



A Meeting Point of Culture, Royalty, and the Environment: Analyzing the Discourse on Sustainability by the Royal Ballet and Opera in London

Oleksandr KAPRANOV

NLA University College, Linstowgate 3, 0166 Oslo, Norway;  oleksandr.kapranov@nla.no

Abstract: Whilst there is a growing line of research that examines sustainability by the leading ballet and opera houses, currently, however, there are insufficient studies that shed light on sustainable practices by the Royal Ballet and Opera in London (the United Kingdom). Furthermore, there is no published research examining the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability through a linguistic lens. The present paper aims to bridge the research gap by means of identifying and analyzing frequently occurring words and word clusters in a corpus of texts on sustainability written by the Royal Ballet and Opera's staff. The rationale for using a quantitative approach to examine sustainability discourse is to highlight frequently occurring words and word clusters that may point to discursive patterns characterizing the Royal Ballet and Opera's sustainability discourse. The analysis reveals that the often occurring words and word clusters in the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability reflect discursive patterns such as organizational identity, environmental sustainability, and climate change. These findings are discussed in relation to the existing body of literature on sustainability in the ballet and opera sector. In terms of the paper's added value, it is argued that it offers an objective, data-driven insight into the language of institutional environmental commitment, contributing to the examination of how the Royal Ballet and Opera construe their sustainability discourse. Additionally, the paper's added value highlights specific lexical patterns and self-referential strategies that reveal how sustainability is framed as a collective organizational identity.

Keywords: cultural institutions; discourse; sustainability in the culture sector; The Royal Ballet and Opera; the United Kingdom (the UK)

Introduction

The present contribution presents a study analyzing the discourse on sustainability by the Royal Ballet and Opera in London (the United Kingdom). Before we proceed to the study, however, let us set the scene for this contribution by outlining the significance of the Royal Ballet and Opera, its relationship to the British royal family, and its connection to sustainability. First of all, we should note that the Royal Ballet and Opera is an iconic opera house celebrated for its place in the history of opera (Zalfen, 2016) as well as for its cultural and architectural heritage (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011). Furthermore, the Royal Ballet and Opera is a unique focal point that blends culture and heritage (Leira & de Carvalho, 2025) with the corporate and political worlds, and royal circles (Avanzini et al., 2020; Kapranov, 2024a; Kotnik, 2019; Rius-Ulledemolins et al., 2024). As far as the British royal circles are concerned, it should be emphasized that King Charles III, the currently reigning British monarch, is the official patron of the Royal Ballet and Opera (Hardman, 2024). In this regard, it should be noted that, from the early Renaissance onward, the British royals have consistently been considered patrons of the ballet and opera sectors (Orgel, 1981). Whilst King Charles III seems to continue the century-long tradition of patronage of the ballet and opera sectors, he is known as a monarch passionate about the environment, environmental sustainability, and climate change (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Kapranov, 2024b).

The King's interest in environmental sustainability and climate change is shared by British political circles, at least among the major political actors (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007;

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Kapranov, 2024c). Moreover, the ideas of environmental sustainability and climate change resonate with the British societal actors (Kapranov, 2024d; Nisbett et al., 2025), mass media outlets (Gillings & Dayrell, 2024; Steinitz et al., 2024), and the cultural milieu (Dales et al., 2024; Orchard & Reiss, 2025). In addition to a score of important actors in the United Kingdom (the UK), sustainability is embraced by the majority of organizations that regard themselves as an integral part of society (Smith & Sharicz, 2011) and seek to make a positive contribution beyond their immediate functional output (Soyka, 2012). On this note, it should be, perhaps, mentioned that the issue of sustainability is taken on board not only by the ballet and opera sector in the UK, but also by other world-renowned ballet and opera houses, which seem to showcase their local cultural roots and combine them with the global outreach by addressing sustainability, the climate crisis, and environmental problems (Payne, 2016; Underiner et al., 2024).

Indeed, a range of iconic ballet and opera houses in the UK and Europe incorporate sustainability into their ethos (Dubini & Monti, 2018). We may contend that whereas the various facets of sustainability are institution-specific, they are, metaphorically speaking, an intrinsic part of their institutional DNA (Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025; Westvall & Carson, 2025). Conceivably, it should be borne in mind that by means of addressing such a universal problem as sustainability, the ballet and opera sector in the UK (and in the rest of Europe) indicates that its role in society is no longer purely elitist, but is relevant for the public at large (Huang-Kokina, 2025). In this respect, the Royal Ballet and Opera in London can be rightfully considered a longstanding cultural flagship (Guachalla, 2019) that adopts and maintains sustainable practices (Bryson, 2007), as reflected in its respective discourses.

