

**Global Governance for Future Generations:  
a Critical Discourse Analysis of Intergenerational Justice in the United Nations**

Dissertation

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by

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the discourse in the United Nations (UN) that facilitates intergenerational justice (IJ) work for future generations (FGs). Using five declarations, I examine how the philosophical schools of utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice, environmental justice, and intergenerational equity are reflected in UN discourse. I also look at changes throughout time regarding the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs. I create codes through NVivo and conduct a classical content analysis after evaluating the ideas and context of each individual declaration. Using the references for all codes, I also perform a critical discourse analysis (CDA). I contend that specific concepts of each philosophical school of IJ are present in UN discourse. Furthermore, I argue that the declarations reflect such schools through the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs. The analysis sheds light on the greater implications of discursive practices in the UN and how these impact institutional efforts for IJ.

## **Abbreviations**

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DA	Discourse Analysis
DoFG	Declaration on Future Generations
FGs	Future Generations
ID	Intergenerational Diplomacy
IJ	Intergenerational Justice
OCA	Our Common Agenda
PGs	Present Generations
SD	Sustainable Development
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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## **I. Introduction**

Wars, environmental crises, economic development, demographic changes, technological advancements, pandemics: these global governance challenges have intergenerational implications, but policymakers barely recognize the unequal distribution of burdens and benefits among generations. The fight for intergenerational justice (IJ) does not only seek to address intergenerational divides, but also increase the institutional representation of youth, implement strategic foresight tools, and inform decision-making with age-disaggregated evidence. In the context of sustainable development (SD), IJ aims to describe the relationship between present generations (PGs) and future generations (FGs) (OECD, 2020, p. 115).

This dissertation analyzes the United Nations (UN) as a case study for global governance efforts for FGs since the institution's charter determined "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (UN Charter, 1945). The cornerstone question of IJ is why PGs should care about unborn people and what do we owe to them. In Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR, 1948), the UN proclaims that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood." This document sets all human beings as of equal concern and respect no matter the place and time they are born. It creates a foundation for the moral obligations towards FGs at all levels of governance.

I pose two research questions: i) how are the philosophical schools of IJ reflected in UN discourse?; and ii) what is the intertemporality in UN discourse regarding the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs? I examine four philosophical schools of IJ: utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice, environmental ethics, and

intergenerational equity. I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to find evidence of philosophical influences in the UN for IJ matters concerning FGs. I examine five UN declarations: the *Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment* (1972), the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992), the *Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development* (1995), the *UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibility of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations* (1997), and the *UN75 Declaration* (2020). I connect discursive references to philosophical schools of IJ and explain how these shift across time. This research makes use of CDA methodology by assessing: i) how UN discourse positions readers within philosophical schools of IJ; ii) how discursive practice is revealed through comparing the declarations to each other; and, to a more limited extent, iii) how institutional practices on IJ can reflect UN discourse.

The remainder of this dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter II provides background information on contemporary IJ work in the UN system, a guide to the literature behind the four philosophical schools of IJ, and the conceptualization of the research questions. Chapter III outlines the CDA methodology, research design, and limitations. Chapter IV explains the empirical findings on language for PGs and FGs, the four philosophical schools, and the intertemporality of concerns regarding FGs. Chapter V presents the implications of the findings and looks at UN discourse critically. Finally, Chapter VI discusses the findings compared to my hypotheses and other conclusions.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **A. Intergenerational Solidarity, Fairness, Equity, and Justice**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations* (2013) was the first to review the foundations of intergenerational solidarity, including ideas of fairness, equity, and justice across generations. It understands "intergenerational solidarity" as the relationship of generational groups—especially between younger and older generations—and recognizes that policies have expanded to include all generations (UN, 2013). As part of SD, "fairness between generations" means the pursuit of welfare by current generations in a way that does not decrease the opportunities of succeeding generations to have a good and decent life (ibid).

The report defines "intergenerational equity" according to the meaning assigned by the OECD (n.d.): "the issue of sustainable development referring, in the environmental context, to fairness in the inter-temporal distribution of the endowment with natural assets or of the rights to their exploitation." Moreover, it explains IJ as a broader concept that captures dimensions like the distribution, procedures, restorations, and retributions across generations (UN, 2013).

Another contribution was acknowledging the lack of adequate moral and meta-ethical responses to the definition of the moral status of future people. It recognizes the moral difference between unborn generations and living generations that are unambiguously individuals with rights (ibid).

In 2021, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres published his report *Our Common Agenda* (OCA), which has a chapter dedicated to succeeding generations. It asks to expand the understanding of "we the peoples" from the *UN Charter* to protect all the people of this century, including unborn generations (UN, 2021). Guterres encouraged the prioritization of long-termism and announced initiatives such as a Special Envoy for Future Generations (UN, 2021,

p.44- 45). He also suggests a Declaration on Future Generations (DoFG) that specifies duties and develops mechanisms to share practices and monitor work towards long-term challenges, building on the *UNESCO Declaration* from 1997 (ibid, p.45).

In response to *OCA*, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 76/307 that establishes the modalities of the “Summit of the Future” to take place in September 2024. Such an event will adopt the outcome document “A Pact for the Future” to strengthen global governance for PGs and FGs (UN, 2022).

## **B. Toward a Declaration on Future Generations**

The *Elements Paper* (2022, p. 1) credits support for the principle of intergenerational equity, recognition of responsibilities towards future people, and solidarity to secure their interests. It claims that a DoFG should be promoted by norms and values from previous UN agreements. As well, it defines FGs as “all those generations that do not yet exist, are yet to come and who will eventually inherit this planet” (ibid). The *Elements Paper* (2022, p. 2) establishes that the DoFG should secure the interests of FGs through long-termist SD policies and the identification, management, and monitoring of global existential risks. The *Elements Paper* (2022, p. 3) identifies three prerequisites for the securitization of a sustainable future: i) planetary well-being and the preservation of life on Earth; ii) safety and peace in the world; and iii) safe development of emerging technologies and digital cooperation. Furthermore, it argues that SD is the foundation and blueprint to secure the interests of PGs and create the foundations for those of FGs (ibid).

The *OCA Policy Brief 1* (UN, 2023) expanded on suggestions for practical steps towards a DoFG. It refers to the *Brundtland Report’s* (1987, p. 43) definition of SD as “development that



meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” The document also makes sixteen suggestions for the DoFG, some of which include: consolidating the DoFG as an international instrument that clarifies the commitments already made to FGs, defining FGs and their distinction to young people alive today, adapting IJ commitments to new challenges, and recognizing the needs, interests, and freedoms of FGs. It also seeks to recognize risks and threats with intergenerational consequences and duties to protect FGs through decision-making (ibid, p. 16). The Secretary-General also makes a call to follow-up on his *OCA* and to commit to the “continued existence of humanity and preservation of the human species” (ibid).

### **C. Philosophical Schools of Intergenerational Justice**

This dissertation does not aim to defend a specific IJ philosophical school, but rather to assess the discursive choices the UN has made to discuss FGs. I do not address “justice” from a legal perspective as this is out of the scope from this paper.

Next, I provide a guide to the available literature in IJ philosophy and ethics from some of the most recognized IJ authors. After presenting their perspectives, I problematize the schools of philosophy to inquire what they mean in the context of this research.

#### **Utilitarianism**

John Stuart Mill (2009) proposes a connection between justice and utility. He defines utilitarian morality as being able to recognize sacrifice but refuses to consider sacrifice itself as a good. Mill (2009, p. 31) states that the only admired self-renunciation is that which seeks happiness. Moreover, he argues that “justice is a name for certain moral requirements, which, regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more

paramount obligation, than any others” (ibid, p. 113). While utility can be described as an uncertain standard that individuals interpret differently, justice is believed to be a concept based on evidence and independent from opinion. Nonetheless, if justice stands for certain social utilities, then these are informed by interpretation (ibid, p. 99).

