

8 Communication for Sustainability

Lesson 02: Framing

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Where are we?

Episode 8.1: Key concepts of communication

Episode 8.2: Framing

Episode 8.3: Narratives & Storytelling

Episode 8.4: Cultures of Sustainability



Learning outcomes

Learning outcome 1:

Describe the diverse nature of contemporary practices of sustainability communication on an individual, organizational and societal level, the relationship of strategic communication practices to other public communication practices, the role of stakeholders and publics and the communication practitioners in and outside of organizations (corporate, NGO, political and educational institutions etc.)

Learning outcome 2:

Develop comprehensive and well-founded knowledge in sustainability communication as field of study, an understanding of how other disciplines relate to the field and an international perspective on the field.

Learning outcome 3:

Understand the key elements of communication theories, strategies and tactics, and, thus, the character and operationalization of best practice sustainability communication planning frameworks.

Learning outcome 4:

Advance your understanding of social and civic responsibility and develop an appreciation of the philosophical and social context of sustainability communication. Advance your knowledge and respect of ethics and ethical standards in relation to communication of, about and for sustainability.

Learning outcome 5:

Anticipate and Interpret current issues and challenges of a world in transformation and social change. Develop a deep understanding of and skills to create change, develop advocacy, leadership and authorship in and for sustainability communication.



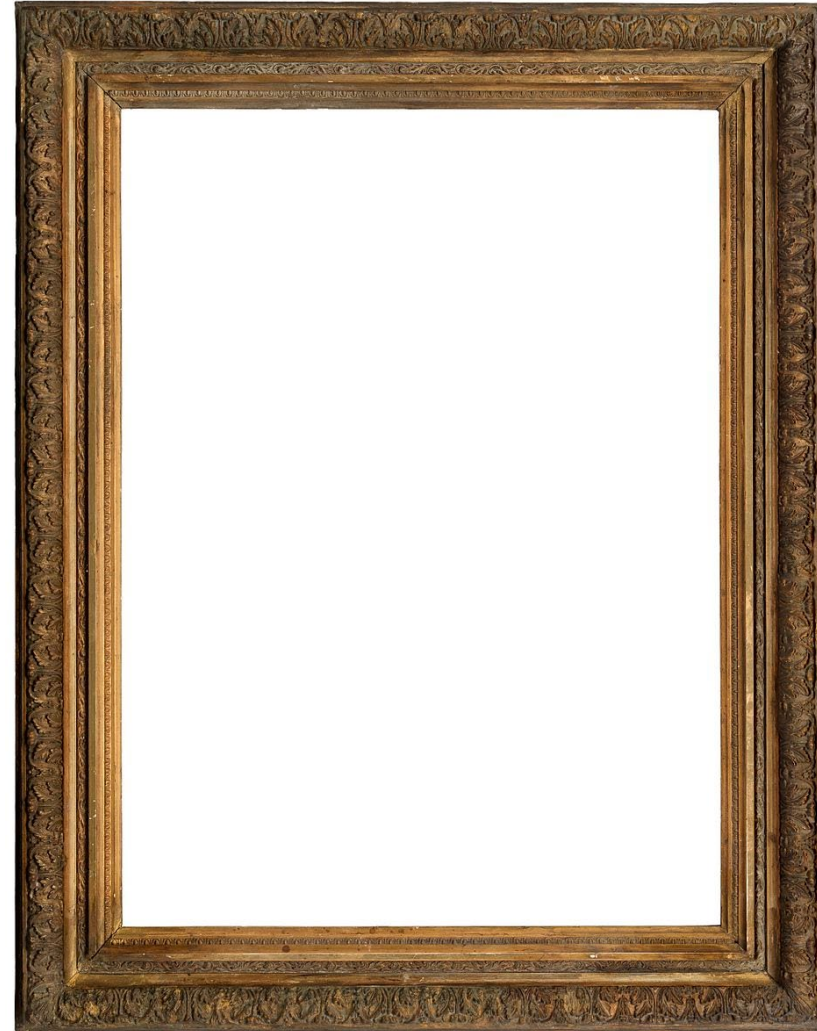
Overview

- A. Definitions
- B. Frames as linguistic devices
- C. Framing examples
- D. Framing *for* the future?



