

## DISCOURSES ON ETHOS AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

*Jeanne Strunck*  
Aalborg University

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

After the tsunami catastrophe late December 2004 the WHO described the situation as follows:

The earthquakes and tsunamis that struck twelve countries on 26 December 2004, from South-East Asia to the Horn of Africa, have caused one of the worst natural disasters in modern history, and have caused over 150.000 deaths, leaving at least half a million injured, and five million people homeless or without adequate access to safe drinking water, food or health services ([www.WHO.int/hac/crisis](http://www.WHO.int/hac/crisis)).

For the private water companies the crisis and the economic support of the WTO increase the marketing opportunities as the worldwide water companies are interactants in the construction of knowledge of water supply solutions in general, and as this article will demonstrate they also operate in situations where humanitarian aid is needed. The private water companies are offering their services to industrialized and developing countries, and they are often operating closely with the national governments on finding political and economic solutions to the problem of water supply and sanitation. Also, they offer their services to international organizations such as The Red Cross in situations of disasters.

The article focuses on the web sites of one of these large water companies, the French Veolia Environnement (the former Vivendi Water Company and Vivendi Environnement), who has elaborated two special web sites on their home page describing their humanitarian operations and their collaboration with The Red Cross. One web site is called Veolia Water Force, the other Veolia Environnement –Partners in Emergency Humanitarian Operations, a site having the paratext Croix-Rouge Française.

The intention of the article is to study the discursive construction of the corporate credibility that help building up the corporate image of one of the water companies that may have an influence on the solution of the problem of access to clean water and sanitation for the victims of the catastrophe. An analysis of the corporate credibility, the company values and the company principles is interesting in regards to the political and humanitarian goals of international organizations such as the UN, the WHO, the WTO and the EU.

By the study of some of the texts at the Veolia web sites we can get an impression of how the texts contribute to the strategy of the corporate practice and how they can influence the broader socio-cultural practice that they form parts of (cf. Fairclough, 1999). The socio-cultural practices that the Veolia texts are inscribed in are the aftermath of the tsunami catastrophe and the political decisions about humanitarian aid, here water supply, discussed by the UN, the WTO and the WHO and on the other hand the criticism put forward by some environmental groups concerning the ethics of privatization of the water supply in general. As an understanding of the Veolia corporate policy and its credibility must be regarded within this framework, some of the discourses of the UN, the WTO, the EU Commission and the WHO as well of environmental groups will be analysed.

Being constituent parts of the discourse practice the media and the genre conventions of home pages will be analysed, and their influence on the structuring of the discourses and the receptionist conditions will be discussed. The Aristotelian terms of *ethos*: *phronesis* (wisdom, good judgement, competence), *areté* (virtue, excellence, goodness, character) and *eunoia* (engagement, presence, goodwill) as well as intertextuality and presupposition are main topics for the rhetorical part of the analysis as they take part in constructing the credibility of the enterprise.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

At the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 the EU launched a global initiative called Water for Life. A press release at the web site of the Commission ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade: press room](http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade:press%20room)), tells that the initiative aimed at creating strategic partnerships to achieve the World Summit on Sustainable Development goals on clean water and sanitation. This means that the EU and the World Bank funding should attract additional financial resources from governments and private companies, an initiative “promoting better water governance building stronger partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector” (ibid.). Also, the EU agreed on March 22, 2004 (the World Water Day) to set up a special Water Facility to promote access to clean water and sanitation for people in Africa, the

Caribbean and the Pacific at a sum of 500 million Euros based on a funding which “will be a tool in forging the public-private partnerships needed” (ibid.). This stresses the important role that the Commission attributes the multinational companies.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) expressed on the web sites concerning the Decision on Trade and Environment, adopted by ministers at the meeting of the Uruguay Round Table Negotiations Committee in Marrakesh, April 1994, that:

Member’s relations in the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, (...) and expanding the production of and trade in goods and services, while allowing for the optimal use of the world’s resources in accordance with the objective of sustainable development, seeking both to protect and preserve the environment...  
([www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/envir\\_e](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e))

The corresponding goals of the WTO and the Commission, as it appears from the quotations, state that economic growth and higher living standards are arguments for globalization and that strategic partnerships between public services and private companies will ensure sustainable development. According to the two organizations sustainable development is defined as economic growth, competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental protection. Finally, the cooperation between international organizations, governments and private companies may ensure an optimal use of the world’s resources –still focusing on the financial aspect of growth and sustainable development.