Peter Singer (1972) applies utilitarian principles to explain humans’ moral obligation to alleviate suffering like poverty. He argues that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” (Singer, 1972, p. 231). Singer (1972, p. 232) refuses proximity and distance (through time or space) as excuses for discrimination, especially if the principles of equality, impartiality and universalizability are to be followed. He describes that choosing to provide aid to others over favoring oneself is not supererogatory, but necessary (ibid, p. 235). Singer (1972, p. 241) proposes that we ought to continue giving until the level of marginal utility is reached, or when by giving more, we would cause ourselves suffering that we are trying to relieve for others.

Tim Mulgan (2014, p. 325) argues that obligations towards future people might be the most important aspect of morality for an utilitarian. Mulgan (2014, p. 325) claims that “if our goal is to maximize the happiness of sentient beings, then the happiness of future people is the paramount ethical concern.” He claims that non-utilitarians cannot find an answer to intergenerational obligations because of the non-identity problem, misplaced optimism, and the absence of reciprocity between generations (ibid, p. 326). Utilitarians focus on how happy a person is, not who they are; in the case of FGs, utilitarians do not pay attention to whether our actions will affect future people or who will exist (ibid, p. 327). Meanwhile, non-utilitarians tend to substantiate morality on reciprocal interaction, which problematizes the lack of

intergenerational reciprocity between present and future people (ibid, p. 330). Utilitarians move away from reciprocity concerns and claim that morality is not about that, instead they argue that humans do have obligations to future people (ibid, p. 331). However, Mulgan (2014, p. 333) offers two accounts of aggregation as a problem within the utilitarian tradition: i) the total view, that consider the greatest total amount of happiness as the best outcome; and ii) the average view, where the best outcome is that where there is the highest average level of happiness. Furthermore, Mulgan (2014, p. 345) considers that there is a tension between rule utilitarianism and act utilitarianism since the former's advantage over the latter is the ability of making moderate demands. Mulgan (2014, p. 345) calls to reconsider non-utilitarian moral ideas—including rights, liberty, and democracy—as they might have to be abandoned to find solutions to challenges such as anthropogenic climate change to guarantee the survival of FGs.

### **Rawlsian Justice**

John Rawls (2020) proposed a theory of justice that emphasized the distribution of goods and opportunities to benefit the most disadvantaged across generations. It established the duty of current generations to secure FGs' access to rights, opportunities, and resources. Rawls (2020, p. 285) suggests that each generation should preserve real capital accumulation while also protecting just institutions and the achievements of culture and civilization. Moreover, he criticizes utilitarianism as an approach to IJ as it considers variables like population size and marginal productivity of capital, without accounting for generations that might have less or more advantages (ibid, p. 286-287). Rawls (2020, p. 289) states that no generations are subordinate or have stronger claims than any other. Furthermore, he acknowledges that, because generations are spread out in time, all generations except the first can improve their situation because the exchanges occur in one direction and the reciprocity is only virtual (ibid, p. 291).

Andrew Dobson (1998, p. 30) takes Rawls' ideas a step further by questioning who and what benefits are to be distributed. He points out that SD that focuses on human FGs is anthropocentric because our species' wants and needs are prioritized over the non-human natural world (ibid, p. 44 & 61). Dobson (1998, p. 88) problematizes the concern of generational needs as taking precedence over wants and highlights the weak formulation of what "opportunities" for FGs should consist of (ibid, p. 162). Regarding distributive justice, Dobson (1998, p. 206) concludes that the concept of sustainability is compatible with a theory of justice that encompasses all humans as dispensers of justice, while PGs and FGs are possible recipients.

Joerg Chet Tremmel (2009, p. 7) further distinguishes between "generational justice" and "sustainability." While the former can interact with questions of social, gender and international justice, it does not focus on it like the latter, which gives equal weight to intergenerational and intragenerational justice. Tremmel (2009, p. 154-155) calls attention to Rawls' omission to address dilemmas of environmental issues or answering inquiries of what should be sustained for FGs and why. Additionally, he argues that IJ does not mean equality of all generations, but instead the creation of just procedures in PGs that will produce just outcomes for FGs; in such a way humanity progresses in "a normal state of affairs" where FGs are better off than previous generations (ibid, p.170). Tremmel dives into a discussion of the language of "at least as good" versus "better" in postulating principles of IJ; the former implies an egalitarian standard, while the latter does not. Finally, he concludes that the objective of IJ is improvement, not equality, without the implication that PGs must sacrifice for FGs (ibid).

### **Environmental Ethics**

Aldo Leopold (2013, p. 171) defines "ethic" under ecological and philosophical terms; ecology gives it the meaning of "a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence,"

while philosophy “a differentiation between social from anti-social conduct.” Leopold (2013, p. 172) argues that no ethic focuses on the human relationship to the land and that the “land-relation” is purely economic in a way that gives privileges without obligations. Leopold (2013, p. 172) names his environmental philosophy as “land ethic,” and expands the boundaries of community to include the land with its soils, water, flora, and fauna. He claims that the purpose of the land ethic is not to impede the alteration and management of natural resources, but instead confirm that they have a right to continued existence and, sometimes, the preservation of their natural state (ibid, p. 172-173). Leopold’s land ethic has the objective of positioning human beings as members and citizens, instead of conquerors, of the land-community (ibid). He demonstrates the existence of an ecological conscience that considers: i) health, the land’s capacity to renew itself; and ii) conservation, human’s effort to preserve and understand the land’s health (ibid, p. 185).

Carolyn Merchant (1989) provides an ecofeminist account of the complex connection between women and nature in the Western world. Self-described as a socialist ecofeminist, she has a structuralist perspective of the oppression and domination of women. Merchant (1989, p. 4-5) looks at language changes in descriptions of nature to examine the transformation of cultural values, specifically in connection to female imagery (i.e., Earth as a nurturing mother). Merchant (1989, p. 143) identifies that Western civilizations have advanced at the expense of nature by creating a nature-culture dualism where women and animality are categorized as a “lower form of human life.” She proposes that the categories of nature and culture need to be radically reorganized in all disciplines if nature, women, and historically marginalized communities, such as Indigenous and Black, are to be liberated (ibid, p. 144). Merchant (1989, p. 294-295) concludes that the ecology and women’s movements brought attention to the issue of liberation

so that economic structures are revolutionized. The aim is to reform capitalism, so it no longer creates profits at the expense of nature and working-class people. In terms of survival, Merchant (1989, p. 295) concludes that capital-intensive economic methods need to be reassessed so that the future distribution of natural resources focuses on the integration between humans and natural ecosystems.

James Garvey (2008, p. 33) proclaims that while science can provide information, it is humans who decide what to do about environmental issues. He proposes that we need to depart from “the old human framework” that views humans as the measure of things and as carriers of value. Furthermore, Garvey (2008, p. 51) categorizes value in two ways: instrumental and intrinsic. Under such understanding, humans introduce value to the world by valuing things as instruments or by judging them for what they are. Garvey (2008, p. 52) explains that the main aim of environmental ethics is to go beyond the limits of anthropocentric valuation by extending human values to other creatures and calling for new values. He identifies as a limitation that the answer to all these challenges have to make sense to humans and, hence, need to be connected to human values (ibid, p. 53).

### **Intergenerational Equity**

Intergenerational equity proposes that all generations should have equal opportunities to meet their basic needs. Peter Vallentyne (2002, p. 195) questions the responsibilities that procreators have to their offspring and others. First, Vallentyne (2002, p. 199) proposes that procreators owe their offspring to make their life worth living by ensuring there are no negative life prospects. He also argues that the existence of offspring is not meant to provide benefits to others (ibid, p. 202). Second, Vallentyne (2002, p. 205-206) identifies that the sole procreative duties are ensuring that other peoples’ rights and equality duties are not violated.

