16%
Government-related data		
Constitutional levels	Federation	Devolved
Parliament system	Bicameral	Bicameral
Parliament members [n] (Parline, n.d.)	736	400

Source: Author.

Compared to other EU Member States, the Bundestag presents and debates a higher share of EU legislation on its floor, which translates into a higher politicization of EU affairs than in other countries (Auel and Raunio, 2014). Re-

search on Camera dei Deputati debates has highlighted that environmental issues have always had a marginal role in Italian politics, but in recent years, attention given to climate change has increased consistently, especially in connection with natural disasters (Ghinoi and Steiner, 2020). Concerning urban greening and biodiversity, Germany and Italy are among the top five European contributors to the Green Climate Fund, showing a specific commitment towards greening policies[1] (GCF, 2023). Regarding their differences, Germany presents a generally high ratio of square metres of public green space per inhabitant, while this ratio in Italy is rather low (Maes et al., 2019). Because Germany and Italy present differences only in a few aspects, this research follows a 'most similar systems design approach' (Bozonelos et al., 2022).

Applying DNA to Italian and German national parliament debates

Using a multi-case-study analysis, this paper deploys discourse network analysis (DNA) to investigate the different responses to the EGD and BDS 2030 in national parliamentary debates. Although the usual primary data for DNA are newspaper articles (Leifeld, 2013), recent applications of the methodology have shown its potential for parliamentary debates by using verbatim reports of the parliamentary sessions (Bhattacharya, 2020; Ghinoi and Steiner, 2020). I analyse the debates on urban greening and biodiversity policies in the parliaments of two EU Member States: the Bundestag in Germany and the Camera dei Deputati in Italy.

The first documents related to urban greening and biodiversity in the German context are the green paper *Grün in der Stadt* and the white paper *Stadtgrün* drafted in May 2015 and April 2017, respectively. Both documents elaborate on the importance of urban greening and biodiversity becoming an integral part of German city planning with a social, ecological, and economic function (BMUB, 2015: 93) and provide guidelines for introducing more greening in cities to counteract the climate crisis (BMUB, 2017). The coalition contract between the CDU/CSU and SPD parties then led to the drafting of the *Masterplan Stadtnatur* in 2019, whereby nature in cities is considered relevant for supporting biodiversity and educating young people about health, social cohesion, and adaptation to climate change (BMU, 2019: 1–2). The masterplan

1 Germany is in first place, while Italy is in fifth.

adjusts the concept of greening in cities (*Stadtgrün*), which focuses on the future life of citizens, towards nature in cities (*Stadtnatur*), which instead targets the broader ecosystem of plants, animals, and insects as well (ibid.: 3). In 2019 and its update in 2021, the Federal Climate Change Act (KSG) was drafted to legally adopt the EGD at the national level. It represents the broadest and most mandatory targets for future developments in Germany, primarily by setting targets for carbon dioxide (CO_2) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction.[2] Since the German Environment Agency (UBA) considers urban greening and biodiversity interventions as a way to capture or reduce CO_2 and GHG emissions (Reise et al., 2022), solutions that rely on natural elements such as GI and NbS have acquired relevance in the climate change debate in Germany. Lastly, the National Strategy for Biological Diversity 2030 is the most recent document concerning urban greening and biodiversity, delineating an action plan for 2024–2026 supporting these interventions to become part of city planning (BMUV, 2023: 68–69).

The first document related to urban greening and biodiversity in the Italian context is Law Number 10/2013,[3] which states regulations for preserving urban green areas of historical and cultural significance and indications for developing new areas. The law supports local initiatives that propose urban green developments in any form[4] and declares the formation of the Committee for the Development of Public Greening.[5] One of its main goals is drafting a national plan to establish criteria and guidelines for realizing permanent green and tree-lined areas.[6] The principles within this law were translated into the National Strategy for Urban Greening, drafted in 2018. This strategy elaborates on the need to produce a plan addressing urban greening for protecting and fostering biodiversity through a systemic approach (CSV, 2018: 48). Solutions relying on nature, such as GI and NbS, are mentioned for their ability to address complex ecosystems (ibid.: 49) and tackle air pollution in cities (ibid.:

2 §3, Bundes-Klimaschutzgesetz, 2019. Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

3 LEGGE 14 gennaio 2013, n. 10. Norme per lo sviluppo degli spazi verdi urbani, 2013. Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana 1.

