

**Environmental Law and the Challenges of the Decades
Ahead: Promoting Transformative and Recovery
Responses to the Planetary Emergency**

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PANEL 3. Imagining alternative pathways and taking action

**FROM THE ENDANGERED POLAR BEAR TO CHILDREN: THE
PROMISING ROLE OF THE INTERGENERATIONAL NARRATIVE
IN THE U.S. CLIMATE MOVEMENT**

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After years of obstinate climate denialism, in a political environment of extreme polarization, climate change has turned into a major campaign issue in the last U.S. elections. Such political shift can be attributed to at least two factors: the number of extreme weather events affecting the North American territory, and the rise of a youth-led climate movement. The present paper focuses on this latter aspect, aiming to analyze how intergenerational justice has become, over the last decade, a major motivation for climate action in the U.S. political discourse. Particularly, the paper argues that children, by becoming a new symbol in the campaign for climate justice, seem to have replaced a role that had previously been occupied by the “endangered species” par excellence: the polar bear. By resorting to media framing analysis, the paper aims to show that the intergenerational narrative, i.e., the identification of children as victims of climate change but also positive drivers of climate justice, might be more promising than communicative strategies previously used by environmental movements, that focused on the adverse effect of climate change on the natural world (“environmentalist narratives”). Through the content analysis of relevant articles in two widely popular U.S. newspapers – the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal–, the paper explores how the “polar bear” and “children” have been represented in the U.S. media, in their role as symbol and motivation for climate action. Secondly, the paper aims to understand how law and legal mobilization have affected the two narratives. Namely, the paper focuses on the media reception of the “Polar Bear” and “Juliana” cases, to explore if and to what extent the two legal campaigns have contributed to enhance or else lessen, the credibility and popularity of the two symbols for climate justice.