

8 Communication for Sustainability

Lesson 01: Key Concepts of Communication

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Where are we?

Episode 8.1: Key concepts of communication

Episode 8.2: Framing

Episode 8.3: Narratives & Storytelling

Episode 8.4: Cultures of Sustainability



Learning outcomes

Learning outcome 1:

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

Learning outcome 2:

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

Learning outcome 3:

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

Learning outcome 4:

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

Learning outcome 5:

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

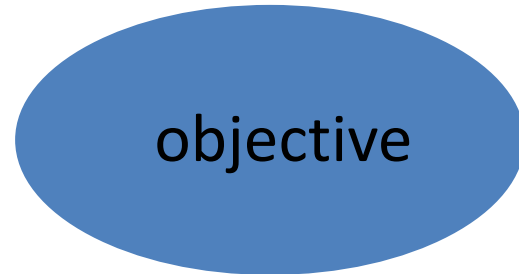


Overview

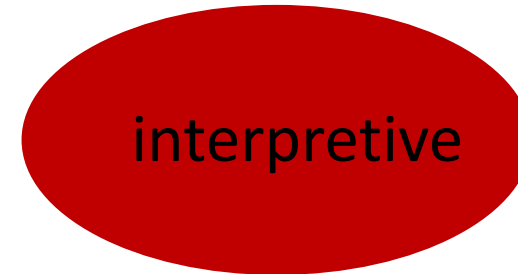
- A. Key concepts of „Communication *about* Sustainability“
- B. Subsystems & Communicators
- C. Function, effectiveness and key narratives



A. Key concepts of communication



pragmatic



constitutive



A. Key concepts of communication



Paradigms

- **Pragmatic** (information, education, instrumental sense of communication, functionalist/structural perspective, description of reality)
- **Constitutive** (symbolic action, social constructivism, sense making, define sth as problem, creates attention, evokes values, orientation, activates/stimulates engagement, exploration)

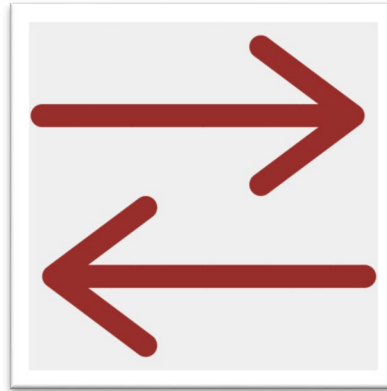




A. Key concepts of communication



COMMUNICATION *OF*
SUSTAINABILITY



COMMUNICATION
ABOUT CSR



COMMUNICATION *FOR*
TRANSFORMATION!

Sources:

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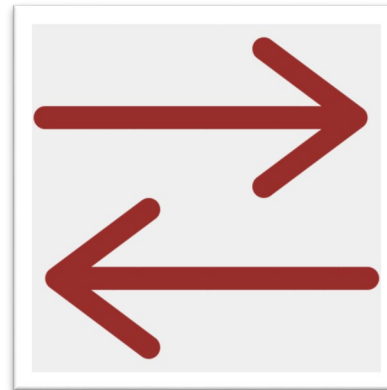
A. Key concepts of communication



COMMUNICATION *OF*
SUSTAINABILITY

**Direction / mode of
communication:**

One-directional, transmissive,
sender-receiver, one to many



COMMUNICATION
ABOUT CSR

**Direction / mode of
communication:**

Deliberative, horizontal,
many to many



COMMUNICATION *FOR*
TRANSFORMATION!

**Direction / mode of
communication:**

Participative, self-
organized, many to one

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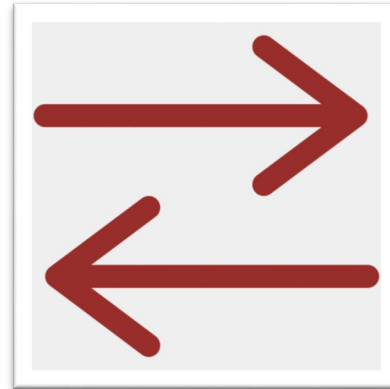
A. Key concepts of communication



COMMUNICATION *OF*
SUSTAINABILITY

Function:

Transmission, information and knowledge transfer towards an objective



COMMUNICATION *ABOUT* CSR

Function:

Deliberation, production of intersubjective/shared concepts, frames



COMMUNICATION *FOR*
TRANSFORMATION!