Stephen Gardiner (2009) explores the application of contract theory in an IJ setting that seeks reciprocity and cooperation between generations as equals. Contract theory uses three principal concepts: cooperation, agreement, and equality (Gardiner, 2009, p.78). There are two main components of contract thought: i) contractarianism, which is based on people's self-interest and the basis for cooperation is mutual advantage; and ii) contractualism, which is founded on the idea that people respect their counterparts and seeks fairness (ibid, p. 79). In the context of IJ, reciprocity can be claimed by contemporary generations looking after the interests of those yet to be born, while future people honor the memories, wishes and ideals of their predecessors (ibid, p. 83). Gardiner (2009, p. 116) argues that intergenerational settings challenge the "rationale for, structure of, and justification for cooperation" in contract theory. Furthermore, he regards postulating a chain connection between generations as an inadequate approach. Gardiner therefore is unsure on whether contract theory should be rejected for intergenerational ethics. Nevertheless, Gardiner (2009, p. 116) sees a possibility to create a "universal kind of contract theory" that considers the conceptual difficulties of an intergenerational contract and moves beyond the current single-generation model.

David Heyd (2009, p. 169-170) examines Rawls' theory of justice to argue that a non-contractarian option to Rawls' principles of IJ cannot work under the framework of his general theory of justice. Moreover, Heyd (2009, p. 171) argues that the duty of "just saving" which demands that we leave capital and resources to future people (while helping the contemporary poor) is not a principle of justice, but instead a value of justice. The Rawlsian social contract seeks to agree on the principles of justice, not maximize welfare; hence, IJ aims to secure necessary conditions for living, not advancing the wealth of people of the future. Heyd (2009, p. 168) points out that theories of justice tend to refer to individuals in a particular generation

because cooperation normally happens between people living at the same time. Regarding the asymmetrical relationship between PGs and FGs, Heyd (2009, p. 179) defends IJ by comparing it to intragenerational contexts where the principles of justice exist between people that cannot mutually harm each other (i.e., slaves and masters).

Henry Shue (2020) explores the interconnection between international and intergenerational justice in relation to climate, development, and disaster. Shue (2020, p. 261) proposes the consideration of responsibilities that PGs might have to “distant strangers” regarding climate change. Shue (2020, p. 267) brings attention to the asymmetrical relationship between PGs and FGs: we can shape the world they come into, but they cannot influence the decisions we take for them. For example, Shue (2020, p. 261) points out that the distribution of dangers versus benefits of carbon emissions, as the benefits are mainly distributed to PGs and the dangers to FGs. Furthermore, Shue (2020, p. 267) identifies two priorities of what FGs need from PGs: i) immediate SD; and ii) the urgent control of climate change to prevent disasters.

Clark Wolf (2009, p. 348) claims that global climate and environmental change are fundamental issues for a theory of IJ as they raise inquiries on fairness and justice in relation to the distribution of burdens and benefits. Wolf (2009, p. 355-356) proposes “generation neutrality,” where there is no special weight assigned to members of any specific generation, including the present, and the needs for future people are not discounted simply because they have not been born yet. Wolf (2009, p. 373) concludes that it is unjust to put at risk the basic needs of FGs for the sake of present activities that are not dedicated to fulfilling fundamental needs.



## D. Problem Formation

The above guide hints at the extensive philosophy literature required to make sense of IJ. There are further discussions that are not within the scope of this dissertation, hence are omitted and should be explored in other research initiatives. Table 1 presents a synopsis with the generalized characteristics of the schools of philosophy previously presented. It is important to disclaim that there are nuanced views between supporters within each school, these are not detailed or further explained either.

**Table 1. Synopsis of Philosophical Schools of Intergenerational Justice**

School	View on Justice	Philosophical Position	Elaborations of this position
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	Moral requirement of higher obligation than other utilities.	The purpose of sacrifice is to seek happiness for oneself or others. We ought to stop spending on anything that is not of “comparable moral importance” to prevent suffering.	Humans ought to continue giving until marginal utility or self-suffering is reached. Distance is not an excuse for discrimination.
<b>Rawlsian Justice</b>	Distribution of goods and opportunities to benefit the most disadvantaged across generations.	Duty of PGs to secure FGs access to rights, opportunities and resources.	Preservation of real capital accumulation, just institutions, and cultural achievements.
<b>Environmental Justice</b>	Focused on the human relationship to Earth (“land-relation”).	Expansion of community boundaries to include soils, water, flora and fauna (the “land ethic”). Reassessment of the future distribution of natural resources to integrate humans and natural ecosystems.	Ecological conscience that encompasses land’s renewal capacity and human’s effort to conserve the land’s health.
<b>Intergenerational Equity</b>	All generations should have equal opportunities to meet basic needs. Distribution of burdens and benefits.	Securitization of necessary conditions for FGs, no advancement of their wealth.	Contract theory as a pathway to intergenerational cooperation, agreement and equality.

Next, I present the non-identity problem, the challenge of intergenerational reciprocity, and other specific concerns related to FGs. Table 2 organizes these considerations by philosophical school and is followed by a recount of the contentions in the literature.

**Table 2. Overview of Philosophical Schools of Intergenerational Justice Applied to Future Generations**

School	Non-identity problem	Intergenerational Reciprocity	Specific Concerns
<b>Utilitarianism</b>	Happiness of future people is a main ethical concern. Focus on how much happiness is provided to a person and not who the person is.	No reciprocity. No attention to how PGs affect FGs and vice versa. Argue that morality does not focus on reciprocity concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The aggregation problem: greatest total happiness vs highest average happiness.</li> <li>- Demands: rule vs act utilitarianism.</li> <li>- Reconsideration on non-utilitarian moral ideas (i.e. rights, liberty, democracy).</li> </ul>
<b>Rawlsian Justice</b>	No generations are subordinate to any other. Well-being of FGs is determined by present and previous generations.	Descending reciprocity. Reciprocity is virtual and exchanges occur in one direction. Not focused on equality, rather on the incremental progress (improvement) of generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What benefits are to be distributed and to who?</li> <li>- SD focused on FGs as anthropocentric.</li> <li>- Omission to environmental dilemmas.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Justice</b>	Reorganization of nature-culture categories to include sentient beings, women and historically marginalized communities as equals to other humans in FGs.	Double reciprocity. Extension of reciprocity to nature and sentient beings (the “land ethic”) beyond human FGs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land-relation based on human privileges without obligations.</li> <li>- Capital-intensive economic methods.</li> <li>- “Old human framework” that uses humans for anthropocentric valuation.</li> </ul>
<b>Intergenerational Equity</b>	“Generation neutrality” that assigns no value to any member from any generation.	Double reciprocity. PGs look after interests of FGs, while the latter honor predecessors. Asymmetrical relationship between PGs and FGs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Responsibilities of procreators to their offspring and others.</li> <li>- Chain connections between generations.</li> <li>- Contract theory as potentially unfit for IJ.</li> <li>- Immediate SD and disaster prevention.</li> </ul>

*Non-identity problem.* This problem raises the question of whether there are obligations of PGs in respect to FGs, especially because current counterparts cause the existence of those yet to be born. It takes into consideration that FGs' existence will inevitably be flawed. Moreover, it inquires whether it is worth bringing anyone into existence or, instead, to bring a non-identical but better off individual (Roberts, 2022).

Utilitarianism does not focus on the existence of individuals in FGs, but rather on the obligation of PGs to provide happiness to FGs (Mill, 2009, p. 31; Mulgan, 2014, p. 325) no matter their distance in time (Singer, 1972, p. 232). Rawlsian justice argues that there should be no subordination among generations (Rawls, 2020, p. 289), however PGs and previous counterparts are determinants of the well-being and existence of FGs (Tremmel, 2009, p. 197-199). Environmental justice sheds light into obligations to nature and sentient beings that are not human (Leopold, 2013, p. 172-173). Moreover, it is concerned with treating FGs of women and historically marginalized communities as equals (Merchant, 1989, p.144). Intergenerational equity proposes "generation neutrality" where the obligations to all generations are equal as no generation or any of its individual members have greater value (Wolf, 2009, p. 355-356).