4 §6c and §6d, LEGGE 14 gennaio 2013, n. 10. Norme per lo sviluppo degli spazi verdi urbani, 2013. Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana 1.

5 §3, LEGGE 14 gennaio 2013, n. 10. Norme per lo sviluppo degli spazi verdi urbani, 2013. Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana 1.

6 §3c, LEGGE 14 gennaio 2013, n. 10. Norme per lo sviluppo degli spazi verdi urbani, 2013. Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana 1.

131). The documents presented show urban greening and biodiversity interventions as tools for CO_2 and GHG emissions reduction. Additionally, after the EGD, the notion of ecological transition was potently used in Italy, leading to the renaming of the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of the Ecological Transition in 2021. Lastly, the Italian Biodiversity Strategy 2030 highlights the role of biodiversity in fostering health, society, and the economy, pushing for more direct and continuative actions to increase knowledge, conservation, and valorization of ecosystems (MASE, 2023: 2–3). It is noteworthy that fostering biodiversity in Italy is still conceptualized as a proxy to bring benefits for human society rather than for nature itself.

The paragraphs above serve to identify the most suitable data according to DNA, namely (1) the period within which the verbatim reports should be searched and (2) which keywords should be used. Therefore, the time frame between 1 January 2013 and 1 June 2023 was selected to search the verbatim reports. This period is long enough to grasp a debate's main concepts and arguments and observe the evolution of discourse coalitions (Nagel and Satoh, 2019: 1685). Additionally, the data were subdivided into two distinct snapshots corresponding to the periods before (T1) and after (T2) the December 2019 publication of the EGD. This subdivision serves to identify whether similarities or differences in the discourse coalitions exist over time based on the external input from the EU (Leifeld and Haunss, 2012: 391). The keywords selected for the German case refer to urban greening, CO_2 and GHG reduction, climate and biodiversity protection, and urban development; [7] for Italy, the chosen keywords were less specific due to the impossibility of conducting a proper Boolean search in the Camera dei Deputati database.[8] In total, 49 and 48 documents were found, respectively. This sample size is comparable with other research using DNA to analyse parliamentary debates (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2020:

7 The German documents were found in the Dokumentations- und Informationssystem für Parlamentsmaterialien (DIP) of the Bundestag. The following string was used: *(A) (Klimawandel) und (Klimaschutz) und (CO2-Abscheidung und -Speicherung oder Treibhausgas) und (Biodiversität) und (Stadtentwicklung); (B) (Masterplan Stadtnatur – Maßnahmenprogramm der Bundesregierung für eine lebendige Stadt oder Stadtgrün); (C) (Naturbasierte Lösung).*

8 Only Assembly-related documents were selected. Four searches were conducted at Banche dati/Dibattiti in testo integrale of the Camera dei Deputati website (*A) clima, emissioni, verde OR biodiversità; (B) verde urbano (exact phrase); (C) soluzioni basate sulla natura; (D) sviluppo urbano sostenibile.*

232). An ad hoc selection concentrated the analysis on 12 documents per country (see Nagel and Bravo-Laguna, 2022). The criteria for this selection considered (1) the main governing periods, i.e. when the government is not concentrated on election campaigns or coalition formation negotiations, and (2) the monthly concentration of verbatim reports identified through the keywords.

The coding of the documents was adapted to the specificity of the parliamentary debates. Actors were categorized according to their position (government, majority, opposition) and political affiliation (from far right to far left). Each statement is categorized as a concept reflecting how actors express themselves on the issue at stake and the meaning those actors attribute to it. In parliament debates, all speakers have the same amount of (limited) time to express themselves on an issue. Each political party must divide its time among its members, whereby governing parties exploit their agenda control to profit from the time allocation (Giannetti and Pedrazzani, 2016). Due to this imbalance, the opposition parties tend to focus on counteracting the majority's proposals and present straightforward suggestions for improvement. Conversely, the speeches of the majority include comparatively vague arguments and mainly present the positive aspects of a proposal. Consequently, most of the statements of disagreement were found in the opposition speeches. In this case, a disagreement value was attributed to the majority's arguments compared to the opposition parties' or vice versa. Using the Java software Discourse Network Analyser version 3.0.10, 1,413 statements grouped into 197 concepts were coded for the documents analysed.[9] These were organized among eight sectors, following the EGD key areas (agriculture, biodiversity, energy, mobility, and the built environment) with the addition of EU and global relationships; technical, legal, and social measures; and urban greening. The use of the same sectors and concepts for the coding of both cases makes the comparison possible.