Currently, however, little is known about the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourses on sustainability. The paucity of research on this matter stands in stark contrast to the growing body of literature that elucidates how major opera houses address sustainability (Cancellieri & Turrini, 2016; Roca et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2025). In this light, the study that is further given in the article seeks to bridge the present research gap by focusing on the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability. In particular, the study examines the sustainability discourses of the Royal Ballet and the Opera through a linguistic lens. This is done through a quantitative methodology that explores the most frequent lexicon in a corpus of texts on sustainability authored by the Royal Ballet and Opera's staff. In this regard, it should be noted that the sustainability discourse is thought to be dominated by the need to maintain human life and civilization in a physical environment similar to that we now enjoy in terms of quality of life (Kreisel, 2019, p. 129; Sutton, 2004, p. 1).

The novelty of the study, apart from the proverbial desire to address the research gap purely from an epistemic perspective, involves the following considerations. First of all, the Royal Ballet and Opera, as an organization based in the UK, is subject to British laws and regulations on sustainability (including climate change and net zero), which are legally binding (Duma et al., 2024; Matarese & Bombonato, 2025). However, the literature notes a degree of uncertainty regarding the legal regulations on the path towards net zero (Pollitt et al., 2025). At the same time, sustainability and the associated issue of climate change are deeply entrenched in British political and institutional culture (Kapranov, 2024a; Zec, 2024). Hopefully, by elucidating the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability, the study will contribute to uncovering the current discursive practices they implement, as one of the UK's flagship cultural institutions. Secondly, the present study will, conceivably, add to the existing body of literature and provide a nuanced perspective on sustainability discourses by actors in the UK ballet and opera sector (Newman et al., 2024). Thirdly, the present study will provide a linguistic lens that helps to navigate the intricacy of sustainability discourses generated by British cultural institutions (Kapranov, 2024b).

In addition to the aforementioned considerations, we should explain why the study is limited to a linguistic analysis of the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability.

Presumably, the application of the linguistic perspective, which is manifested by frequently occurring words and word clusters in the discourse on sustainability by the Royal Ballet and Opera, may provide a clear understanding of what the Royal Ballet and Opera is “saying” (written or oral communication)” (Goubran, 2025, p. 165), rather than designing in its project proposals in the context of sustainability. The analysis, as mentioned, may reveal the driving forces behind the Royal Ballet and Opera’s decisions regarding sustainability. Besides, it should be reiterated that, through the linguistic prism, the study may identify and clarify the Royal Ballet and Opera’s focal points associated with its sustainability agenda. In light of the above, the present study aims to answer the following **research question (RQ)**:

***RQ:** What frequent lexicons are used in the sustainability discourses by the Royal Ballet and Opera?*

The paper is structured as follows. First, the literature on sustainability in the ballet and opera sector is outlined. Second, the study’s theoretical framework, corpus, and research methodology are presented. Third, the study concludes with a summary of the significant findings and their relevance to the ballet and opera sector in the UK and beyond its borders.

Sustainability in major ballet and opera houses: Literature review

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a multitude of studies on sustainability by the major ballet and opera houses (Avanzini et al., 2020; Esposito & Fisichella, 2024; Guachalla, 2019; Matarese & Bombonato, 2025; Roca et al., 2021; Rodrigues & Ventura, 2025; Rudland, 2025; Wang & Yuan, 2020). Presumably, the increase in scholarly publications on sustainability in the flagship opera houses is explained by the ballet and opera sector’s distinctive social, artistic, and community-oriented missions (Goldbard, 2006) that shape sustainability initiatives in the UK and, by extension, in other European countries (Sacco et al., 2013).

In this regard, the literature posits that the British cultural institutions of the ballet and opera sector have changed their missions by distancing themselves from the previously elite model (Hall-Witt, 2007) and, instead, adopting a democratic role as active members of society and their local communities (Clements, 2016). The literature, in general, demonstrates that the British ballet and opera sector takes into consideration such notions as (i) ethical responsibility (Quinn, 2003), (ii) heritage preservation (Labadi & Logan, 2015), (iii) audience engagement (Vidican-Teohari et al., 2025), and (iv) ecological and social values and embeds them in opera production (Duxbury et al., 2019). In general terms, the literature shows that sustainability in the ballet and opera sector in the UK and other Anglophone countries is characterized by a proactive, context-specific approach that is organically integrated into its sustainability strategies (Benner, 2022; Fancy et al., 2021; Pringle, 2021).