*Intergenerational reciprocity.* In IJ literature, there are three models of reciprocity: descending, ascending, and double. Descending reciprocity is the most standard model and relies on indirect reciprocity oriented towards a generation that is initially a third party. Ascending reciprocity goes in the opposite direction, although still indirect, where FGs owe PGs as much as what current counterparts transferred to previous generations, i.e., the logic of "pay-as-you" pension schemes. Double reciprocity involves direct reciprocity where the initial contributor also acts as final beneficiary; FGs investing on previous generations is not a reply to benefits received

from older counterparts, but rather a response to the investment previous generations did to benefit FGs (Gosseries, 2009, p. 123-124).

Utilitarianism pays no attention to reciprocity between FGs and contemporaries as it claims that morality is not concerned on reciprocity, but on obligations (Singer, 1972, p. 231; Mulgan, 2014, p. 331). Rawlsian justice has a claim for descending reciprocity as exchanges are unidirectional (Rawls, 2020, p. 291) and focus on the improvement of FGs (Tremmel, 2009, p. 170). Environmental justice focuses on the extension of reciprocity to actors beyond human FGs such as nature and other sentient beings (Garvey, 2008, p. 52). While the reviewed literature on environmental justice does not provide a claim for one of the reciprocity models, I argue that the double reciprocity model fits best. Under such an approach, PGs act as both initial contributor and final beneficiary because the application of the land ethic (see Leopold, 2013, p. 172) allows for SD that benefits PGs, FGs, and Earth. Intergenerational equity also has a claim for double reciprocity where PGs are the contributors and benefactors: by looking after FGs, the memories, wishes and ideas of PGs could be honored by FGs (Gardiner, 2009, p. 83).

*Specific concerns.* Within and between each school of philosophy, there are considerations when it comes to the application of IJ to FGs. In utilitarianism this includes aggregation problems (Mulgan, 2014, p. 333), rule vs. act utilitarianism (Mulgan, 2014, p. 345), and non-utilitarian moral ideas (Mulgan, 2014, p. 345). In the case of Rawlsian justice, there is a gap between who benefits and what is to be distributed (Dobson, 1998, p. 162), as well as the exclusion of environmental considerations (Tremmel, 2009, p. 154-155). The school of environmental justice considers capitalism (Merchant, 1989, p. 295), anthropocentric thinking (Garvey, 2008, p. 51), and the lack of human obligations to Earth (Leopold, 2013, p. 172). Intergenerational equity inquiries on procreational responsibilities (Vallentyne, 2002, p. 195), the

connection between generations (Gardiner, 2009, p. 116), contract theory (Heyd, 2009, p. 169-170), and SD as a time-sensitive issue (Shue, 2020, p. 267).

### **E. Research Question**

The different ethical approaches of each school of philosophy translate into diverse applications of IJ in discourse and policymaking. Given the commitment to write a DoFG that is meant to become a landmark international instrument, UN policymakers need to take into consideration multiple existing worldviews and ethical concerns regarding FGs. Trying to find which school of philosophy is most present in the UN system is not possible by looking at a limited selection of documents. Instead, I am interested in discovering what aspects of the four schools of philosophy are present in UN discourse when discussing FGs. I believe it is important to conduct a CDA of UN instruments so that existing trends on philosophical approaches to IJ are considered in the negotiations for the DoFG. The *Elements Paper* (2022) has claimed that stakeholders across the UN support the principle of intergenerational equity, but I wonder if there is evidence on whether this is already reflected in UN discourse. As well, looking at past UN instruments might reveal findings on the non-identity problem and the issue of intergenerational reciprocity.

I pose two research questions: i) how are the philosophical schools of IJ reflected in UN discourse?; and ii) what is the intertemporality in UN discourse regarding the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs? For the first question, my hypothesis is the following: utilitarianism will be reflected through the approach of greatest total happiness; Rawlsian justice's distribution of goods and opportunities will be present; conservation will be the main displayed concept of environmental justice; and the idea of

contract theory from intergenerational equity will be referred to at least once. My hypothesis for question two is that, in response to the non-identity problem, UN discourse uses “generation neutrality” in older declarations and that is not different in contemporary documents. In terms of intergenerational reciprocity, I expect that UN discourse adopts the Rawlsian approach of descending reciprocity with incremental progress of generations. Finally, I think UN discourse mentions concerns on moral obligations towards FGs.

### **III. Research Design and Methodology**

#### **A. Critical Discourse Analysis**

“Discourse” refers to statements that supply a language to represent the knowledge in a topic during a historical moment in time (Taylor, 2013, p. 16). Discourse analysis (DA) is a methodology to understand how social ideas and objects were created; it explores “social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist” (AAVV, 2004, p. 19). DA systematically studies texts with the purpose to find evidence of their meaning and how it translates into the social world (ibid).

CDA scrutinizes the connection between language employment and how elites make use of language to exercise societal power (Taylor, 2013, p. 14). The critical orientation to DA makes multiple assumptions including: all thoughts as arbitrated by social and historical power, facts as part of ideological inscription, language as primordial to form subjectivity, *etc* (Locke, 2004, p. 25-26). This research is interested in looking at the text to discover how it discursively positions readers. Additionally, it seeks to understand the discourse practice, or how one document relates to other similar texts. Finally, to a lesser extent, it considers how institutions provide contextual importance.

In my preparation for this dissertation, I did not find published academic papers that made use of DA or CDA to study IJ. Nonetheless, there is a diverse variety of academic research that makes use of DA and CDA to study the UN. Using the CDA methodology, I will contribute to IJ literature by providing qualitative findings on the intersection between philosophy and discourse. Additionally, I will advance DA efforts to study the UN.

## **B. Research Design**

*Materials.* The UN deals with multiple international instruments such as charters, treaties, agreements, conventions, declarations, *etc.* While they are different in title and features, international law commonly has applied the same rules to all. The *OCA Policy Brief 1* (UN, 2023) annexed a partial list of existing international instruments (proclaimed between 1945 and 2022) that refer to FGs, these include: one charter, one treaty, four agreements, nineteen conventions, and thirteen declarations. While a “charter” and a “treaty” are solemn agreements, the former is used for formal instruments and the latter is reserved for topics of gravity. An “agreement” is of lesser formality and is concerned with a more specific subject-matter; it normally has a technical or administrative purpose. A “convention” refers to multilateral treaties or the instruments that result from the negotiations in an international organization. Finally, a “declaration” indicates a set of aspirations without binding obligations (UNTC, n.d.).

The only UN international instrument produced that is explicitly centered on FGs is *UNESCO* (1997). It caught my attention that such an instrument is a declaration and made me wonder what other “aspirations” UN Member States have agreed for the future but are not obliged to meet. To conduct a CDA, I expanded my sample beyond *UNESCO* (1997) to include

four declarations from the annexed partial list in *OCA Policy Brief 1* (UN, 2023). I present these declarations in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. List with Summaries of the Examined Declarations**

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<i>Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment</i>	1972	Created during the first world conference focused on environmental issues. Adopted principles for environmental management and dialogue between industrialized and developing countries.
<i>Rio Declaration on Environment and Development</i>	1992	One of the outcome documents from the “Earth Summit.” Highlighted the interdependence between social, economic and environmental factors with the purpose to give guidance on international cooperation.
<i>Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development</i>	1995	Resulted from the “World Summit for Social Development.” Pledged to get rid of poverty, meet goals for full employment, and increase social integration.
<i>UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibility of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations</i>	1997	Resolution of the 29th session of the UNESCO General Conference. Formulated a behavioral guideline for PGs to better protect the needs and interests of FGs.
<i>UN75 Declaration</i>	2020	Adopted during a high-level event on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN. Reaffirmed the commitment to multilateralism and steered the process to reform the UN.