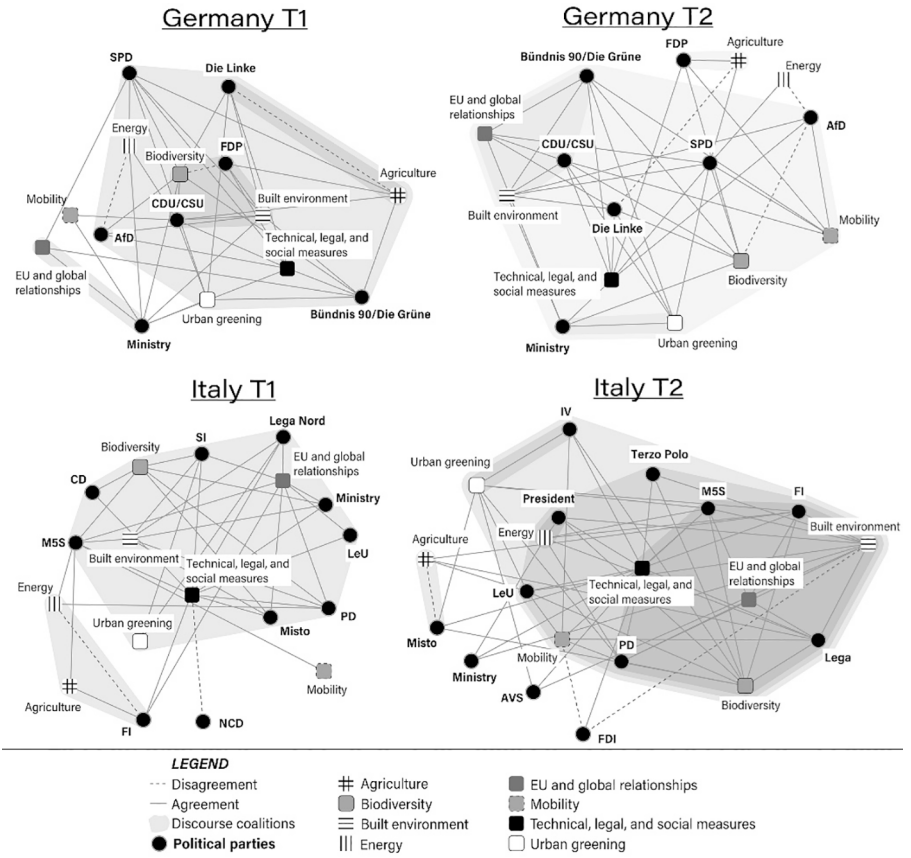
Discourse coalitions in German and Italian national parliaments

The data collected and coded as described in the preceding subsection are analysed by combining congruence and conflict networks to show both shared and conflicting arguments using the subtraction function (Leifeld and Haunss,