A UN society called the Global Compact was initiated in 2002 engaging the private sector in innovative partnerships to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals of the UN. Looking at the web site of the Global Compact on July 15, 2005, we find statements that follow up the quoted thinking of the WTO and the Commission, stating for example that

Through responsible business practices, business is making a unique and significant contribution to implementing the Millennium Development Goals. Private enterprise is at the heart of growth and development. By taking a principle-based approach to business, companies can help to ensure that sustainable development is achieved and that the benefits of globalization are shared more widely.  
([www.unglobalcompact.org/content/NewsEvents/homepage.htm](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/content/NewsEvents/homepage.htm))

The goals mentioned concern solutions to poverty and access to needed goods/services and livelihood opportunities as well as “reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water” (goal no 7) and “develop a global partnership for development” –which means for example “In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies (...)” (goal no 8) (ibid.). The Veolia Environnement company is one of the many participants of the Global Compact, which on 8-9 March 2005 held a meeting in South Asia, “bringing together representatives of companies, civil society and the UN to facilitate regional collaboration, share knowledge and present case studies of corporate-led partnerships and initiatives” and to present “practices that can be used to implement the Global Compact’s principles” (ibid.). Similar meetings have been held in May 2005 in London for business leaders, in June 2005 in Paris for business participants, in July 2005 in London to “discuss how the private sector can forge valuable partnerships with governments and civil society and mobilize resources to support the achievements of the Millennium goals”. In July 2005 an Africa Conference was held and finally on 11-13 September 2005 in New York a summit entitled An Active Role for Globally Responsible Companies was held. At the March meeting the UN secretary-general expressed his satisfaction with the commitment to the Global Compact, with the “openness to new forms of public-private cooperation” showed by the participants in 2004. But even if the concept of public-private partnerships, seen from the point of view of the international organizations, suggests democracy and responsibility, it hides the fact that the worldwide organizations and the governments are financing the privatization of public goods, according to Vandana Shiva (2004: 93)<sup>1</sup>. Shiva argues that liberalization is not a solution to the problem of lack of water because of the increased price level in countries where private companies govern the water, situations often followed by negative consequences for the poorest.

For the private companies such as Veolia Environnement, however, the partnerships with public and international organizations create opportunities for benefit in more than one sense: First the companies can have a good income being supported by public institutions and governments, secondly their operations in developing countries and in emergency situations are usable branding aspects and might create good stakeholder-relations. One corporate participant stated at the Global Compact May meeting 2005: “If business could show some numbers about their contribution, it would improve the credibility of business as a whole!”

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental activist.

([www.unglobalcompact.org/content](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/content); Business Action for Development, report 2005).

As it will emerge from the following, Veolia has changed and developed its strategies during the last few years and has had a need for image creation, new branding strategies and good stakeholder-relations, a corporate development that has called upon a new holistic corporate communication. As we shall see the possibilities of partnerships and the stressing on the company's humanitarian assistance form essential parts of the image in 2005, and we may say that the described socio-cultural practice influences the company's corporate practice as well as the latter by the corporate communication is influencing the decision-making of the socio-cultural practice – a reciprocal interdependence.