*Methods.* NVivo is a software for qualitative data analysis that assists researchers in managing data, creating graphical models, and generating reports of a qualitative database (Bazeley, 2007, p. 2-3). Following Leech & Onwuegbuzie’s (2011) types of qualitative data analysis, I conduct a classical content analysis where I systematically assign codes to data to capture the covered concepts in each of the analyzed documents. I create the codes based on concepts from each school of philosophy and pair data from the declarations with one or more codes using inductive reasoning. As well, I count the number of “references” or paired data for each code to understand what codes are predominantly discussed. I present my findings using tables that show a reference count per declaration for each code.



### **C. Limitations**

There are two principal limitations to the work of this dissertation. First, I acknowledge that a CDA using NVivo is a research design that does not provide quantifiable information besides the number of references per code. Furthermore, the codes created in NVivo and the selection of information that is designated to each code is selected by a single researcher. While I count with multiple years of IJ advocacy work inside and outside the UN, this work would have benefitted from comparing my coding with that of other researchers to avoid any biases. Second, the number of declarations examined is extremely limited. This is a result not only of the space and time restrictions of this dissertation, but also that the UN has a short list of declarations that touch on FGs. Having looked at the partial list of existing international instruments that refer to FGs provided by the *OCA Policy Brief 1* (UN, 2023), I selected the declarations that are the most aligned to this research. Academic literature on IJ would benefit from expanding the work of this dissertation to also investigate more documents such as the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* (1993), the *Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights* (1997), the *Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (2002), the *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* (2005), and others.

### **IV. Empirical Findings and Analysis**

In this chapter I provide an overview of the language used to refer to both PGs and FGs. Afterwards, I present the NVivo findings and explain how the codes reflect each of the four schools of philosophy of IJ. Finally, I analyze how the declarations discursively reflect the schools of philosophy through the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns regarding FGs.

### **A. Language for Present and Future Generations**

Using NVivo, I found that “present and future generations” was the language most used across all declarations. I was surprised to discover that *UNESCO (1997)* is the only declaration that used “future generations.” This is important because it does not accompany future generational cohorts with their contemporaries. Moreover, *UNESCO (1997)* opted to use the synonym “succeeding generations” once. *UN75 (2020)* used the same synonym once and “coming generations” twice. Regarding PGs, *UNESCO (1997)* is also the only declaration that used “present generations” without the accompaniment of future counterparts. *Stockholm (1972)* and *Copenhagen (1995)* were linguistic outliers because they gendered PGs. *Stockholm (1972)* always used male gendered language (i.e., “man” and “mankind”) to talk about humans. Meanwhile, *Copenhagen (1995)* used male and female gendered language with one reference for “men and women” and two for “women and men.” *UN75 (2020)* had one reference for “women and men,” but this language was used to describe UN peacekeepers. From these findings, shown in Table 3, it can be concluded that UN discourse has become less gendered throughout time and that more contemporary declarations separate FGs from PGs.

**Table 3. Language for Present and Future Generations**

Language	Declaration	References
“Present and Future Generations”	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	3
	UN75	1
“Future Generations”	UNESCO	13
“Succeeding Generations”	UNESCO	1
	UN75	1
“Coming Generations”	UN75	2
“Present Generations”	UNESCO	17
“Men and women” (gendered PGs)	Copenhagen	2
“Women and men” (gendered PGs)	Copenhagen	1
	UN75	1
“Man” (gendered PGs)	Stockholm	9
“Mankind” (gendered PGs and FGs)	Stockholm	1

### B. Findings for Each Philosophical School of Intergenerational Justice

*Utilitarianism.* The five declarations analyzed demonstrate that utilitarianism is one of the philosophical schools least reflected in UN discourse. First, nowhere in the declarations is there mention of happiness, suffering, or sacrifice, which are core concepts of the utilitarian philosophical position. However, there were seven total references for the code “prevent,” which is also of importance since utilitarianism adopts a preventive approach to disadvantages.

*Stockholm* (1972, two references) called on taking steps to prevent the pollution of seas and any environmental effects resulting from human activities, while *Rio* (1992, two references) focused on the prevention of environmental degradation. As well, *Copenhagen* (1995, one reference) aimed “to prevent or counteract market failure” and the *UN75* (2020, two references) set the aspiration to prevent conflicts and hostilities. The code reveals a clear chronological shift from anthropogenic bioenvironmental damage to economic concerns and the promotion of peace. It raises to my attention the absence of the code in *UNESCO* (1997), which presents a list of

responsibilities of PGs toward FGs. The language in *UNESCO* (1997) is more proactive rather than preventive with the usage of expressions such as: “ensure,” “bequeath,” “preserve,” “take into account,” “take care,” “spare,” and “refrain.” While the four other documents seek PGs to prevent future issues, this declaration proposes for PGs to achieve specific goals to favor FGs.

Some of the specific concerns of utilitarianism include the aggregation problem (greatest total happiness vs highest average happiness) and rule vs. act utilitarianism, but these were not found in any of the examined documents. Utilitarianism considers the possible abandonment of moral ideas such as rights, liberty, and democracy to find solutions to challenges. While rule vs. act utilitarianism might defer on approaches to moral ideas, in my coding I treat all as non-utilitarian. Searching for moral ideas has provided, perhaps, the main revelation of studying the declarations through an utilitarian lens: UN discourse makes frequent use of moral ideas and references to international instruments in its argumentative and goal-setting process. As seen in Table 4, the coverage of moral ideas was larger in the declarations that were people-centered (*Copenhagen*, *UNESCO*, and *UN75*) and smaller in those that were focused on environmental issues (*Stockholm* and *Rio*).

**Table 4. NVivo Coverage of Non-utilitarian Moral Ideas per Declaration**

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
Stockholm	1
Rio	2
Copenhagen	33
UNESCO	9
UN75	14

The non-utilitarian moral ideas found in the five declarations included: accountability, democracy, equality, justice, liberty, peace, respect, rights, solidarity, and transparency. The codes with most coverage were “rights” with twenty-six references, “respect” with eighteen

references, and “liberty” and “equality” with both twelve references. Furthermore, international instruments were referred to in all the declarations except *Stockholm* (1972). The *UN Charter* and *UDHR* were the instruments with most references. Table 5 shows a breakdown of the number of references for each moral idea throughout the five declarations.

**Table 5. NVivo Codes for Non-utilitarian Moral Ideas**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Accountability</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	2
<i>Democracy</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	4
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	1
<i>Equality</i>	Stockholm	1
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	8
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	1
<i>Justice</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	5
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	3
<i>Liberty</i>	Stockholm	1
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	5
	UNESCO	4
	UN75	2
<i>Peace</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	2
	UNESCO	3
	UN75	3
<i>Respect</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0

	Copenhagen	12
	UNESCO	4
	UN75	2
<i>Rights</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	17
	UNESCO	4
	UN75	5
<i>Solidarity</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	1
<i>Transparency</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	2
<i>International Instruments</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	2
	Copenhagen	12
	UNESCO	5
	UN75	8

*Rawlsian Justice.* Distribution of goods and opportunities among the most disadvantaged is the conceptualization that Rawls provides for IJ. Of the five declarations, *UNESCO* (1997) is the most focused on describing what benefits are to be distributed and on clarifying that they are to be directed to FGs. There are only two other acknowledgements to the distribution of benefits between generations: *Rio* (1992) asserts that “the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations,” while *Copenhagen* (1995) calls to “fulfill our responsibility for present and future generations by ensuring equity among generations protecting the integrity and sustainable use of our environment.” While *Rio* (1992) and *Copenhagen* (1995) are aligned with the Rawlsian view on

justice, *UNESCO* (1997) specifically fits in this school because it sets specific duties of PGs towards FGs.

The Rawlsian school is also reflected in UN discourse because it presents SD as anthropocentric. Coded as “people-centered sustainable development,” it places human interests and needs above those of Earth and other sentient beings. As shown in Table 6, *Copenhagen* (1995) had the most coverage with forty-five references, however this is not surprising as the declaration is focused on social development. While *Stockholm* (1972) is a declaration on the environment, the efforts to protect Earth and natural resources are so that PGs and FGs benefit from them. *Rio*’s (1992) references for this code are on the eradication of poverty and the improvement of quality of life for humans, and *UN75* (2020) references are on the crisis and conflict prevention. The *UNESCO* (1997) references are more centered on SD for “the maintenance and perpetuation of humankind.”