Framing

Hidden patterns = FRAMES
Process of FRAMING



Source: Picture by [Fæ](https://commons.wikimedia.org) on commons.wikimedia.org



A. Definitions

Framing

- a dynamic, circumstantially-bound process of opinion formation in which the prevailing modes of presentation in elite rhetoric and news media coverage shape mass opinion
- Framing effects refer to behavioural or attitudinal outcomes that are not due to differences in *what* is being communicated, but rather to variations in *how* a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse.
- Entman (1996): „to frame means to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation“



A. Definitions

Framing

- Episodic framing the dominant form of broadcast news coverage – issues depicted as particular instances: homeless person, single mother, laid off worker as symptomatic of poverty, particular criminal acts instead of overall trends in the level of crime (Iyengar, 1991)
- Thematic framing embeds issues in some general or societal context – historical trends in unemployment or poverty; news accompanied by expert analysis



A. Definitions

Frames

- “The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani 1989, in Vreese: 27)
- Frames are ..interpretative packages that give meaning to an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 3)
- Framing involves implicit information between the lines, the frame provides a context for the interpretation of a news message



A. Definitions

Frames

- Frames are perceptual experiences which activate some structures that we've acquired in the course of previous experiences
- „frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse“ (Gitlin, 1980)
- „frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world“ (Reese et al., 2001)