It should be noted that there is a cornucopia of prior studies that provide exhaustive accounts of the literature on sustainability in major ballet and opera houses (Benner, 2022; Fancy et al., 2021; Pringle, 2021; Vidican-Teohari et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, the present literature review focuses on research published from 2020 to 2025. For instance, in one recent study, Roca et al. (2021) argue that opera houses are attuned to the need to adopt sustainability in their daily operations. The current openness to sustainability in the ballet and opera sector’s quotidian activities is necessitated by societal demands to showcase the sector’s best practices in environmental sustainability, climate change-related agendas, and to raise spectators’ awareness of sustainability concerns (ibid.). Furthermore, Roca and colleagues (2021) demonstrate that the ballet and opera sector’s openness to sustainability enhances its positive image in the eyes of the public at large.

A similar contention regarding the positive image of sustainability in the ballet and opera sector is found in Wang and Yuan's (2020) publication. They demonstrate that sustainability in the ballet and opera sector is a prominent issue, one that is associated with public interest. Importantly, however, Wang and Yuan (2020) show that sustainability in the ballet and opera sector is directly related to urban development. These authors have found that the presence of opera houses fosters the development of a sophisticated urban culture that grows in synergy with the opera. At the same time, though, the concurrent growth of opera and urban communities contributes to the re-thinking of the role of sustainability, which appears to be of paramount importance to the ballet and opera sector and its urban surroundings. It could be argued that the main idea in Wang and Yuan's (2020) publication is to approach the sustainability of the ballet and opera sector in harmony with the development of urban communities.

As in the study by Wang and Yuan (2020), Rudland (2025) posits that the sustainability of the ballet and opera sector works in synergy with local communities. The point Rudland (2025) broaches is to find ways to organize opera events in an environmentally sustainable manner. Deliberating on sustainability, Rudland (2025) notes that sustainable opera production should capitalize on available community resources, including recycling props and costumes. According to Rudland (2025), the sustainable way of opera production should avail itself of the scenery and locations that are readily available in the given community. For example, an opera production could involve a paperless ticketing system and repurposing readily available buildings, such as churches, to minimize production costs.

Esposito and Fisichella (2024) address production costs in conjunction with sustainability in their recent study, which examines sustainability in the context of Italian opera houses. In particular, Esposito and Fisichella (2024) tie sustainability to the financial viability of opera production. In addition, these authors explore how sustainability can enhance social inclusion and raise public awareness. Esposito and Fisichella (2024) view sustainability as a means of contributing to opera production without compromising the quality of artistic output or diminishing engagement with local communities. Moreover, Esposito and Fisichella (2024) indicate that the economic sustainability of Italian opera houses is effective. However, the promotion of social inclusion and environmental sustainability does not seem to broaden the audience for opera-goers. These authors attribute the aforementioned shortcoming to high ticket prices and the location of operas as significant obstacles to increasing opera audiences.

Analogously to Esposito and Fisichella (2024), the research theme of sustainability as social responsibility is present in the study conducted by Rodrigues and Ventura (2025). According to Rodrigues and Ventura (2025), the ballet and opera sector appears increasingly shaped by the notion of responsibility. In particular, the ballet and opera sector takes a responsible and proactive stance on environmental sustainability, at least in Portugal, where the study is localized. Rodrigues and Ventura (2025) discuss the pillars of sustainability, including social, economic, ecological, and ethical. Rodrigues and Ventura (2025) contend that the ballet and opera sector should raise eco-awareness and promote environmental sustainability by demonstrating best practices to peers and the public at large.

Unlike the aforementioned researchers, Matarese and Bombonato (2025) focus on climate change as an inherent aspect of sustainable practices in the ballet and opera sector. To be precise, Matarese and Bombonato (2025) examine how the Sydney Opera House, a UNESCO World Heritage site, responds to climate change within the broader context of sustainability. The authors note that the Sydney Opera House's climate change-related activities are instrumental in preserving and maintaining the Opera's heritage. To implement its climate change agenda, the Sydney Opera House demonstrates leadership through its responsible approach to tackling and mitigating climate change. The approach is characterized by

(1) bringing the Opera House team together to tackle climate change through good governance; (2) inspiring positive change in the community through creative programming and engagement; (3) holding the organization accountable by setting and achieving environmental performance benchmarks; (4) implementing practical mitigation measures that also respect heritage values; and (5) applying a participatory approach to climate risk and adaptation planning. (Matarese & Bombonato, 2025, p. 1)

Matarese and Bombonato (2025) argue that the Opera's sustainability and climate change-related activities may serve as best practices in custodianship for the sustainable management of a heritage site.