**Table 6. NVivo Codes for Rawlsian Justice**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Distribution of Benefits</i>	Stockholm	1
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	7
	UN75	0
<i>Improvement of Generations</i>	Stockholm	1
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	0
<i>People-centered Sustainable Development</i>	Stockholm	8
	Rio	3
	Copenhagen	45
	UNESCO	12
	UN75	3

*Environmental Justice*. The school of environmental justice was the most time consuming to analyze and complex to code in NVivo given the multiple environmental considerations in the five declarations. First, I wanted to understand if UN discourse represents the “old human framework” as explained by Garvey (2008), hence I created two codes: “humans as carriers of value” and “humans as measure of things.” The reference from *Rio* (1992) best explains the first code: “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development.” Meanwhile, the second code can be best encapsulated in the concept “human environment” from *Stockholm* (1972), because human beings define what is to be considered. As demonstrated in Table 7, *Stockholm* (1972) has the largest coverage for the first and second code, followed by *UNESCO* (1997). The references have a small coverage across the five declarations; hence I induce that the old human framework is not significantly present in UN discourse. Nonetheless, the references for these codes reveal an interest in the perpetuation of human interests above all others.

**Table 7. NVivo Codes for Old Human Framework**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Humans as carriers of value</i>	Stockholm	6
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	0
<i>Humans as measure of things</i>	Stockholm	3
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	0

Afterwards, I wanted to understand the land-relation in the declarations. I created four codes, as shown on Table 8, on the human relationship to the land following Leopold’s (2013) ethical approach. The code with most coverage was “humans as protectors of land” with seven references, followed by “humans as transformers of land” with five references, and “humans as



right-holders over land” and “humans as exploiters of land” with three references each. Table 8 demonstrates the most clearly a change in discourse across time. *Stockholm* (1972), the earliest document, has the most references of all codes and it includes discursive ideas that disappear in the other declarations, such as “humans as transformers of land.” Furthermore, the codes “humans as right-holders over land” and “humans as exploiters of land” have half the coverage in *Rio* (1992) than they do in *Stockholm* (1972), but they do not appear again in the other three declarations. Using induction, I concluded that UN discourse has shifted from a land-relation where humans have an economic relationship focused on privileges, to a relationship that includes obligations as seen in the trend of the code “humans as protectors of land.

**Table 8. NVivo Codes for Land-relation**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Humans as exploiters of land</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Humans as protectors of land</i>	Stockholm	3
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	3
	UN75	0
<i>Humans as right-holders over land</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Humans as transformers of land</i>	Stockholm	5
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0

Next, I created four codes that centered not on human interest but on the well-being of the environment. Table 9 shows that the code “environmental protection” had the largest

coverage across the five declarations with eighteen references, followed by “environmental conservation” with six references, and “environmental legislation and management” and “environmental restoration” with five references each. I argue that “environmental protection” is meaningfully present across all documents due to anthropocentric interests. The references for “environmental conservation” remained one per declaration, except in *UNESCO (1997)* with two references. I argue that this difference exists given that *UNESCO (1997)* has significant influence from the school of intergenerational equity (specifically on distribution of benefits) as discussed further below (p. 35-37). It was not unexpected to see zero references for “environmental legislation and management” in *Copenhagen (1995)* and *UN75 (2020)* since these declarations lean more towards people-centered SD. Such a code had one reference in *UNESCO (1997)*, I argue, due to intergenerational equity interests. Finally, the code “environmental restoration” disappeared after *Rio (1992)*. This last observation is meaningful, as restoration would make claims for an environmental justice approach stronger because the land-relation provides justice to Earth.

**Table 9. NVivo Codes for Environmental Justice**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Environmental Conservation</i>	Stockholm	1
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	1
<i>Environmental Legislation and Management</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	2
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	0
<i>Environmental Protection</i>	Stockholm	6
	Rio	4
	Copenhagen	2
	UNESCO	3
	UN75	3
<i>Environmental Restoration</i>	Stockholm	4
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0

The school of environmental justice is critical of capital-intensive economic methods, therefore I searched for codes that reflected environmental economics. In my findings I observed a paradox in UN discourse: a call to reduce consumption and production, but to grow the economy. *Rio* (1992) and *Copenhagen* (1995) state a need to stop unsustainable patterns of consumption and production due to its link with environmental deterioration, however, suggest economic policies that seek to ensure sustained economic growth to meet development goals in countries. This is a contradiction, as explained in Hickel (2019), given that Earth has a finite amount of resources and cannot sustain unlimited growth for PGs or FGs. Moreover, the references for the code “economy-based solutions for social development,” mainly found in *Copenhagen* (1995), also demonstrate a paradoxical discourse between environmental measures and economic strategies.

**Table 10. NVivo Codes for Environmental Economics**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Consumption and Production</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	2
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	1
<i>Economic Growth</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	6
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Economy-based solutions for social development</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	31
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0

*Intergenerational Equity.* Coding for the school of intergenerational equity was the least straightforward process as I found that much of the language did not explicitly refer to the ideas proposed by this philosophy. It famously proposes contract theory as a pathway for intergenerational cooperation, hence I searched for any references to this idea in the five declarations. Both *UNESCO* (1995) and *UN75* (2020) make calls upon the *UN Charter* to reinstate that PGs have committed to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” As seen on Table 11, *UNESCO* (1995) has the most references for the “contract theory” code. I argue that of the five declarations, this one is the closest to be a contract on itself as it “formulate(s) behavioural guidelines for the present generations within a broad, future oriented perspective.” *UNESCO* (1995) engages in contractarianism, given that PGs act based on mutual advantage, and contractualism, since PGs act on the idea that FGs deserve respect and fairness; more on this later when I examine intergenerational reciprocity (p. 41).

“Disaster prevention” was the code with the most total coverage, as demonstrated in Table 11. Some of the disasters mentioned included communicable diseases, natural disasters, environmental problems, mass destruction, war, etc. Overall, the language for this code was the least precise on whether preventive action was directed towards PGs exclusively or if it also encompassed FGs, except in *UNESCO* (1997) where there is a clear focus on FGs. For the code “ensuring equity,” I found references for equity across generations (present and future) in *Rio* (1992), *Copenhagen* (1995), and *UNESCO* (1997). However, *Copenhagen* (1995) also makes a call for equity among people of all age groups (or intergenerational equity among PGs); this is also further discussed as part of the analysis of the non-identity problem (p. 41).

The code “intergenerational chain connection” appears since *Copenhagen* (1995), but it has discursive differences in *UNESCO* (1997) and *UN75* (2020). In *Copenhagen* (1995), the code is implicit in “the insecurity that many people (...) face about the future—their own and their children’s—is intensifying.” It discursively creates a connection between different age groups (and generations) in the present. There is a similarly implicit message in *UN75* (2020) with “young people today will live the consequences of our action and inaction.” The same connection is established but it focuses on young people instead of children. This is a common approach in IJ strategies: setting young people and children as proxies of yet to be born generations. The code is discursively different in *UNESCO* (1997) where the chain connection is extended to all generations (born and yet to be born), as seen in one of the references: “each generation inheriting the Earth temporarily should take care to use natural resources reasonably (...).”