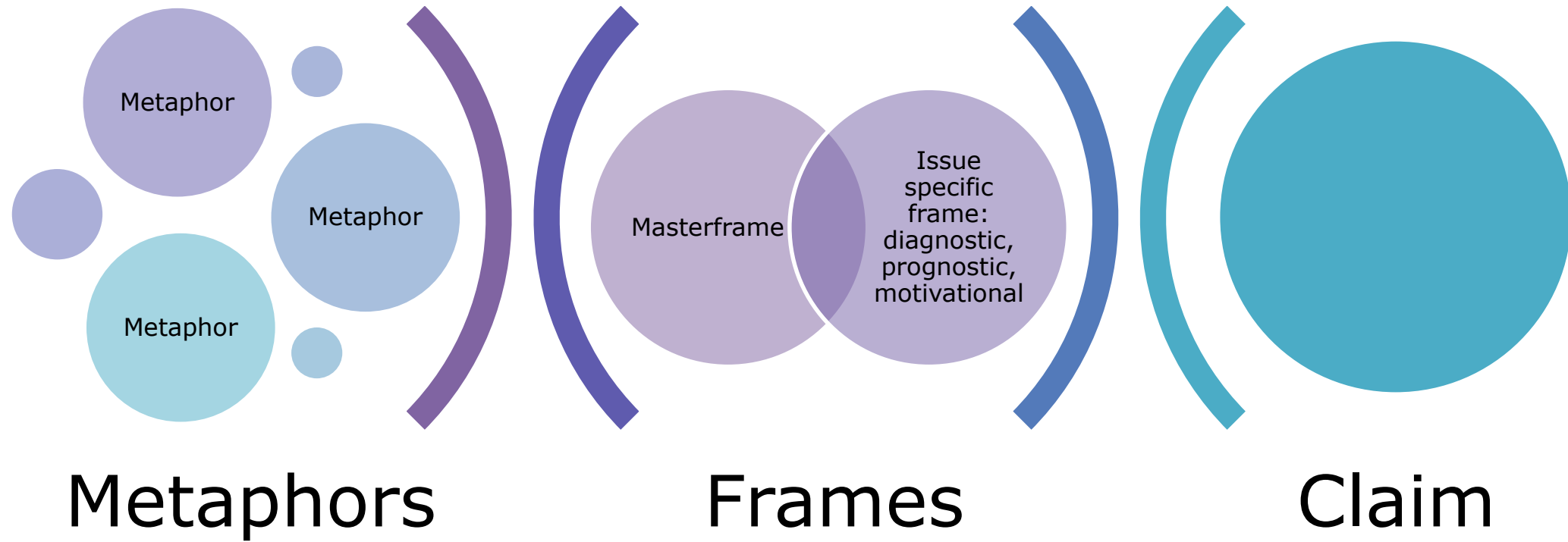
B. Frames as language device

Frames include...

- **Metaphor:** To frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else.
- **Stories** (myths, legends): To frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
- **Tradition** (rituals, ceremonies): Cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane, closely tied to artifacts.
- **Slogan, jargon, catchphrase:** To frame an object with a catchy phrase to make it more memorable and relate-able.
- **Artifact:** Objects with intrinsic symbolic value – a visual/cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the object itself.
- **Contrast:** To describe an object in terms of what it is not.
- **Spin:** to present a concept in such a ways as to convey a value judgement (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent; to create an inherent bias by definition. (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996)