### 3. THE BRAND VEOLIA

Within the last 10-15 years the public media have been focusing on quite a big number of scandals within the water companies. American investigative journalists write in *The Water Barons* (2003) that no foreign companies so far have had a chance to get inside the water distribution in France, because the government and the big companies work together financially as well as politically. There are examples of lawsuits in France and elsewhere because of corruption between political parties and the companies Veolia and Suez, where allegations tell that the water companies pay percentages of their profit to political parties and important managers to ensure new contracts in France and other countries. The allegations against Veolia have, of course, had a very negative impact on the corporate image and may be regarded as one of the reasons for the company's change of brand name from Vivendi into Veolia in 2003. Another reason might be that the company was inspired by the participation in the Johannesburg Summit 2002 and by its membership of the UN Global Compact to adapt itself to the international standards and goals. Late 2002 and spring 2003 the company started constructing the new corporate identity by creating the last brand Veolia Environnement, an initiative by which the media organization, Vivendi Universal, was separated from the rest of the company.

Since 2002 Veolia Environnement has constantly been updating and renewing the corporate communication and the image in order to meet the demands of good citizenship having corporate and social responsibilities and showing moral and ethics in every decision and act. Veolia demonstrates these efforts in the company values and points in the corporate communication to the efforts within sustainable development and the humanitarian attitude to need, distress and emergencies, aspects that along

with information of product functionality should create a credible brand. This is what the rhetorical analysis is investigating, but before analysing the discourses that built up the Veolia ethos revealed at the corporate home page a study of the home page as a discourse practice is necessary.

#### 4. THE DISCOURSE PRACTICE

The reader of a corporate home page is exposed to a positive impression of the corporate identity and ethos which is the communicative purpose of the home page. Together with a promotion of products and/or services this impression may be perceived as a positive image and ensure the relationships between customers, investors and company. In spite of the fact that the reader can choose which information he/she wants, all information given at a corporate home page is selectively chosen by the company being the gate-keeper.

The Veolia home page as a genre is complex, because it is not divided into marketing sites and corporate sites (a division often used by companies, cf. Marco (2002), Nielsen (2000) and Strunck (2002, 2003 and 2004)), but it is characterized by the many sub-companies and divisions assembled under the same brand and which all have their own sites of the home page containing both product presentations and ethos building sites. As the intention of this article is to present some features of Veolia's ethos and the water supply, the focus is primarily on texts and discourses at sites called *Ethics, Belief and Responsibility Report, Veolia Environnement, Veolia Water Force, Annual Reports, Sustainable Development Report* and *Partners in Emergency Humanitarian Operations*.

Some of the differences between home pages and other genres consist in the dynamics in regards to function, target groups and situations and in being interactive. The Veolia home page for instance has got a separate part for consumers to ask specific questions concerning the water quality and the keeping of water as well as a children's corner with games about water. Besides, it is distinctive that a home page is not linear, it can not be read as a book or a brochure, but the reader has to choose actively which parts to read. This means that the reading is fragmented, that perhaps only smaller parts of a text is read very quickly and that the reader decides what, how and when a web site text is read. One of the consequences of this fragmented reading is that the web-editor has to repeat the most essential ethos constructing discourses on nearly every site to ensure the reception of the image wished by the company. Furthermore, we talk about a special move called the navigation move which helps guiding the reader, who has also got to use more senses at a time to be able to perceive the pictures, animations, texts

and sounds as a connected narrative. These particularities have an influence on the construction and the structure of the discourses as well as on the perception of them as it is the case for the actual construction of the corporate image at the Veolia web sites, being different from the constructional and reception conditions of traditional (paper) text genres even though some genre conventions are alike<sup>2</sup>.