9 I thank Rebecca Dedeck for help in coding the German case.

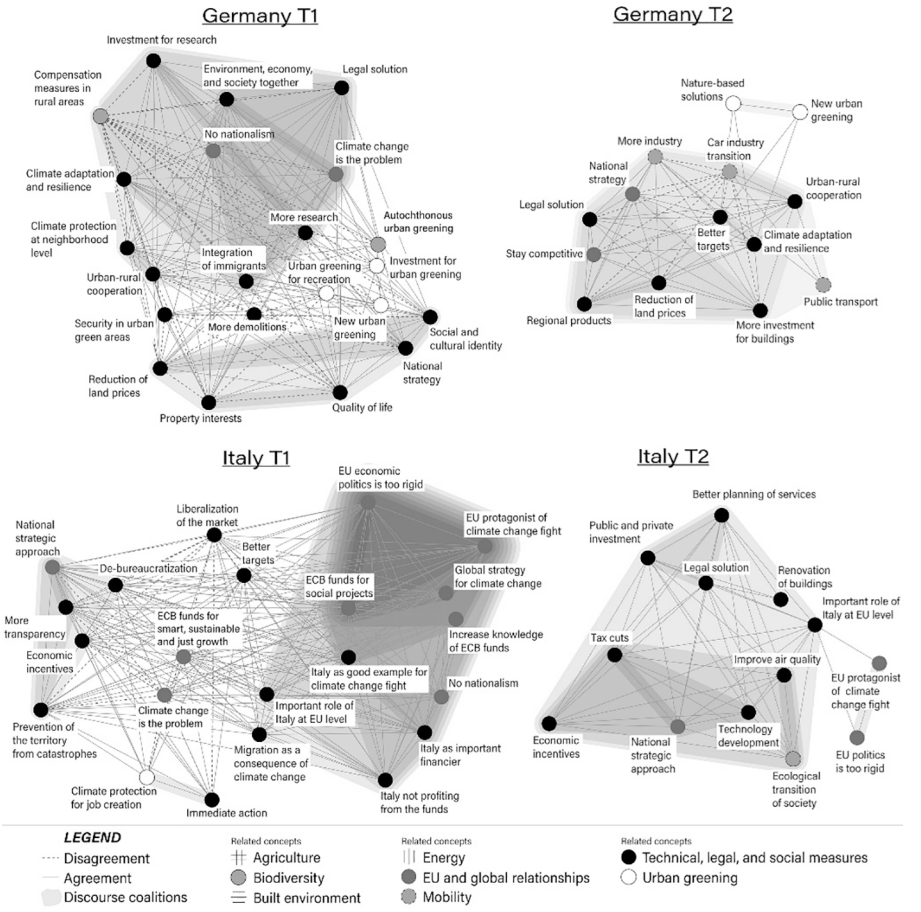
2012). The results were clustered through the Girvan-Newman method and visualized using the software program Visone (version 2.26) and are depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1: Subtracted discourse coalitions for Germany (above) and Italy (below) in two snapshots: before 2019 (T1) and after 2019 (T2) at the macro level of the eight sectors.



Source: Author.

Figure 2: Subtracted discourse coalitions for Germany (above) and Italy (below) in two snapshots: before 2019 (T1) and after 2019 (T2) at the micro level of the 197 concepts.



Source: Author.

Figure 1 shows discourse coalitions for the snapshots T1 and T2 at the macro level of the eight sectors. Networks were extracted from the Discourse Network Analyser software as two-mode based on concepts and political parties. Only the concepts with a betweenness above 0.2% are visualized. Figure 2 depicts the same discourse coalitions but at the micro level of the 197 concepts. Here, networks were extracted from the Discourse Network Analyser software as one-

mode based on concepts and sectors. Only the concepts with a betweenness above 0.5% are visualized.

Concerning the German case, discourse coalitions are relatively visible in T1 between concepts referring to the built environment and technical, legal, and social measures sectors (Figure 2). At the level of sectors, the two main coalitions see the government (ministry) isolated, standing mainly for the EU and global relationships (Figure 1). It can be observed that urban greening and biodiversity-related concepts are not ascribable to any specific coalition; still, these are in disagreement with other concepts, such as property interest support and compensation in rural areas (Figure 2). In the urban greening and biodiversity debate, the two centre-right parties, the FDP and CDU/CSU, disagree (Figure 1). Interestingly, these two parties are the parliamentary groups that most intensively address urban greening and biodiversity.

In T2, the concepts related to biodiversity form a clear coalition in contrast with others, especially mobility and agriculture (Figure 2). The more participative opposition of the AfD increases conflictual relations compared to T1 (Figure 1). Instead, agreement on concepts related to urban greening is generally shared by all parties, with more intense support from the government (Figure 1). In this debate, the AfD, although recognizing the importance of urban greening and biodiversity per se, vigorously pursues other fossil-fuel-friendly priorities. By accusing the majority of being too ideological in their environmental politics, this party rather pushes for the built environment and mobility-related concepts (Figure 2).

For T1 in Italy, three discourse coalitions can be observed: concepts related to (1) existing governance modes for the territory, (2) relationships between Italy, the EU, and other institutions, and (3) the need for immediate action and economically adequate climate protection (Figure 2). The second of these coalitions includes the highest number of concepts, revealing a direct invested interest in working on the image of Italy at the EU level (Figure 2). The isolated FI, the centre-right party, argues for agriculture and against energy sectors while not making any relevant contribution to urban greening and biodiversity (Figure 1). In general, concepts related to urban greening and biodiversity are not addressed, while conflicts are visible between market liberalization, transparency, and de-bureaucratization measures (Figure 2).