B. Frames as language device





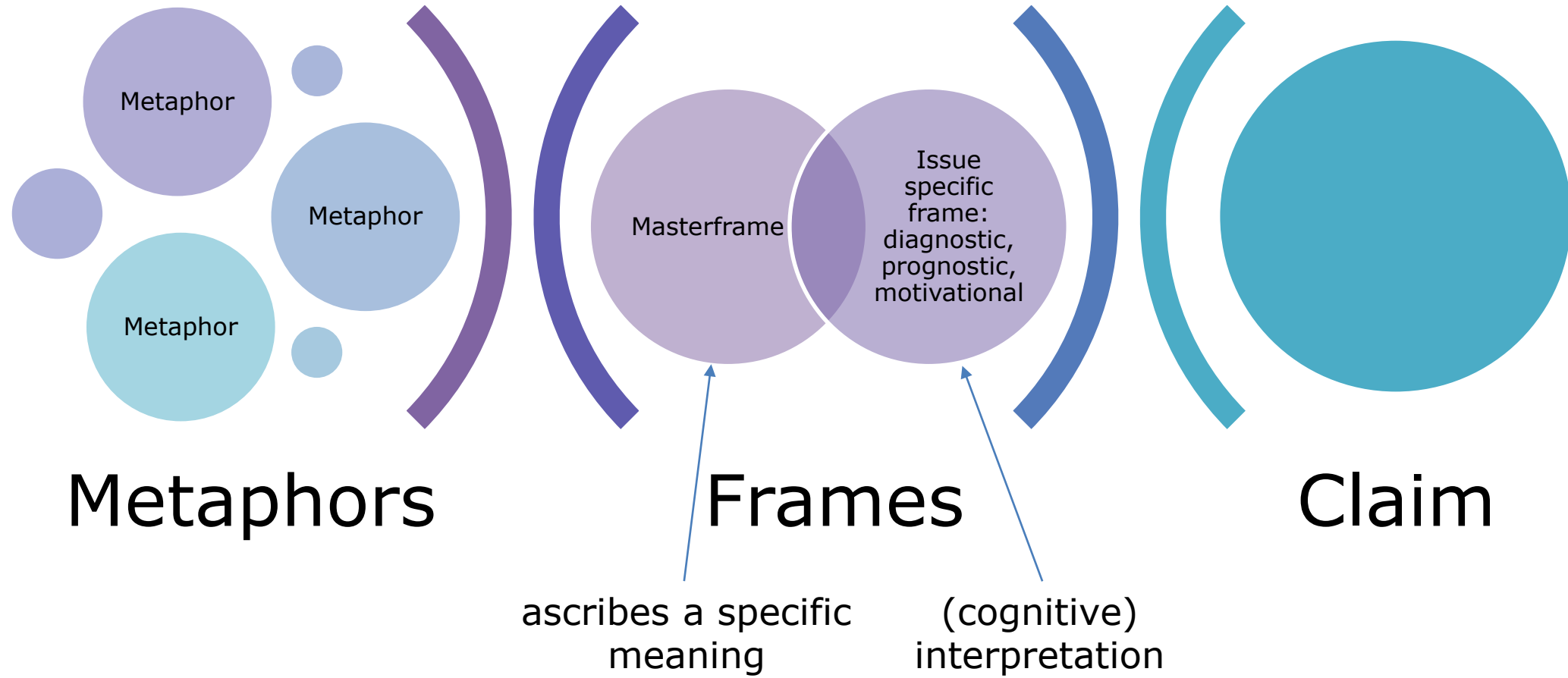
C. Examples

- **Topic:** Asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants
- **Claim:** Due to the war, we experience a wave of refugees, this will be one of the major challenges in Europe in the next years.
- **Alternative frames** (van Gorp 2007):
 - Misgovernment frame
 - Intruder/strangers frame
 - Our hospitality frame
 - The innocent victim frame
 - The donor/support frame
 - The “not in my backyard” frame