Function:

Participative, sense- and meaning-making, social change, cultivation

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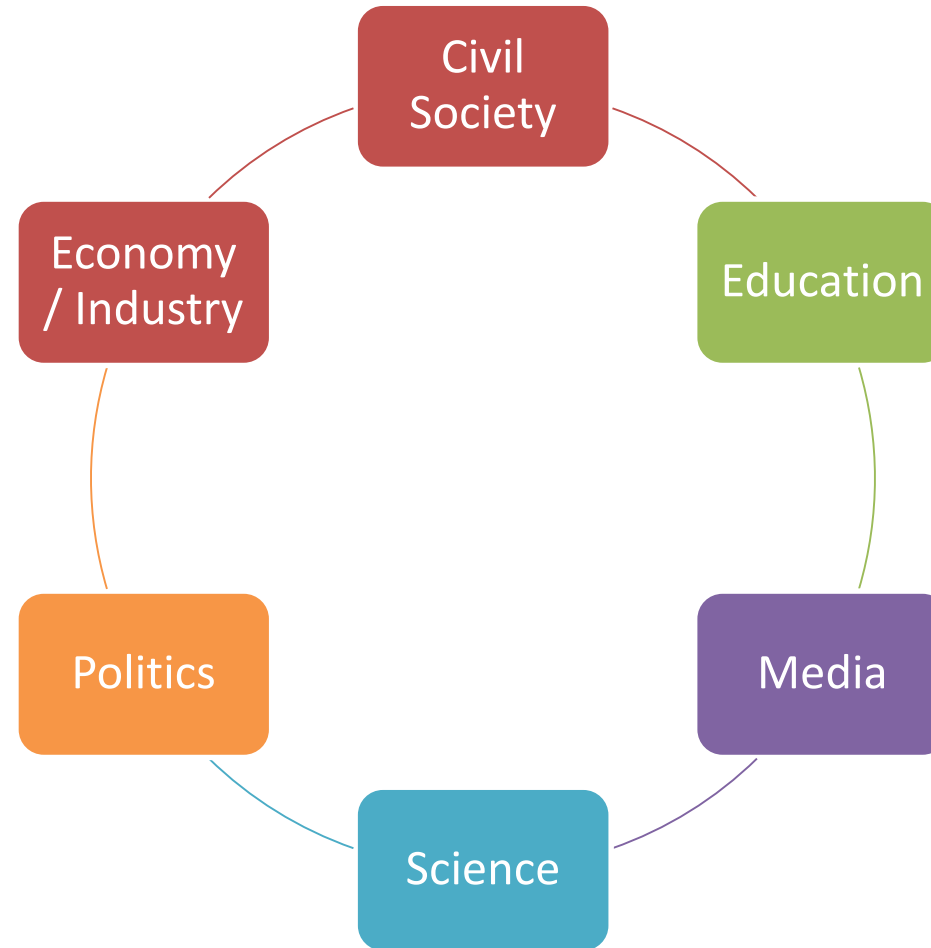
A. Key concepts of communication

Communication *for* sustainability

- Culture oriented
- Quality of public discourses, social deliberation
- Meeting the uncertainty challenge by producing socially robust knowledge
- Meeting the ambivalence challenge by producing shared visions on sustainability
- Meeting the implementation challenge by producing better accepted decisions



B. Subsystems & Communicators





B. Subsystems & Communicators

Political pressure, participation & cooperation, SD governance, self-organized cooperative

Civil Society

Competence-oriented approaches, encouraging to take action & authorship, place based/locality

Education

Media initiatives & special issues with sustainability focus

Media

Transdisciplinary sustainability science, normative approach, promoting SD

Science

Displaying own solutions, parties, NGOs, governments, bureaucracies

Politics

Communication beyond reputational aspects, effects on corp behavior, management

Economy / Industry



C. Function, effectiveness & key narratives

Relevance of sustainability-related communication to achieve sustainable development (Newig et al., 2013; Weder, 2021)

- **Participation:** Introducing bottom-up concerns, ideas & solutions into society (from individuals, stakeholders, organizations, movements)
- **Problematization:** Create societal awareness of sustainability related problems
- **Deliberation, antagonism:** highlighting different perceptions & **narratives** of SD, pluralvocacy (**framing**), embrace conflicts
- **Capacity building:** Enabling individuals to take authorship, to play an active role in/for SD



C. Function, effectiveness & key narratives

Communication of Sustainability

- S. as alternative within capitalism, conservation, compensation, sustainable growth

Communication about Sustainability

- S. as alternative to capitalism, abandonment, abstention, degrowth, restrictions

Communication for Sustainability

- S. as revolution, restoration and regenerative practices; new ecological identities, cultural change, innovation



C. Function, effectiveness & key narratives

Next episode: Let's have a look at ...

- Framing
- Narratives
- Storytelling



Reflection

- Try to summarize the concept of „communication *for* sustainability“.
- Why is communication relevant for sustainable development?
- What are possible differences between the three dimensions discussed so far (communication of, about and for sustainability)?
- What are the differences between the key narratives – which one is probably easier to communicate, and why?