In T2, the visible discourse coalitions are reduced to two; one is centred on the role of the EU in guiding local actions, and the other on the activities themselves (Figure 2). However, conflicts are generally absent here. Like the German AfD, FDI is the main conflictual party, whereas the technical, legal, and social

measures sector is the most debated (Figure 1). In line with the arguments of Ghinoi and Steiner (2020), no evident discussion about urban greening or biodiversity sectors has been observed in both T1 and T2. If mentioned, concepts related to these sectors are embraced in a human-centred discourse (e.g. urban greening for human health).

The five 'latent conflicts' of prioritization

The results above show the German and Italian political parties' general agreement on the importance of supporting interventions related to urban greening and biodiversity. Following this logic, there is no apparent obstacle to their implementation. Nevertheless, conflicts are visible at the interface between urban greening and biodiversity concepts and others. In these cases, conflicts arise when limited resources force political parties to set priorities, whereby other more pressing issues surpass urban greening and biodiversity interventions. This prioritization explains how these actors more or less consciously deploy a set of discursive strategies to delay or divert the decision. I use the four discursive strategies of climate delay proposed by Lamb et al. (2020) as a heuristic tool to interpret the results from the DNA driven by the prioritization logic. Due to the specificity of the political arena of the national parliaments, a fifth set of strategies was added (see Table 2). Understanding the act of prioritization as the primary source of conflict among political actors, I conceptualize the absence of conflict in urban greening and biodiversity policies by presenting five 'latent conflicts' and the related discursive delay strategies. These conflicts are a meta-categorization of the discourse coalitions identified through the DNA methodology that express the intentions of parliament members to prioritize one concept over others. These five 'latent conflicts' are explained in the following paragraphs.

Table 2: Discursive strategies based on Lamb et al. (2020) and the related elements of conflict.

Strategy category	Discursive strategy	Elements of conflict
Redirect responsibility	Individualism	Change should be at the individual level
	Whataboutism	Other countries should adjust
	Free-rider excuse	Change cannot be pursued because of loss of competitiveness
Push non-transformative change	Technological optimism	Faith in technology for change
	Fossil fuel solutionism	Change is not needed as existing fossil fuel solutions work perfectly
	All talk, little action	Promises of change, but no action follows
	No stick, only carrot	Incentivize change through economic measures and silence the downsides
Emphasize the downside	Appeal to social justice	Change would create costs for the society
	Appeal to well-being	Change would diminish citizens' quality of life
	Policy perfectionism	Change can't be too ambitious, and caution is needed
Surrender	Change is impossible	Surrender or adapt because change is too complex
	Doomism	No matter what can be done, it is too late for change
Play the debate (parliamentary-debate-specific strategy)	Battles over meaning	Confusion or difference in meanings attributed to the same notion
	Protagonism	Criticize or second an argument by saying that its party already fought for it before
	Same day, another concept	Criticize the action of the government in general or introduce a new concept

Source: Author.

The first identified conflict, 'Immediate action or step-by-step?', is rooted in the broader mismatch between politics and policy in the perception of a problem (Heinelt, 2007) and, in particular, in the different spatial and temporal logic of a local politics of urgency versus the slow pace of global environmental-related challenges linked to climate change (Haarstad et al., 2023). While moderate parties follow a rather positivistic approach by arguing for the need to foster innovations and technology (*Technological optimism*) to combat climate change through the support of economic measures, such as incentives or tax exemptions (*No stick, only carrot*), left parties, to the contrary, tend to counteract this type of argument by calling for immediate action. These parties argue that humankind is dependent on nature and advocate for more natural solutions, pointing out the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss. However, the complexity of dealing with climate change is often argued by right-wing parties to justify the impossibility of change (*Change is impossible*) and the promotion of already existing technologies based on fossil fuels (*Fossil fuel solutionism*) or, at most, the support of a step-by-step approach (*Policy perfectionism*). This argument also pinpoints the high costs of urban greening and biodiversity interventions, which would burden society and the market (*Appeal to social justice*). Also, the frightening and pessimistic perspective of left-wing parties, as argued by right-wing parties, is often accused of creating panic and being counterproductive, reinforcing immobility arguments (*Doomism*).

The 'Is your future better than mine?' latent conflict reflects tensions between different ideas of urban futures. Even if everyone agrees on the importance of urban greening and biodiversity, dedicated areas for natural solutions within the city boundaries often clash with other ideas of the urban, such as the smart city, with a focus on technology and economy, or the compact city, with an emphasis on densification and mobility (Lidmo et al., 2020). Strategies deployed refer to a high faith in technology (*Technological optimism*), which all parties share, or to strategies that tend to obscure the downsides by highlighting the benefits for all (*All talk, little action*). Because some urban future ideas include market-based solutions that tend to commodify assets and resources, conflicts are located in both contexts' limitations and opportunities offered by the neoliberal paradigm of the current market (Ravazzi, 2021). In this sense, new alternative urban futures are embedded to a certain extent in strong path dependencies beyond right or left orientations.