Metaphor



C. Examples



Metaphors

Frames

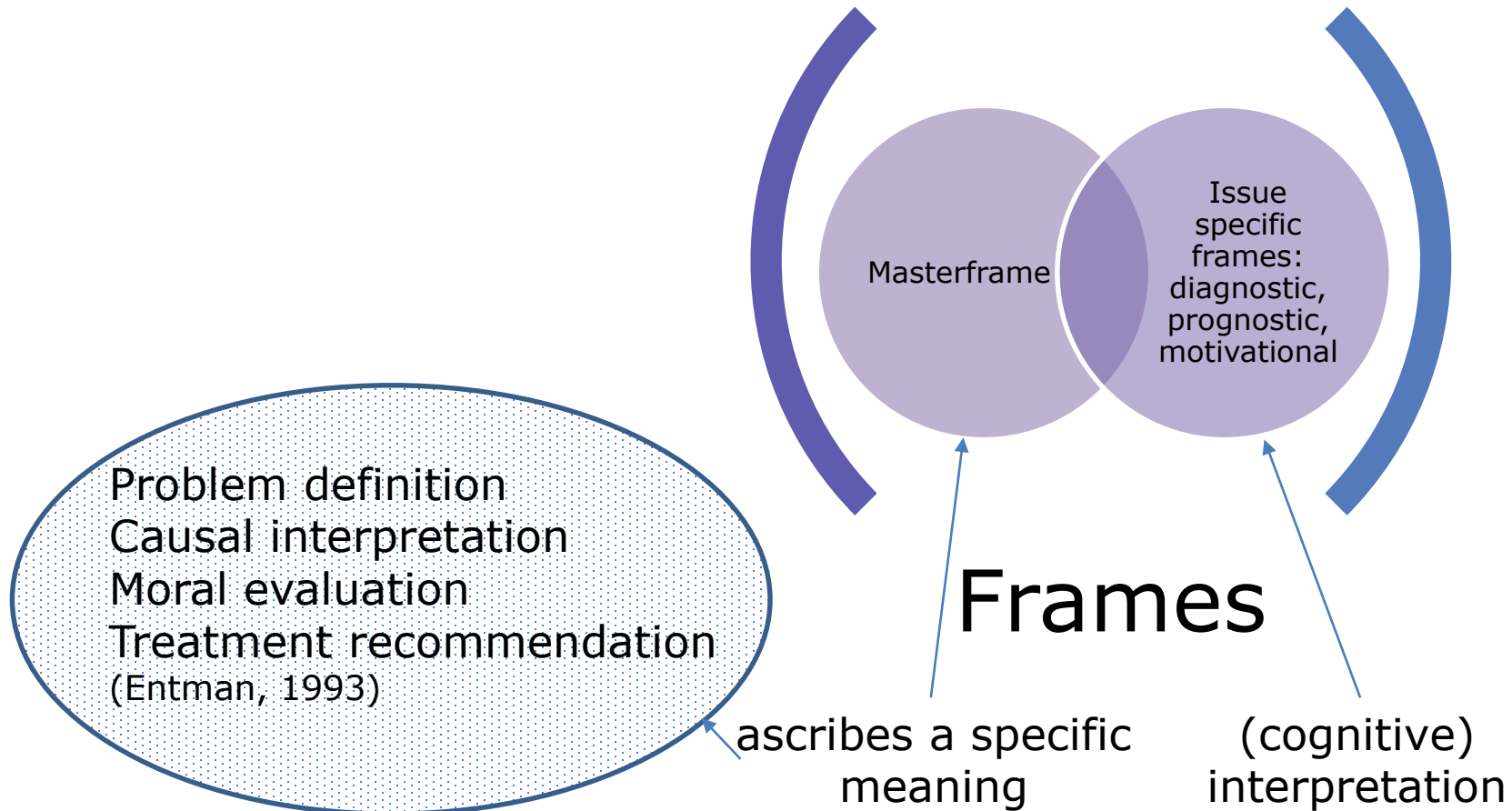
Claim

ascribes a specific meaning

(cognitive) interpretation



C. Examples





C. Examples

- Which keywords define a frame/identify a frame? (key word analysis)
- Example: Wetland issues (Australia or USA) (frame mapping)



Conservation advocates

- Natural
- River
- Earth
- Wildlife, species
- Conservation, protect
- Habitat, ecosystem
- Threatened
- Research, rare
- Bird, migratory, fish



Property owner, advocates

- Farmers, farm
- Rights, owners
- Agriculture
- Regulations, laws
- Compensation
- Business
- Ranchers
- private

Sources: private



C. Examples

Source: Picture by Ralf Roletschek on commons.wikimedia.org



Drill for oil

Prospectors, oil platforms, black, dirty, selfish, oil spill



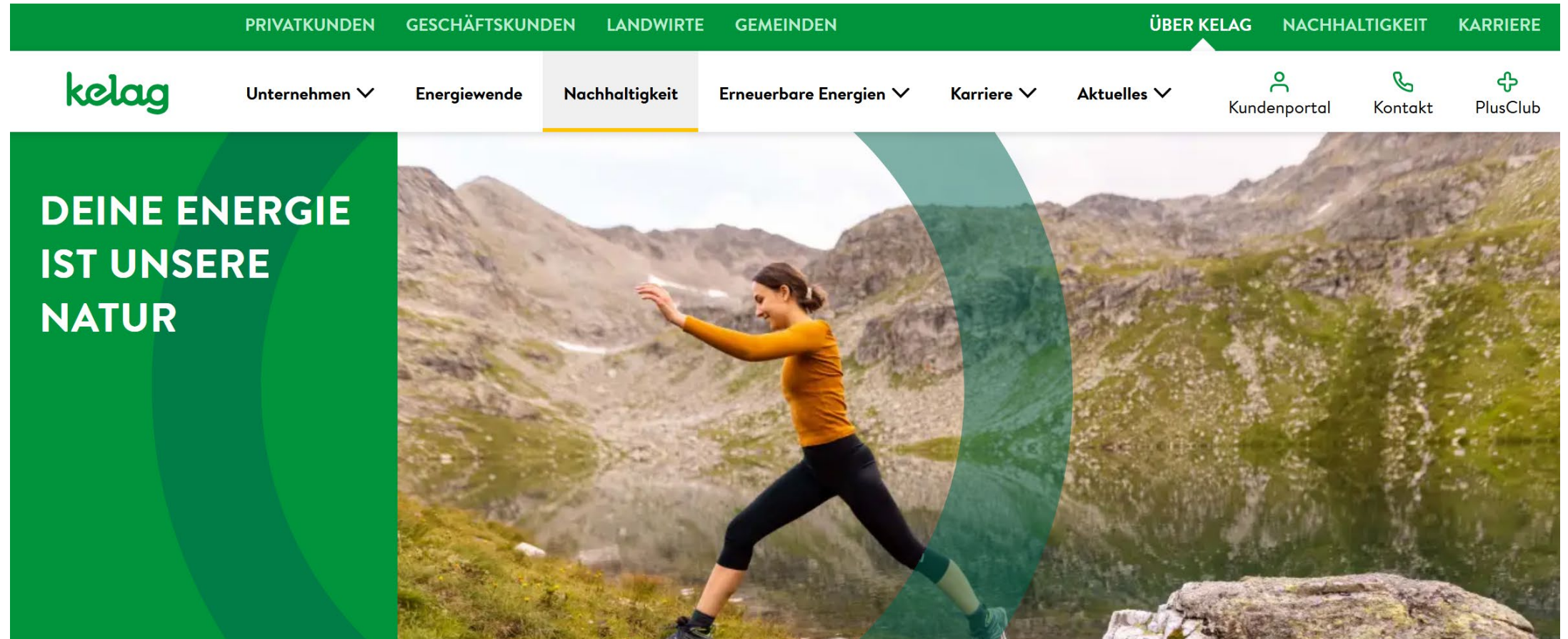
Source: Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Explore for energy