There is little coverage of the code “intergenerational dialogue.” *Copenhagen* (1995) encourages “foster dialogue between generations” and *UN75* (2020) makes the commitment to

“listen and work with youth.” While younger generations can act as proxies for FGs, in these declarations they are referred to engage in discussions about their future, not that of FGs. The absence of this code in *UNESCO (1997)* indicates that UN discourse is not focused on intergenerational dialogue that explicitly treats youth and children as proxies for FGs. The code “intergenerational solidarity” only has two references in *UNESCO (1997)*: first calling on the promotion of “intergenerational solidarity for the perpetuation of humankind” and then refraining from “any form of discrimination for future generations.” These two references are interesting because under the context of *UNESCO (1997)* they call for solidarity with the end goal of ensuring the wellbeing of the human species, rather than of individuals in FGs. This approach is more leaned towards utilitarianism than to the school of intergenerational equity since it privileges the quantified or total benefit of sacrifice rather than looking at who are the people to be benefited from such a sacrifice.

The last code I searched for this philosophical school was “procreational responsibilities,” for which I found three references in *Copenhagen (1995)* only. Such were discursively built around “the family as the basic unit of society,” where parents and other people legally responsible for children have rights, duties, and responsibilities. Intergenerational equity is not effectively reflected in this code since “procreational responsibilities” are limited to children in PGs and not in FGs.

**Table 11. NVivo Codes for Intergenerational Equity**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Contract Theory</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	6
	UN75	4
<i>Disaster Prevention</i>	Stockholm	3
	Rio	4
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	10
	UN75	6
<i>Ensuring Equity</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	0
<i>Intergenerational Chain Connection</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	3
	UN75	2
<i>Intergenerational Dialogue</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	1
<i>Intergenerational Solidarity</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	0
<i>Procreational Responsibilities</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0

### C. Analysis of Considerations for Intergenerational Justice Applied to Future Generations

*Non-identity problem.* Throughout the five declarations, as shown in Table 12, I found ten references that I coded as “generation neutrality.” However, it is important to distinguish between “generation neutrality” among PGs and such neutrality between PGs and FGs. For example, language like “all peoples” (Stockholm, 1972), “the people” (UN75, 2020), “leave no one behind” (ibid), and “we the peoples” (ibid)” is ambiguous in terms of generation neutrality because it is left unclear whether it refers to only born generations or includes generations yet to be born. Language such as “people of all age groups” (Copenhagen, 1995), “between generations in all parts of society” (ibid), and “people of all ages” (ibid) is indicative of generation neutrality among generational cohorts of born PGs. Whereas “humankind” (UNESCO, 1997), “preservation of the human” (ibid), and “all of humanity” (UN75, 2020) is clearly referring to generation neutrality between PGs and FGs since all generational cohorts belong to the human species. This last type of language reflects the schools of Rawlsian justice and intergenerational equity.

**Table 12. NVivo Codes for Generation Neutrality**

Declaration	References	Language
<i>Stockholm</i>	1	“all peoples”
<i>Rio</i>	0	
<i>Copenhagen</i>	3	“people of all age groups” “between generations in all parts of society” “people of all ages”
<i>UNESCO</i>	2	“humankind” “preservation of the human”
<i>UN75</i>	4	“all of humanity” “the people” “leave no one behind” “to our citizens, in the true spirit of ‘We the peoples’”



The school of environmental justice is concerned with reorganizing nature-culture categories so that sentient beings, women, and historically marginalized communities are treated as equals to other humans. As seen on Table 13, I searched for codes that represented diverse historically marginalized communities. *Copenhagen* (1995) was the declaration that encompassed almost all codes, only with the exception for “victims of environmental damage,” which is referenced in *Stockholm* (1972) and *Rio* (1992). Furthermore, the code with the most overall references was “women and girls,” although it was not found in *Stockholm* (1972) or *UNESCO* (1997). *UNESCO* (1997) did not have references for any of these codes. Aligned to this observation, none of the five declarations acknowledge that there might be members of historically marginalized communities in cohorts of FGs.

**Table 13. NVivo Codes for Historically Marginalized Communities**

Codes	Declaration	References
<i>Children</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	8
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Youth</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	5
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	3
<i>Women and girls</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	31
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	3
<i>Indigenous</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	3
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Disabled</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	6

	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Poor</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	4
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Rural</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Victims of environmental damage</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Under foreign domination, oppression or occupation</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Refugee, immigrant, and internally displaced</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	7
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Veterans, prisoners, and victims of war</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	2
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0

*Intergenerational reciprocity.* One of the most meaningful findings in this research is discovering what type of intergenerational reciprocity is most reflected in UN discourse. As demonstrated in Table 14, the code “descending reciprocity” had the most coverage overall with nineteen references in *UNESCO* (1997) and three in *UN75* (2020). Nonetheless, it appears that the code “double reciprocity” is most reflected in UN discourse as it is present across the five declarations. This is an important discovery because it demonstrates that UN discourse is

reflective of Rawlsian justice—or the incremental improvement of generations—when it is specifically directed to discussing FGs, as in *UNESCO* (1997). However, the institutional discourse around double reciprocity is more representative of the schools of environmental justice and intergenerational equity when it discusses SD because actions aimed to safeguard FGs (and Earth) are conducted to ultimately benefit PGs. Ascending reciprocity, which is not part of any of the philosophical schools of IJ in terms of FGs, had only one reference in *Copenhagen* (1995) and it proposed the improvement of the lives of older people.

**Table 14. NVivo Codes for Intergenerational Reciprocity**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>Ascending Reciprocity</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Descending Reciprocity</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	19
	UN75	3
<i>Double Reciprocity</i>	Stockholm	3
	Rio	1
	Copenhagen	2
	UNESCO	5
	UN75	5

*Specific concerns.* While analyzing the declarations using NVivo, I came across unexpected topics or “specific concerns” that I created codes for. As shown in Table 15, these included “COVID-19,” “digital technologies,” “moral obligations,” “population growth,” “sovereignty,” and “urgency.” The *UN75* (2020), given its recent publication, is the only declaration to include more contemporary concerns like pandemics and the rise of digital technologies. It was surprising to only find references for the code “moral obligations” in *UNESCO* (1997), where obligations were of PGs towards FGs. “Population growth,” also an

important consideration in environmental and IJ discussions, only had two references in *Stockholm* (1972) and one in *Copenhagen* (1995). Calls to respect sovereignty during responses to SD were present across all declarations, except *Stockholm* (1972) and *UNESCO* (1997). Although I expected sovereignty concerns to appear regarding IJ or FGs, there were no references for the code in such a context. Finally, a sense of urgency was present since *Copenhagen* (1995) to make a call for the united action and commitment of UN Member States. *UNESCO* (1997) was the only declaration where a reference for the code “urgency” was to communicate the threats to the “existence of humankind and its environment.” I argue that all of these concerns reflect the school of Rawlsian justice as they are anthropogenic and aim to look after the well-being of FGs. While there could be claims for the school of intergenerational equity to be reflected in the codes for “COVID-19” and “digital technologies” as part of concerns on disaster prevention, these are too recent and are not explicitly explained to be for the benefit of FGs. “Moral obligations,” “sovereignty,” and “urgency” are codes that reflect Rawlsian justice because their consideration is an achievement for the UN, and such school seeks to preserve institutional accomplishments.

**Table 15. NVivo Codes for Specific Concerns**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Declaration</b>	<b>References</b>
<i>COVID-19</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	1
<i>Digital Technologies</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	1
<i>Moral Obligations</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	0
	UNESCO	2
	UN75	0
<i>Population Growth</i>	Stockholm	2
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	0
<i>Sovereignty</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	2
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	0
	UN75	1
<i>Urgency</i>	Stockholm	0
	Rio	0
	Copenhagen	1
	UNESCO	1
	UN75	2

## **V. Implications**

### **A. Philosophical Schools of Intergenerational Justice in UN Discourse**

After analyzing my findings, I draw a list of conclusions for each individual philosophical school of IJ (see Figure 2). I believe it necessary to disclaim that such conclusions are not only informed from the number of references found per code, but also from looking at the content of each reference and evaluating it in context to each individual declaration.

## Figure 2. Conclusions on UN Discourse per Philosophical School

### *Utilitarianism*

- Utilitarianism is the least reflected philosophical school.
- Language on SD is preventive, but when applied to FGs it is proactive.
- UN discourse makes frequent use of moral ideas and international instruments.