Also grounded in the context of sustainability and heritage sites, a research paper by Avanzini et al. (2020) offers detailed insights into sustainability from the perspective of music and cultural heritage. These authors regard sustainability as the preservation of musical collections housed by the ballet and opera sector, specifically by La Scala in Milan (Italy). Seen through this lens, the authors posit that La Scala's sustainable practices pertain to "the fields of preservation, information retrieval and dissemination of cultural heritage through computer-based approaches" (Avanzini et al., 2020, p. 325). Furthermore, Avanzini and his colleagues (2020) demonstrate that sustainable practices at La Scala involve the application of new digital technologies, such as (i) the multi-layer representation of music information to make it accessible to opera experts and lay audiences, (ii) 5G networks to provide videos of live performances, and (iii) digital possibilities for cultural heritage dissemination.

The literature review indicates a substantial body of prior studies that focus on different aspects of sustainability in the ballet and opera sector. The studies analyzed in the literature review point to the ballet and opera sector's willingness to be engaged in (i) their respective communities and (ii) the resource-efficient approach to opera and/or ballet production. Furthermore, prior studies identify several localized, culturally grounded sustainability strategies in ballet and opera houses that emerge from sector-specific considerations. However, as noted in the introduction, there is no published research examining sustainability in the ballet and opera sector from a linguistic perspective. Further in the article, a quantitative study examines the frequent lexicon used by the Royal Ballet and the Opera in London in their sustainability discourse.

The present study: Its theoretical framework, corpus, and methodology

The study's theoretical framework is anchored in Michel Foucault's (1981) approach to discourse. Whilst Foucault did not address the issue of sustainability in discourse per se, his approach to discursive practices is programmatic and central to the present investigation due to a host of reasons. First of all, the present study is informed by the Foucauldian postulates, which demonstrate that language, in general, and specific discourses, in particular, are shaped by relationships of power, knowledge, and historical situatedness (Miller, 1990). As Foucault (1981, p. 52) puts it,

"in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (Foucault, 1981, p. 52)

Foucault (1981) posits that the system of power in discourses is determined, along with knowledge and truth, by the considerations of institutional support, which

"is both reinforced and renewed by whole strata of practices, such as pedagogy, of course; and the system of books, publishing, libraries; learned societies in the past and laboratories now. But it is also renewed, no doubt more profoundly, by the

way in which knowledge is put to work, valorised, distributed, and in a sense attributed, in a society". (Foucault, 1981, p. 55)

Based upon the approach to discourse by Foucault (1981), the author of the article argues that sustainability discourses in the ballet and opera sector in the UK are characterized by multiple references to sustainability and the related notions (e.g., climate change), which are conditioned by (i) the British centers of power and (ii) the dominant discourses on sustainability that have gained currency in the UK. Specifically, both the corporate and political elites in the UK share the current view of sustainable development goals as a way forward to reach the so-called net zero, i.e., the legally binding commitment to eliminate the emission of CO₂ gases into the atmosphere (Kapranov, 2024a, 2024b). Accordingly, various organizations and institutions in the UK are expected to at least consider sustainability and climate change in their respective discourses (Gillings & Dayrell, 2024; van Eck et al., 2025). Against this background, the study assumes that the theme of sustainability will be present in the Royal Ballet and Opera's communication with the public on its official website <https://www.rbo.org.uk/>.

In this light, the present paper seeks to answer the RQ (see the introduction), which examines the frequently occurring words and word clusters in the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability. Methodologically, the study design is built on the premises of the analysis of sustainability and climate change discourse proposed by Kapranov (2025). In line with Kapranov (2025), the study employs a quantitative methodology to analyze a corpus of texts on sustainability written by staff at the Royal Ballet and Opera. The computer-assisted analysis aims to identify the most frequent words and word clusters, which are thought to facilitate our understanding of how the Royal Ballet and Opera present their discourse on sustainability to the public at large.

Thus, the quantitative approach undertaken in the study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the frequent and possibly preferred lexical means in the Royal Ballet and Opera's texts on sustainability. Arguably, the frequency analysis is particularly suitable for the examination of sustainability discourse by the Royal Ballet and Opera, since the lexical frequency data allow to (i) identify recurring themes, patterns, and priorities in organizational communication and (ii) provide an objective measure of how sustainability is framed, given that the quantitative frequency analysis minimizes subjective interpretation in comparison to purely qualitative assessments. Accordingly, analyzing the lexical frequency data could enhance the rigor and reliability of the study. Furthermore, the frequency data may provide insights into the Royal Ballet and Opera's general perception of sustainability. For instance, let us, so far hypothetically, assume that the word cluster "environmental sustainability" is frequent in the corpus, but the cluster "responsible sustainability" is, in contrast, rare. The high frequency of the cluster "environmental sustainability" may indicate that the Royal Ballet and Opera view sustainability through the prism of environmental issues, whereas the hypothetical dominance of the cluster "responsible sustainability" may reflect a view of sustainability as a facet of social responsibility.