Nature, explorers, indidana jones, conquest, green and blue, internet explorer



C. Examples



Source: <https://www.kelag.at/ueber-kelag/nachhaltigkeit.htm>



C. Examples



← Menu

Sustainability

Getting to net zero >

Improving people's lives >

Caring for our planet >

Reimagining energy

Sign up for news

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Sustainability

Sustainability at bp is about creating value by connecting the business opportunities of the energy transition with our aims and objectives for people, our planet and getting to net zero

Sustainability report 2021 – quick read

Net zero ambition report

ESG datasheet

Source: <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/sustainability.html>





C. Examples

Sustainability?

- **Definition:** the ability of something to be maintained at a certain rate or level].
- **Masterframe:** Avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance and sustain our basis of existence
- **Claim:** *The committee is developing sustainability standards for products that use energy; with those standard we will help to create a sustainable future.*
- **Alternative (issue specific) frames:**
 - Economic reasonable (reduced costs/economic profitable, ensuring or hindering that the economic system can continue to function in the future)
 - Optimization (making existing things “better” by making them “sustainable”)
 - Extra-effort (economic not reasonable, future costs, need more time, not profitable)
 - Ecological risks (climate catastrophe, risks of nuclear power ..)
 - Socio-cultural justice (distributional justice, equality, diversity, conditions that allow human beings to meet their needs)
 - Insecurity (of the future, individual impotence)
 - Responsibility, consequences of actions (causal relationships)
 - Regulator frame (regulations needed)
 - (Over)Moralization (greenwashing, vagueness)
 - Transformation, Change (society, energy, capitalism – alternatives?)



D. Framing for the future?

Possible categories of analysis:

- **Connotation/sentiment:** positive, negative,
- **Direction:** forward facing, retrospective, justification ...

Snow & Benford: Frame Alignment (1988); Weder, 2021

- diagnostic framing (identification of a problem and assignment of blame)
- prognostic framing (suggestion of solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem)
- motivational framing (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action)



Reflection

- Try to define frames and the process of framing in your own words.
- What is the difference about a frame and a narrative (more to come in the next episode)?
- Try to identify frames in current climate change communication in the media – in newspaper articles, magazines and TV reports. Are there any frames that are used more often than others? Why is that?
- What about sustainability – is sustainability a frame itself or are there various “issue specific frames” that are used (and abused) to talk about the future? Are they rather diagnostic, prognostic or even motivational?