The latent conflict 'You said Z, but what about X and Y?' regards a general mismatch between majority statements and those of the opposing parties. Interestingly, it was observed that right-wing parties usually bring up the topic

of urban greening and biodiversity in the debate as an excellent solution to improve the quality of life in cities (Germany) or to help prevent natural catastrophes (Italy). Left-wing parties do not oppose this kind of statement; they instead criticize the late response of the right-wing parties in supporting urban greening and biodiversity actions (*Protagonism*), and then either welcome their decision or propose additions. In Germany, during T2, the right-wing opposition disagrees with the arguments on urban greening and biodiversity of the majority by commenting on the inadequacy of the government's general conduct rather than criticizing the proposals per se. Similarly, the opposition may introduce new arguments with the aim of destabilizing the decision or pushing back responsibilities (*Same day, another concept*). These arguments usually refer to rather vague ideas and general notions, such as the ecological transition of society in the case of Italy, which are often difficult to counteract.

The latent conflict 'For humans or for nature?' pertains to the use of specific concepts, criticizing the different meanings each party gives to the same notion (*Battles over meaning*). In some cases, the parties accuse each other of wrongly using the notion of nature. A clear difference between urban greening and biodiversity interventions for the benefit of people or nature can be observed. It is noticeable that the advent of the EGD and the BDS 2030 has introduced a specific sensitivity among actors on this issue. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the debate around urban greening and biodiversity became relatively active in terms of mental and physical health. However, discourses on citizens' safety and on economic support to industry dominate the discourse on urban greening and biodiversity (*Appeal to well-being*). These events – the drafting of the EGD and BDS, as well as the onset of Covid-19 – prove the importance of external influences on domestic discourses, which may lead to a reshuffling of the actors' relations and the consequent formation of new coalitions. Misconceptions of wording are also found with other notions. For instance, democracy is often questioned in the Italian case, as the majority is accused of skipping some decisional steps in order to implement partial climate change–related plans (*Same day, another concept*).

The last identified conflict, 'Whose fault is it?', concerns the relationship with the EU or with other Member States, which causes intense polarization among parties in both cases. Here it is possible to recognize approaches of collaboration and harmony, as well as command, control, and open conflict, and even manipulation where acting against other countries is prioritized over addressing domestic problems. In many cases, these discourses on the relationship with the EU undermine the translation of the debate into effective reg-

ulations or policies. Italian parties' tones are usually rather autoreferential in referring to the relationship with the EU: the main objective is to regain the EU institutions' trust in the country and reaffirm the power and right of Italy to become a protagonist in the EU scene. The pressure of dealing with the EU is lower in Germany, translating into milder tones, referring mainly to searching for the solution to the problem outside the country (*Whataboutism*). Conflictual discourses regarding EU institutions are usually deployed by liberals and democrats, leading to the generation of nationalist beliefs (Marks and Wilson, 2000). This push against the 'outside' when acting for change is supported by concepts of protecting one's own cultural identity and by arguments of preserving the domestic economy's competitiveness (*Free-rider excuse*).

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed analysing national parliamentary debates in order to unravel conflicts among political parties that may explain the reasons for inaction in implementing urban greening and biodiversity interventions. A discourse network analysis (DNA) was deployed to identify reasons for conflicts by detecting different discourse coalitions over 10 years, from 2013 to 2023. DNA proved to be beneficial in highlighting more formally than other policy discourse analysis approaches (1) the arguments and concepts of conflict around urban greening and biodiversity policies and (2) actors' coalitions that either hinder or support the implementation of such policies (Leifeld and Haunss, 2012). Comparing two EU Member States of global relevance, Germany and Italy, provided a lens for grasping the complexity of urban greening and biodiversity policy-making. Interestingly, the analysis has revealed that little conflict exists per se on this topic at the national level. Conversely, actors prioritize solutions differently, whereby urban greening and biodiversity interventions are evaluated as being of relatively low priority compared to interventions within other policy fields. While DNA offers a quantitative evaluation of the debate and highlights network dynamics between actors and concepts, the strategies proposed by Lamb et al. (2020) provide an additional qualitative lens to interpret the results. Thus, five 'latent conflicts' were identified as the product of an implicit and explicit prioritization of policy agendas that follow politicians' constructed storylines to hinder effective implementation and justify inaction.