### *Rawlsian Justice*

- UN discourse does not treat Earth as an equal to humans.
- Descending reciprocity fits with the Rawlsian approach of incremental improvement of generations.
- UN discourse reflects Rawlsian justice's focus on anthropocentric SD.

### *Environmental Justice*

- The idea of maintaining and perpetuating the human species is highly reflected in UN discourse.
- The "old human framework" is not significantly represented in UN discourse.
- The role of humans in land-relation has shifted from only having economic privileges over land (exploiters, transformers, and right-holders) to also having obligations over land (protectors).
- The school of environmental justice is not genuinely reflected in UN discourse due to an unbalanced focus on human interests.
- UN discourse focuses on environmental well-being with the end goal to benefit humans.
- Historically marginalized communities are considered, but not other sentient beings beyond humans.
- UN discourse to reduce unsustainable patterns of consumption and production is contradictory to its calls to ensure sustained economic growth.

### *Intergenerational Equity*

- Aligned with the school of intergenerational equity, UN discourse focuses widely in the distribution of benefits between generations.
- UN discourse frequently refers to the UN Charter's commitment to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."
- The discourse of UNESCO (1995) is the most closely aligned to contract theory.
- The discourse surrounding disaster prevention is ambiguous on whether it takes into consideration FGs or not.
- UN discourse makes use of the idea of "intergenerational chain connection" to connect different age cohorts in PGs, but also to connect PGs with FGs.
- Intergenerational dialogue and solidarity are not meaningfully referred to in UN discourse.
- The discourse of perpetuating humankind is more aligned to the utilitarian school because it overlooks individual humans and prioritizes the total outcome of perpetuated generational cohorts.
- Procreational responsibilities in UN discourse is limited to children in PGs and not in FGs.

## **B. Intertemporality of Intergenerational Justice in UN Discourse**

Evolution of UN discourse was also taken into consideration when looking at each declaration. One of the principal findings in terms of the intertemporality of IJ in UN discourse is that contemporary declarations separate the needs and interests of FGs from PGs. As well of importance, language is less gendered in latest declarations. In terms of the non-identity problem, UN discourse has adopted more language that reflects generation neutrality between born and yet to be born generations, as they are of equal value given that they are all human beings. Nonetheless, there appears to be a discursive difference when it comes to acknowledging members of historically marginalized communities since they are mentioned as part of PGs, but not of FGs.

When it comes to intergenerational reciprocity, there is an intertemporal trend of double reciprocity. However, the model of descending reciprocity appears in *UNESCO* (1997) and is also present in *UN75* (2020). Using inductive reasoning, I conclude that both models might continue to appear in future UN discourse. Specific concerns were detected during the research process in NVivo and these shifted in each declaration. *UN75* (2020) mentioned contemporary challenges such as pandemics and digital technologies, while earlier declarations *Stockholm* (1972) and *Copenhagen* (1995) show concern for the issue of population growth. Concerns that were more intertemporal included respect for sovereignty and a sense of urgency for action. The consideration of moral obligations was an outlier since it only appeared in *UNESCO* (1997).

### C. Looking at UN Discourse Critically

*Positioning readers.* This research has focused majorly on uncovering how UN discourse positions readers within a philosophical school of IJ. My conclusions have proved a focal point of CDA: the discourse for IJ in the UN has shifted throughout time.

*Discourse practice.* Regarding how each declaration relates to one another in terms of discursive practice, they appear to have a shared philosophical approach to IJ. The most evident trait shared among the five declarations is that, although each one is focused on a different topic, they all have a people-centered outlook. This positions the practice of UN discourse as cohesively anthropocentric.

*Institutional practice.* A critical analysis of the institutional practices of the UN in terms of IJ is out of the scope of this dissertation as it moves away from discourse. Nonetheless, it is important to consider what the presented findings might imply for the ongoing work of the UN. Firstly, regarding the DoFG, its negotiators should carefully consider the existing UN discourse and meaningfully engage with (or move away from) it according to the philosophical approach it intends to adopt for IJ. The *Elements Paper* (2022) claims a shared support for the principle of intergenerational equity among UN stakeholders. However, the findings of this dissertation show that UN discourse does not have an overarching reflection of such a school of philosophy. It is of utmost importance for the UN to align its discursive and practical actions regarding FGs moving forward. Secondly, the Special Envoy for Future Generations suggested in *OCA* is likely to become a referential point for UN discourse regarding FGs, hence the same considerations should be made when they are appointed. Thirdly, the outcome document to be written at the Summit of the Future represents an opportunity to address incongruences and gaps in UN discourse regarding IJ for FGs.



## **VI. Conclusion**

Global governance for FGs must take into consideration the distribution of burdens and benefits among generations. This dissertation sought to use the UN as a case study to analyze IJ, thus it posed two questions: i) how are the philosophical schools of IJ reflected in UN discourse?; and ii) what is the intertemporality in UN discourse regarding the non-identity problem, intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs? Making use of the CDA methodology and the NVivo software, I conducted a classical content analysis on five UN declarations. I created codes based on concepts of four schools of philosophy of IJ: utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice, environmental justice, and intergenerational equity. Using inductive reasoning, I paired data from the declarations with one or more codes, and counted the references per code to track those predominantly discussed.

My hypothesis for the first research question included an expected result for each philosophical school: utilitarianism's greatest total happiness would be reflected; the Rawlsian justice idea of distribution of good and opportunities would be present; environmental justice's concern on conservation would be displayed; and there would be at least one reference to the intergenerational equity idea of contract theory. My analysis of the five declarations proved this hypothesis is not accurate. First, no codes reflected the utilitarian concept of greatest total happiness, although the focus of perpetuating humankind rather than looking at future individuals or cohorts of FGs (possibly more reflective of an average level of happiness) could arguably lean into this concept; a separate analysis would need to be conducted to find a concluding thought. Second, as I expected, there was a significant presence of the Rawlsian idea on the distribution of goods and opportunities among generations, but this was anthropocentric

and did not highlight the distribution of burdens. Third, as part of the school of environmental justice, the code for “environmental conservation” was present in all declarations, however I did not anticipate finding more references for “environmental protection.” Fourth, there were no direct calls to the intergenerational equity idea of contract theory, but *UNESCO* (1997) had the most references for such a code because that declaration is conceptually like a contract.

My hypothesis for question two covered the expected results for the non-identity problem, the challenge of intergenerational reciprocity, and other concerns related to FGs. Regarding the non-identity problem, I thought that old and newer declarations would reflect generation neutrality and my findings proved me right. In terms of intergenerational reciprocity, I expected that UN discourse would adopt the Rawlsian approach of descending reciprocity with incremental progress of generations. I found that descending reciprocity was significantly present in *UNESCO* (1997) and that there was an intertemporal trend of double reciprocity because the code for such a model was present in all declarations. Finally, I thought that UN declarations would demonstrate concerns around moral obligations towards FGs. This was correct as I found two references in *UNESCO* (1997). As well, I discovered that specific concerns changed throughout the declarations and the only intertemporal concerns were sovereignty and urgent action.

Beyond answering my research questions and providing proof for my hypotheses, this dissertation achieved something ambitious: it connected philosophy with discourse to explore IJ for FGs as a social phenomenon in the UN. This research project is not only the first of its kind, but also opens a pathway to expand academic research on IJ and provides insights for global governance efforts for FGs. I recognize that this dissertation would have benefitted from looking at more than five declarations and checking biases in NVivo codes with other researchers. I

encourage other academics to pick up this work and expand the CDA of IJ in the UN; avenues for this include analyzing more of the international instruments in the partial list annexed in the *OCA Policy Brief 1*.

I hope the reader finishes this dissertation with excitement and ideas on next steps for IJ. My final thought is the following: we must question whether IJ for FGs is limited to ensuring the existence of humanity or if it is also meant to protect the needs and interests of future peoples.

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**Note:** The NVivo project with the coded declarations is available upon request.