Guided by the aforementioned theoretical and methodological premises, the study's corpus has been collected. The procedure for corpus collection consists of searching the official website of the Royal Ballet and Opera (<https://www.rbo.org.uk/>) for the keywords "economic sustainability", "environmental sustainability", "sustainability", "sustainable", "climate change", and "social responsibility". In total, the search returned seven texts, whose titles, authors, and online publication dates (if available) are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The description of the Corpus

#	Titles and Genre-Related Properties	Author and Date
1	<i>Royal Opera House Environmental Policy</i> (a policy document)	A. Beard 02. 2025

2	<i>The Royal Opera House is Thrilled to Have Been Involved in the Development of the Theatre Green Book version Two and Achieves Basic Standard</i> (a news item)	R. O'Sullivan June 3 2024
3	<i>Sustainability Stories</i> (a series of narratives)	R. O'Sullivan N/A
4	<i>Our Commitments</i> (a policy document)	N/A
5	<i>Royal Ballet and Opera Environmental Policy Version 4.0</i> (a policy document)	N/A 02.2025
6	<i>Corporate Policies</i> (a policy document)	N/A
7	<i>Royal Ballet & Opera Schools</i> (a presentation outline)	N/A

Source: The author's analysis based on <https://www.rbo.org.uk/>

It should be explained that the corpus comprises four policy documents, one news item, a series of short narratives, and one presentation outline. As shown in Table 1, not all texts in the corpus have a precise online publication date. Furthermore, three texts are collectively authored by the Royal Ballet and Opera's staff; hence, N/A is used for the authorship. The descriptive statistics of the corpus are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics of the Corpus

Descriptive Statistics	Value
The total number of texts	7
The total number of words	6711
Mean words	958.7
Standard deviation words	816.9
Maximum words	2852
Minimum words	266

Source: The author's analysis

After completing the corpus collection, the corpus is processed as a single file in the computer concordance program AntConc (Anthony, 2022). The program calculates the most frequent words and word clusters (N of words = 4) by providing their frequency in absolute values and their respective frequency ranks. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed in the subsequent section of the article.

Results and discussion

The corpus analysis has yielded word-frequency data summarized in Table 3 below. It should be observed that the following frequently occurring words are excluded from Table 3: articles (e.g., the), conjunctions (e.g., and), prepositions (e.g., from), and auxiliary verbs (e.g., is). Their exclusion is supported by the literature (Kapranov, 2025; Szczygłowska, 2022), which suggests that frequent yet semantically impoverished words should be excluded from word-frequency lists used to identify patterns in discourse analysis. Accordingly, Table 3 outlines the most frequent notional words in the present corpus.

Table 3. The most frequent words in the Corpus

Words	Frequency/Rank
Our	210/4
We	91/9
Opera	65/12
Royal	60/13
Ballet	48/17
Environmental	41/20
Sustainable	35/22
Will	35/22

Productions	33/26
Theatre	33/26
New	32/28
Impact	28/30
More	28/30
Sustainability	28/30
Waste	26/34
Book	23/37
Reduce	23/37
Work	22/41
Green	22/41
House	21/43
Production	20/46
Can	19/48
Staff	19/48
Audiences	18/51
Materials	18/51

Source: The author's analysis

As seen in Table 3, there are frequently occurring words that pertain to the self-mention of the Royal Ballet and Opera. Whilst we discuss these findings further in the article, we would like to point out that there are no frequently occurring words in the corpus that are directly associated with King Charles III, the Opera's royal patron. Presumably, this finding is consistent with the literature (Clements, 2016; Hall-Witt, 2007), which demonstrates that the ballet and opera sector has shifted from a purely elitist paradigm to a more democratic framework of active membership in society and local communities. However, whereas references to King Charles III are minimal in the corpus, the analysis shows that the Royal Ballet and Opera's focus on the environment is one of the sustainability pillars that King Charles III is keenly interested in (Kapranov, 2024a, 2024b).