Among the five types of latent conflicts, the 'Whose fault is it?' conflict is the most intense. This is quantitatively visible in the number of concepts related to the EU institutions, as depicted in Figure 2. Qualitatively, the subdivision into the two snapshots, T1 and T2, shows that this conflict persists, although with different arguments and intensities, demonstrating diverse reactions of the two countries to EU-level guidelines (Auel and Raunio, 2014). Together with external events (e.g. Covid-19), the introduction of the EGD has proven to be decisive in discourse coalition rearrangements, resulting, in turn, in new polarizations on urban greening and biodiversity policy-making. Specifically, conflicts with the EU increased in Germany in T2, symbolizing a heightened sensitivity towards such topics. In Italy, the intensity of this conflict remained stable. Still, the topic shifted from trust and collaboration towards tension and distancing, whereas urban greening and biodiversity stayed in the background and mainly remained connected to discourses related to human benefits. In both cases, nationalists and Eurosceptics have increased their dissent against the EGD, in favour of domestic actions rather than multilevel collaboration. This is relevant for urban greening and biodiversity in particular, and for climate change in general, as such wicked problems are not affected by administrative boundaries and instead require a strong collaboration that transcends human-created boundaries.

The two conflicts 'For humans or for nature?' and 'You said Z, but what about X and Y?' are also highly controversial. The former fundamentally questions the argumentations of the proposer, while the latter refers to tactics to introduce new concepts with the aim of increasing complexity in the debate and blocking decisions. Interestingly, conservative parties have taken the initiative of introducing concepts related to urban greening and biodiversity. In contrast, progressive parties tend to speak of other concepts, such as housing and social justice, when counteracting the propositions from the majority. This is the case for Germany in T1, when the CDU/CSU highlighted the necessity of implementing more urban greening and biodiversity interventions, and the Green Party replayed the importance of strengthening the provision of social housing. A similar dynamic occurs in the Italian case, but in T2. This dynamic is linked to the majority's power to steer the agenda, while the opposition parties, with less time at their disposal, limit their speech to counteract the majority's argumentations. This counteracting usually takes the form of redirecting to other subjects of accusation instead of arguing on the same subject. In this case, no differences in political affiliation are observable.

Lastly, the latent conflicts 'Immediate action or step-by-step?' and 'Is your future better than mine?' are the least intense. A reason could be that opinions on the best approach and best urban future to pursue are firmly rooted in parties' beliefs and values, which are difficult to change. Conversely, the concepts generated from these beliefs are questioned rather than the beliefs themselves. This reflects the results that show a general agreement on the importance of urban greening and biodiversity. At the same time, no real suggestion on how to proceed is proposed; decisions are instead kept for an indefinite next meeting. Finally, it is noteworthy that these five latent conflicts are also linked to the specific format of the parliament debates. Since the imbalance in time allocation favours the majority, it was observed that the opposition must convey its ideas in a more precise and straightforward fashion. In contrast, the majority parties tend to remain vague.

Political discourses are a network phenomenon (Leifeld, 2017: 302). National debates on urban greening and biodiversity should not be treated as separate from other policy fields. While political actors tend to focus on the issue at hand, the complexity of urban greening and biodiversity is consistently intertwined with questions of land use, responsibility, materiality, and ideology. As shown in the German and Italian cases, the vagueness of the arguments on which actors agree even risks worsening any attempt to implement urban greening and biodiversity policies due to particular contextual situations and the complexity of the concepts used. By assuming the existence of multiple realities and considering the institutional dimension of discourse as its ability to shape society (Hajer, 1995), discourse analysis and DNA create space for properly interpreting the ambiguity of environmental politics, whereby discourse analysis is not simply a descriptive tool but can represent power dynamics among actors embracing conflict as a motor of (or brake to) change (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Leifeld, 2017). Further research could investigate the relations between parliamentary debates and practical implementations locally by identifying key actors and conflict types related to socioecological changes. Also, the analysis might benefit from defining more snapshots – for instance, during shifts in legislatures – to provide a more fine-grained picture that may show different types of agreement and disagreement (e.g. conceptual, opportunistic) and highlight additional conflicts related to the use of concepts in political debates during the election period.

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