In earlier articles on press releases and web sites (Strunck, *op. cit.*) we found that rhetorically, the web site texts were not as persuasive as the traditional texts, but focused more on the positive evaluation of the corporate ethos as the following examples from the Veolia web sites will demonstrate. A multimodal discourse analysis of the total home page might give us an in-depth understanding of the holistic corporate communication, but this would lie outside the scope of this article. What lies within the scope is, however, to mention that the Veolia home page, in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, contained special sites dealing with the company's assistance. The titles of these sites were *Veolia Environnement et la Croix-Rouge Française: Partenaires dans l'Intervention d'Urgence* and *Urgence Solidarité humanitaire Asie* ([www.veoliaenvironnement.com/fr/presse/](http://www.veoliaenvironnement.com/fr/presse/)), both describing the presence and work of the company and the cooperation with the Red Cross. The web sites have given Veolia the possibility of listing how many people and how much money the company provided, along with a text written by the president of the French Red Cross, praising Veolia's expertise. At these sites you could also find links to the French Red Cross who mentioned Veolia at the news sites of their home page. Furthermore Veolia used the web sites to call for support among their stakeholders. At this particular moment, you might say that the Veolia home page functioned as a mouthpiece for ethical behaviour, adding of course to the positive ethos and the PR of the company.

Another important particularity is that home pages are not created for external communication only, but for internal communication as well. This auto-communication is embedded implicitly in all the texts, but are especially explicated in Veolia's 'Ethics, Belief and Responsibility Report'. This means that the home page is being part of an integrated corporate communication having both costumers, investors, partners, other stakeholders and employees as receivers, and that it caters for a discourse community with interest in the products, services and the environmental policies of the worldwide water-companies. The purpose of the integrated corporate communication is twofold: the external and the internal receivers are interested in the corporate

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<sup>2</sup> As an empirical study of the reception of the Veolia web sites has not been carried out, it is not possible to conclude on the perceived corporate image.

policies, the code of ethics, the mission and vision statements and the range of products or services on the one hand, and on the other hand the company wishes to ensure common values for the employees and to create a positive image within the discourse community.

This article presents different text genres<sup>3</sup> and parts of texts from different sites of the home page, but concentrated on Veolia Environnement, Veolia Water, the Annual, the Ethics and the Sustainable Development reports to be able to study the discursive construction of an ethos seeking to imply a uniform image and to create a strong brand.

##### 5. THE POSITION ON THE WATER MARKET. VEOLIA 2002-2003

The desire of the Veolia company has, for some years, been an expansion of its position on the global water market, and the visions of market shares have so far been fulfilled by economic and political cooperation and partnerships and by multifarious activities and competences (Strunck, 2005).

Discourses in parts of the Veolia home page communication of 2002-2003 construct an ethos that supports the corporate visions, lives up to the international regulations and goals concerning the global water supply and sanitation and it tries to play down allegations against the company's business ethics and principles which had been problematized by the press. In a press release dated April 8, 2003 the company explains the reasons for the change of brand name as a result of an image repair strategy:

(...) The company is embarking on the next stage in its long history with a new corporate identity.(...) This name change reflects its fresh impetus as it moves forward into a new era in its 150-year history (...). A unifying name embodying the Group's ambitions and values. (...) The priority was for the name to express the group's unique positioning, since it is the only company with worldwide reach focused exclusively on environmental services and able to deliver a full range of services across its four business segments, i.e. Water, Waste Management, Energy Services and Transportation (...) several themes reflecting the company's business activities and expertise, such as sustainable development, care and attention, protection, customisation, living standards, proximity, service, commitment and innovation (...).  
([www.dalkia.com/default/doc/en/communications](http://www.dalkia.com/default/doc/en/communications); the sites for journalists: press releases)

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<sup>3</sup> Even though a genre analysis of each text could be interesting, the focus of this article is on the broader perspective of the home page as a genre and media exposing the corporate ethos and not on each text genre separately.