Table 3 shows that the environment is explicitly referenced as one of three sustainability pillars. Environmental sustainability is reflected in words such as "environmental", "sustainable", "impact", "sustainability", "waste", "reduce", and "green". These frequently occurring words point quite unequivocally to the primary focus of the Royal Ballet and Opera's sustainability discourse, namely the environmental facet. The aforementioned range of the frequent sustainability-related lexical items in the corpus can be accounted for by the Foucauldian understanding of discourse, which applies to the discourse on sustainability by the Royal Ballet and Opera in London. As previously stated, Foucault (1981) posits that the discourse at hand is critically influenced by the relationship between power, including institutional support, and knowledge. In our case, the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability seems related to the dominant British discourses on sustainability and climate change emanating from such centers of power as the major political parties (except the Conservative Party in 2025), the government, and the royalty. Additionally, we should bear in mind that there is a tacit consensus among the British corporate and societal elites that has agreed on the necessity of curbing the negative consequences of climate change by focusing on sustainability goals (Vetlesen, 2025).

Interestingly, the word cluster "climate change" is not among the most frequently occurring word clusters in the corpus. Whilst "climate change" is mentioned several times in the corpus, its epiphenomenal presence is compensated by such climate change-related words as "green", "reduction" (of emissions), "environmental", "sustainable", and "sustainability". In this sense, we may argue that the notion of climate change is embedded in the Royal Ballet and Opera's discourse on sustainability. This finding contrasts with the previously published study by Matarese and Bombonato (2025),

which found that the flagship opera houses (e.g., the Sydney Opera House) prioritize climate change in their sustainability-related activities. The analysis of the present corpus, however, reveals that the Royal Ballet and Opera, as the UK's flagship opera house, subsumes the notion of climate change under the aegis of sustainability.

Whilst the issue of climate change does not seem to be associated with the most frequent lexical items in the corpus, it follows from Table 3 that the most frequently occurring words in the corpus are “our” and “we”, respectively. Arguably, their frequency is indicative of the Royal Ballet and Opera’s image as a team player; i.e., all their members, from actors, singers, and dancers to management, are portrayed as a cohesive entity or institutional team involved in the sustainability-related agenda. In this regard, it should be noted that the portrayal of institutional images through the lens of teamwork is not at all novel in the Anglophone sustainability discourse (Kearins et al., 2010; Livesey & Kearins, 2002). In particular, Livesey & Kearins (2002) posit that institutional image-building vis-à-vis sustainability is carried out through references to team spirit, teamwork, and team effort. In terms of the present findings, the AntConc (Anthony, 2022) word cluster analysis indicates that both “our” and “we” are used in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability to emphasize the collective, team-like effort to engage with the issue. These clusters are further illustrated by Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4. Word clusters with “Our” in the Corpus

Clusters	Frequency/Rank
Our audiences and visitors	3/1
Our back of house	3/1
Our belief that reducing	3/1
Our buildings and manage	3/1
Our buildings we operate	3/1
Our carbon emissions monitoring	3/1
Our efforts and share	3/1
Our energy and water	3/1
Our environmental impact will	3/1
Our environmental strategy focuses	3/1
Our estate building on	3/1
Our impact on the	3/1
Our infrastructure and equipment	3/1
Our knowledge encouraging the	3/1
Our operations more efficient	3/1
Our organizational resilience in	3/1
Our people we are	3/1
Our plans progress and	3/1
Our productions have an	3/1
Our productions in partnership	3/1
Our productions our productions	3/1
Our progress each year	3/1
Our staff and visitors	3/1
Our retail offering and	3/1
Our staff to enable	3/1

Source: The author’s analysis

It should be remarked that Table 5 is organized identically to Table 4, so that both of them are comprised of 25 most frequent word clusters, as shown below.

Table 5. Word clusters with “We” in the Corpus

Clusters	Frequency/Rank
We are committed to	12/1
We are delighted that	3/2
We can measure and	3/2
We care for our	3/2
We commit to meeting	3/2
We have been improving	3/2
We operate across three	3/2
We remain involved with	3/2
We will enable and	3/2
We will monitor and	3/2
We aim to comply	3/2
We are developing a	2/11
We are not only	2/11
We are securing	2/11
We embrace our responsibility	2/11
We have been trialling	2/11
We hope that our	2/11
We manage our organization	2/11
We plan to reduce	2/11
We will also continue	2/11
We will work with	2/11
We work with schools	2/11
We are doing and	1/24
We are making changes	1/24
We are taking revivals	1/24

Source: The author's analysis

It is evident from Tables 4 and 5 that the self-mentions “our” and “we” are employed by the Royal Ballet and Opera inclusively (e.g., “our audiences and visitors”) to construe a positive discursive image of the opera house as a team player that, together with the audiences, commits itself to the issue of sustainability, cares for the environment, remains engaged in sustainability-related activities, and aims to comply with the government-prescribed sustainability measures. Such an image aligns with the study by Roca et al. (2021), which demonstrates that positive image-building by the ballet and opera sector reflects the sector’s involvement in sustainable activities.

In addition to the very noticeable focus on environmental sustainability, the frequency data in Table 5 show that the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability emphasizes another pillar of sustainability: its social facet. This finding is evident in the frequent word clusters “we embrace our responsibility”, “our people”, “we work with schools”, etc. The presence of the social pillar of sustainability in the corpus supports the prior study by Roca et al. (2021), which argues that the ballet and opera sector’s sustainability agenda is deeply embedded in social sustainability. Furthermore, the present findings bolster the argument by Esposito and Fisichella (2024), who assert that sustainability can enhance social inclusion and facilitate the audience’s awareness of sustainability. Moreover, the aforementioned findings align with the study by Rodrigues and Ventura (2025), which demonstrates that the social pillar of sustainability has become a recurrent theme in the ballet and opera sector’s sustainability agenda. In this regard, we should note that the social pillar of sustainability is manifested, inter alia, by the Royal Ballet and Opera’s concrete and feasible steps that demonstrate its responsible stance in relation to sustainability. Particularly, there are numerous mentions in the corpus (e.g., “we work with schools”) that are indicative of such measures, as educating children and secondary school pupils about the need to lead a sustainable lifestyle. In

other words, the Royal Ballet and Opera is actually involved in feasible measures that are related to the social pillar of sustainability, which means concrete deeds and not just “talking about sustainability” (Goubran, 2025, p. 165).

Whilst it is evident from the corpus analysis that the social pillar of sustainability characterizes the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability, its primary focus, nevertheless, is associated with the view of sustainability within the framework of the environment. Indeed, the word “environmental” is one of the most frequently occurring words in the corpus. The focus on environmental sustainability comes to the fore when we regard the word clusters with “environmental” in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Word clusters with “Environmental” in the Corpus

Clusters	Frequency/Rank
Environmental impact of our	3/1
Environmental impact will not	3/1
Environmental issues be transparent	3/1
Environmental policies of our	3/1
Environmental strategy focuses on	3/1
Environmental sustainability of our	3/1
Environmental action we will	2/7
Environmental impact but also	2/7
Environmental impact our people	2/7
Environmental impact particularly in	2/7
Environmental impact the royal	2/7
Environmental sustainability and to	2/7
Environmental sustainability together our	2/7
Environmental accreditation ISO and	1/14
Environmental impact and extend	1/14
Environmental impact by switching	1/14
Environmental leadership extends beyond	1/14
Environmental manager sustainability at	1/14
Environmental manager went to	1/14
environmental policy it is	1/14
environmental policy statement the	1/14
environmental stewardship pureprint group	1/14
Environmental impact of productions	1/14
Environmental impact in relation	1/14
Environmental sustainability together with	1/14

Source: The author’s analysis

The fact that the Royal Ballet and Opera emphasizes environmental sustainability provides indirect support for the study by Rodrigues and Ventura (2025), which posits that the ballet and opera sector takes a proactive stance on environmental sustainability.

Further, we unpack additional shades of the notion of sustainability through a cluster analysis of the frequently occurring word “sustainable”. These data are outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Word clusters with “Sustainable” in the Corpus

Clusters	Frequency/Rank
Sustainable and ethical options	3/1
Sustainable choices when visiting	3/1
Sustainable by bringing a	2/3
Sustainable city charter a	2/3
Sustainable city charter can	2/3

Sustainable future for the	2/3
Sustainable options are not	2/3
Sustainable practices during concept	2/3
Sustainable and healthy paints	1/9
Sustainable coronation bunting the	1/9
Sustainable coronation decorations London	1/9
Sustainable development three times	1/9
Sustainable future a revival	1/9
Sustainable look out for	1/9
Sustainable materials improving durability	1/9
Sustainable model for making	1/9
Sustainable model for production	1/9
Sustainable paints made from	1/9
Sustainable production model as	1/9
Sustainable productions modular scenery	1/9
Sustainable raw materials like	1/9
Sustainable reuse of materials	1/9
Sustainable suppliers in all	1/9
Sustainable to work towards	1/9
Sustainable venue please get	1/9

Source: The author's analysis

It follows from Table 7 that the clusters with the frequent word “sustainable” allow us to draw inferences about the discursive layers related to the economic pillar of sustainability, manifested, in particular, in the notion of venue sustainability. This finding supports prior research by Rudland (2025), which highlights the sustainable use of the building by the ballet and opera sector. Furthermore, the aforementioned finding bolsters the study by Esposito and Fisichella (2024), which also broaches the pillar of economic sustainability in conjunction with sustainable venues in the ballet and opera sector.