These parts of the release express Veolia's self staging as a dynamic company (*embarking, moves forward*) being able to change its identity in order to fulfil the wishes of expansion. The words *embarking, next stage, new corporate identity, change, fresh impetus* and *new era*, all presuppose a past that has been criticized by NGOs, Green Peace, Attac and the press, and that the company wishes to put the lid on by pointing to new visions, but avoiding direct justification. In its self-presentation Veolia differentiates itself from the competitors by stressing its global position and expertise such as "sustainable development, care and attention, protection, customisation, living standards, proximity, service, commitment and innovation" by which some of the company's competences and values are expressed. The short text contains discourses concerning the Veolia competences (the *environmental services*), the company's good character (*care and attention, protection, living standards*) and its engagement and presence (*proximity, service, commitment*). These discourses imply credibility as signs of phronesis (competence), areté (character) and eunoia (presence), and they give us an impression of the corporate ethos.

At the water web sites, we (Strunck, 2005) found an introduction expressing the benefits that a contract with Veolia can offer the customers:

Veolia Water Systems subsidiaries create a close relationship with their customers in countries around the world. Each subsidiary integrates fully into its region by establishing experienced teams, adapting expertise to suit conditions, setting up agreements with local partners, and using as many local suppliers as possible.

(...) Constant attention is paid to: -reducing capital outlay and operating costs, -the flexibility and reliability of facilities, -protecting the environment and ensuring safety, -meeting commitments in terms of timetables, specifications and compliance with regulations (...).

([www.veoliawatersystems.com/offrevws.htm](http://www.veoliawatersystems.com/offrevws.htm))

If we interpret the notion eunoia as covering written discourse and not just goodwill towards the interactant in an oral dialogue, the quotation is an example of obligingness and proximity by the stressing of close relationships with the local partners and communities. An interesting aspect is the fact that Veolia expresses the intention to use local suppliers "as many as possible" by which the company has, indirectly, made reservations on promises. Also, Veolia expresses its competence (phronesis) as regards economic conditions and safety, topics that have been negatively thematized by public media and environmental activists, but which are used at the web sites for positive evaluation of the company's ethos.

The Annual Report 2002 ([www.veoliaenvironnement.com](http://www.veoliaenvironnement.com)) includes a presentation of the company values which are repeated in the 2004 report:

We realize that our everyday actions have impacts on the improvement of people's living conditions. We never forget the effects of our business on our employees and on society as a whole, and operate with the common good in mind (...).

We continuously improve quality of service and value added for customers and users alike (...) We show financial discipline at every level (...) and ensuring long-term growth.

Here again the company ethos appears in areté, good character, and phronesis - in the capacity of economic intelligence and fulfilment of the WTO's and the Commission's regulations and goals concerning growth, a topic stressed in other parts of the reports too: "building a world in which economic progress and better living conditions go hand in hand. (...) We are helping to build a form of progress that preserves life".

The Veolia voice describes the company's work as philanthropic at the same time as the goals and regulations of the WTO and the Commission appear as indirect intertextuality. But the voices of the NGOs and the environmental groups are indirectly present, transformed into "progress, better living conditions, preserves life", topics criticized as mentioned before. In order to emphasize the charitable work of Veolia a part of the Annual Report 2002 deals with the relief work of 2002 in disaster areas such as Pakistan, Congo, Germany, Albania, Brazil and the Czech Republic, features also present in the 2004 reports.

In the Annual Report 2002 the Commission's request to make public-private partnerships to ensure clean drinking water and sanitation is intertextualized:

The concept of *public-private partnerships* is emerging in international circles as one of the best ways of meeting the challenges of sustainable development. We are pleased to see this because the concept is basically very similar to the French mechanism of public-service outsourcing, the very foundation of our company's business model.

We might interpret this sequence as an attempt from the company to adapt itself to the decisions made at the Johannesburg Summit and to the goals of the Global Compact, or we might interpret it as a visible proof of the company's political influence on the global decisions concerning environmental solutions. Finally we might interpret it as an attempt to

legitimize its business principles. Another sequence in the text intertextualizes more of the WTO and the Commission goals: “(...) the company strives to reconcile social responsibility, economic growth and environmental balance (...)”

The Sustainable development report for 2002 develops the social responsibility as a topic ([www.veoliaenvironnement.com](http://www.veoliaenvironnement.com)), pointing at the good intentions (areté) of the Veolia company:

Veolia Environnement intends to conduct its business around the world while carefully adhering to its Fundamental Social Rights charter, which was inspired by the International Labour Organization's principles, particularly with regard to abolishing child labour and protecting the freedom of association.

The fulfilment of the WTO and the Commission's regulations are here adopted in the values and principles of the private company, and they are extended in the Ethics, belief and responsibility report 2002 (op. cit.).

The rhetorical analysis of the 2002-2003 texts (Strunck, 2005) leaved an impression of an ethos where the credibility is composed of the three Aristotelian virtues: phronesis, areté and eunoia, expressing an idealistic approach to the possible improvement of the water supply in general and to the future within the private sector of the water supply business in particular. This was due to the dynamics of Veolia and its charitable impact on the living conditions of the citizens. However, the positive evaluation appearing in the company's self-presentation is nuanced by the implicit references to an image repair strategy demanded as a result of public criticisms and the changing of identity and brand name.

#### 6. THE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. VEOLIA 2004-2005

In the Annual and the Sustainable Development Report from 2004 the chairman and chief executive officer, Henri Proglia, states in his message that “I feel we have acquired greater maturity (...)”, a statement substantiated by the many international classifications achieved because of the company's work within sustainable development solutions and social responsibility. The statement follows up the visions of the years 2002-2003 and demonstrates the success of the efforts of change, cooperation, membership of the Global Compact and partnerships, emphasized early in the report:

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are characterized by their long-term perspective and well-balanced partnership with public authorities. PPPs meet the objectives of sustainable development by striking a harmonious balance between

the seemingly contradictory constraints of social, environmental and economic factors.

Again we see an indirect intertextuality as regards the goals of international organizations, adding positively to the company's credibility, which is mentioned directly at the site concerning the new Ethics Committee whose work is "to establish the trust and credibility necessary to perform its duties properly" towards the employees. In the 2004 report the corporate and the social responsibilities seem more important than before, considering the space these topics occupy, and we might interpret it as a sign of positive ethos, building consensus between vision statements, mission, communication and management.

Finally, the Annual Report of 2004 contains parts that tell about the Veolia competences concerning development aid and emergency aid. These parts of the Veolia business have been attributed much more attention in 2004-2005 than before and have resulted in two new separate web sites: the web site *Waterforce – Serving humanity and development with our expertise* and *Partners in emergency humanitarian operations*. At the Waterforce web site we get an impression of the many development projects and emergency situations the company has participated in, showing pictures and giving short descriptions of the expertise needed. Furthermore the introduction informs us about the mission of Waterforce: "Waterforce's mission is to step in quickly when relief is needed anywhere in the world and send equipment and a team of experts to help the authorities in place deal with the emergency". ([www.veoliaenvironnement.com:Waterforce](http://www.veoliaenvironnement.com/Waterforce)).

Also, the text stresses that Waterforce has got a team of 150 volunteer employees from Veolia Environnement who can provide expertise within drinking water, technical support, training and development work together with their partners: French Red Cross, Secours Catholique, Unicef, the French and the local governments. The text illustrates "the dedication of our Waterforce volunteers in their work with people in critical situations".

These few lines from the site clearly built up the image of a company having the good in mind, emphasizing phronesis (competence), arête (goodness) and eunoia (presence and engagement). What underlines even more this positive ethos is the creation of the Veolia Environnement Corporate Foundation on May 25, 2004, created in order to distinguish "clearly between its business operations and its philanthropic activities. The foundation, set up for and by employees, is designed to enable Veolia Environnement employees to become involved in environmental, social and humanitarian causes".