In addition, the “sustainable” clusters (see Table 7) indicate a focus on urban development. The Royal Ballet and Opera’s attention to urban development in the discourse on sustainability appears to align with prior literature (Wang & Yuan, 2020), which demonstrates that the ballet and opera sector is sensitive to the sustainability aspect of urban and community development. These findings show that the notion of sustainability in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse does not involve an exclusive focus on the environmental pillar of sustainability. Specifically, the clusters with the word “sustainable” summarized in Table 7 point to one additional pillar of sustainability: economic sustainability. It is manifested by frequent references to the venues, reusable materials, sustainable suppliers, etc. These findings indicate the Royal Ballet and Opera’s view of sustainability as the recycling and reuse of stage materials, decorations, and costumes. This discovery resonates with Rudland’s (2025) argument that the ballet and opera sector aims to capitalize on available resources by recycling props and costumes.

Concurrently with the abovementioned findings, however, there are no indications in the corpus that the Royal Ballet and Opera maximises the positive effects of digitalisation as an integral aspect of sustainability. Arguably, this observation contrasts with the study by Avanzini et al. (2020), which suggests that the ballet and opera sectors use digital opportunities to disseminate heritage.

Conclusions

The paper employs an original and novel approach to the discourse on sustainability by one of the flagship institutions in the ballet and opera sector in the Anglophone world, the Royal Ballet and Opera in London (the UK). The novelty lies in applying word-

frequency data to reveal how the Royal Ballet and Opera represent the discourse on sustainability on its official website <https://www.rbo.org.uk/>.

The application of the computer-assisted corpus analysis has revealed that the Royal Ballet and Opera employs the following frequently occurring words and word clusters: “our”, “we”, “Opera”, “Royal”, “Ballet”, “environmental”, and “sustainable”, among a host of other lexical items. In particular, the frequently occurring pronouns “our” and “we”, which are also referred to as self-mentions, suggest that the Royal Ballet and Opera portrays itself discursively as a team player that is actively engaged in a sustainable agenda. Furthermore, the frequent use of “environmental” and “sustainable,” and their respective word clusters, is indicative of the strong environmental focus in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability. In this regard, it should be mentioned that whilst the notion of the environment is prioritized in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability, a closely related issue of climate change is subsumed under the aegis of environmental sustainability. Among other aspects of sustainability, the Royal Ballet and Opera focuses on the recycling of costumes and props and on using the venues sustainably, which clearly points to the economic pillar of sustainability.

These findings bear the following practical implications. Firstly, it seems reasonable to suggest that the discourse on sustainability by the Royal Ballet and Opera in London (the UK) could be regarded as a reflection of the three central pillars of sustainability, conceptualized as the triad “environment – economy – society”. The present study advances our understanding of the discourse on sustainability in cultural institutions such as the Royal Ballet and Opera through a corpus-based approach, offering insights into the aforementioned sustainability triad. In this regard, it is concluded that the environmental pillar of sustainability is particularly highlighted in the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability. Furthermore, based on the analysis of frequent word clusters, it can be concluded that the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability sheds light on its institutional identity and its sustainability communication.

Moreover, it is concluded that the Royal Ballet and Opera’s discourse on sustainability could be incorporated into the respective discourses of other flagship institutions in the ballet and opera sector in the Anglophone world and worldwide. Also, the discourses on sustainability by major opera houses should consider foregrounding environmental sustainability and the associated issue of climate change. Additionally, the flagship opera houses may consider recycling and reusing props and costumes, which constitutes a smart, environmentally friendly, and low-cost way to conduct sustainable activities.

Finally, the study’s limitations should be noted. First of all, the study relies exclusively on the official texts authored by the Royal Ballet and the Opera and available on their official websites. Hence, the paper’s findings reflect representations of sustainability rather than verified operational practices. In this regard, and to ward off overgeneralisations, it would be desirable in future studies to conduct structured and/or semi-structured interviews with the Royal Ballet and Opera’s staff to unpack additional, personalised aspects of the sustainable practices they engage in. Presumably, such an approach to the analysis of the Royal Ballet and Opera’s sustainability discourse may help critically examine whether the discourse primarily reflects the institution’s aspirational commitments to sustainability or its concrete sustainable actions. Furthermore, interviews with the Royal Ballet and Opera’s staff would also be valuable for exploring potential gaps or divergences between the language used in the discourse and the organisation’s actual practices. To conclude, it would be pertinent to analyse what stakeholders and audiences think of the Royal Ballet and Opera’s sustainability activities.

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Author biography

Oleksandr KAPRANOV (PhD) is an associated professor in English linguistics at NLA University College in Oslo (Norway). His research interests involve climate change discourse, sustainability discourse, academic writing, and cognitive linguistics.

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