At the Waterforce site specific sections deal with stakeholder viewpoints about the company's responsibilities in the area of sustainable development and humanitarian aid, all praising the Veolia competence. It has to be mentioned here that these viewpoints are placed in connection with the descriptions of the company's assistance after the tsunami catastrophe, a situation attracting the attention by telling that "The Veolia Water Force emergency humanitarian aid unit went into action straight after the tsunami struck the islands (...)" and that the unit was working alongside the French Red Cross and Unicef which together with the Foundation's donation of 500.000 Euros and the work of 100 volunteers stresses the company's reputation ([www.durable.veoliaenvironnement.com/en/dialogue/community](http://www.durable.veoliaenvironnement.com/en/dialogue/community)).

In the efforts of creating a strong brand and a renewed image built on a positive ethos one of the most significant innovations at the Veolia home page 2004-2005 is the web site *Partners in Emergency humanitarian operations* which especially deals with the partnership between Veolia and the Red Cross. The significance emerge in that not only the voice of Veolia is heard but we also find articles written by the president of the French Red Cross and by the director of International Operations for the Red Cross alongside with articles written by the Veolia executive officer and the founder of the Veolia Water Force.

Rhetorically we notice immediately the occurrence of intertextuality present in the two Red Cross texts and present in the two Veolia texts, but also across the two groups of texts. As we may assume that the Red Cross and the company Veolia, respectively, speaks with one voice according to an integrated corporate communication, the following analysis only calls attention to examples of intertextuality across the two groups of texts. Another reason for this selection is the possibility of demonstrating that Veolia as a gate keeper has chosen or might even have decided the contents of both groups of texts occurring at a home page of which the communicative purpose is to present the corporate identity and ethos.

The Veolia texts emphasize the efforts, contributions and engagement of the emergency response team and the partnership with the Red Cross by expressions like:

- 1) This permanent mobilization reflects the extraordinary human potential that a global company can provide (...).
- 2) (...) one goal and that is to provide relief to devastated communities wherever they are.
- 3) (...) nor is it their aim to lay the ground for future economic activity.
- 4) When it comes to saving human lives, efficiency is the key.

- 5) (...) our desire to work alongside partners who are familiar with the latest emergency operation techniques. The resultant bond, notably with the teams of the French Red Cross, has shown that only a stable and lasting partnership can guarantee the success of missions (...).
- 6) (...) volunteers of the French Red Cross (...) and volunteer professionals of Veolia Environnement have pooled their expertise (...) for drinking water supply, waste water and waste management: all of which are of vital importance (...).
- 7) Each of our volunteers is very committed to solidarity, a central corporate value of our group.

Besides the praise of the professional skills of the company (*phronesis*), the character (*areté*) and the engagement (*eunoia*), once again the fulfilment of the international goals regarding public-private partnerships is stressed along with the downgrading of benefit, which in itself is an example of intertextuality from other parts of the home page (Annual Report, Waterforce). The downgrading of profit fits nicely with the emphasis on the company's humanitarian focus which seems to be of the greatest importance. As we shall see in the examples from the Red Cross texts, the Veolia focus has got resemblances with the missions of the Red Cross humanitarian organization to such an extent that we may talk about intertextuality between the two groups of texts.

First of all we notice that the titles of the two articles from the Red Cross are: *Water, the source of stable humanitarian operations* and *Cooperation – serving a humanitarian ideal*, titles which refer directly to the partnership with the water company Veolia who is mentioned directly and indirectly in expressions such as:

- 1) (...) basic human needs. Access to water is one of these.
- 2) Water is of vital importance.
- 3) The fact that it has earned credibility in this area is largely due to the alliance formed, and strengthened from one disaster to the next, with Veolia Environnement whose expertise has facilitated many of our missions.
- 4) This alliance has been sealed by the convention of April 26, 2005 (...).
- 5) Quality provided by a large company that specializes in water and wastewater. This quality is also assured by the committed men and women who volunteer for these solidarity missions.

As it emerges some expressions have got a remarkable resemblance to the Veolia examples and the Red Cross also praises the partnership in the same

way as do Veolia: "(...) innovative programs that demonstrate the maturity of our partnership".

Concerning the expression *maturity* it is worth mentioning the intertextuality that goes back to the introductory words of the Veolia executive officer in the Annual Report 2004. Furthermore the focus on humanitarian operations that we found in the Veolia texts is, of course, central for the Red Cross: "Mankind and human dignity are the heart of our commitment, and all our joint actions must strive to achieve this humanitarian ideal, which also encompasses respect for the environment and a fair economic balance".

The *fair economic balance* mentioned by the Red Cross has to be understood in a global political sense, a subject also mentioned by Veolia, in the Annual Reports, in expressing its desire to work with locals.

As it was the case in the years 2002-2003 the Veolia home page in 2004-2005 presents a company ethos built on credibility resulting from know-how, competence, character and engagement. But the 2004-2005 home page differs from the 2002-2003 home page in the downgrading of profit and in fewer implicit references to possible criticisms. At the same time it is distinctive that the 2004-2005 home page is more focused on humanitarian aid, where the sealing of the partnership with the Red Cross in April 2005, in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, is essential for the international reputation and image of the company Veolia.

## 7. THE VEOLIA BRAND AND IMAGE CREATION OF 2002-2005

The goals and regulations of the WTO, the Commission, the World Bank and the UN Global Compact deal with economic growth and higher living standards, with environmental protection and sustainable development on water and sanitation and with human rights. Furthermore, the international organizations regard public-private partnerships as a possible and cost-effective way of achieving these goals as well as being able to perform optimal emergency assistance. Intertextualizing, directly and indirectly, the discourses of these international organizations in its web texts Veolia makes use of them in the construction of an ethos that draws the attention to the company's potential as the perfect collaborator for the EU, the WTO and for the UN Global Compact.

At the same time as the Veolia ethos is guiding the perception of the external receivers towards the desired corporate image, the texts are having an influence on the corporate practice by trying to ensure a homogeneous perception of the company values internally. The home page texts are influencing the opinion of the discourse community by repeating at every

web site the discourses that construct the narrative of a company having the good in mind, being economically responsible and fulfilling the regulations and goals of international political organizations. Critically, with the negative publicity in mind, we might also interpret the discourses at the home page of the years 2002-2003 as a means of legitimacy.

The home page of 2004-2005 demonstrates to what degree the company Veolia has been able to develop the brand into an appreciated expert within sustainable development solutions, but also into being a respected partner for organizations like the Red Cross and Unicef. As it appeared from the analyses of the web site texts, the company profits by its partnership with the Red Cross and by its operations in emergency situations, as it was the case in the aftermath of the tsunami catastrophe in South East Asia in December 2004. The company profits by these conditions in the corporate communication, and the texts leave the impression of a company image developing from being a competent collaborator in sustainable development projects in 2002-2003 to that of a company being in line with international humanitarian non-profit organizations like the Red Cross in 2004-2005.

The analyses also pointed to the fact that the corporate communication is holistic and integrated having an impact on customers and employees, but it has an impact on other parts of the discourse community too. The company has an influence on international decisions, made possible by its membership of and participation in international organizations and meetings. This influence on decisions regarding sustainable development, water supply and assistance in emergency situations is an example of the impact on the broader socio-cultural practice.

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## 8.2. Data: web pages

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<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment>  
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade>  
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners>  
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi>  
<http://WHO.int/hac/crisis>  
[http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/envir\\_e](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e)

<http://www.dalkia.com/default/doc/en/communications>  
<http://www.vivendienvironnement.com>  
<http://www.vivendiwatersystems.com>  
<http://www.generale-des-eaux.com>  
<http://www.veoliaenvironnement.com>:  
Rapport Annuel 2002, 2004/Annual Report 2002, 2004  
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Rapport Développement Durable 2002, 2004/Sustainable Development  
Report 2002, 2004  
Veolia Water 2005  
Veolia Partners 2005  
<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/content/NewsEvents/homepage.htm>  
<http://www.durable.veoliaenvironnement.com/en/dialogue/community>