NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Professor Ph.D. **Florina BRAN**
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
florinabran@yahoo.com

Associate Professor Ph.D**. Daniela POPA**
"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University Bucharest, Romania
dnlapopa@yahoo.com

Associate Professor Ph.D**. Ildiko IOAN**
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
ildiko.ioan@yahoo.com

Abstract:
Communication plays a major role in enacting the changes needed for sustainable development. Many stages of management such as vision development, planning and action, and building consensus are relying heavily on communication. Therefore it is necessary to grant a special attention on how communication is planned and delivered, but also for the assessment of communication's impact. There a range of options for communication that should be combined by taking in account the needs and interests of stakeholders. Out of the components of strategic communication it is built a reasoning that supports non-formal education initiatives. This departs from the competences recognized for sustainable development education and is developed with a number of case studies.

Key words: *communication, strategic management, sustainable development, education*

JEL classification: I25, Q01

INTRODUCTION

The strategic management of sustainable development means moving from a rigid plan toward a continuous process of an adaptive system that improves by integrating experience, theory, and expert knowledge, widening the scope for responsibilities, transparent negotiation, focus on outcomes and integrated planning (Tatu and Oprean, 2011).

Sustainable development was defined within a context that relied on advanced expertize and global approaches that are of little relevance for any individual. Moreover, the first steps toward sustainable development consist in the development of national strategies and action plans that in the view of the public fall within the responsibilities of authorities who have access information about and understanding of processes and issues that are relevant at country, regional, and global level.

Since broad public participation in decision making for sustainable development is a statutory requirement (Bran et al., 2011) it becomes obvious the need of "translating" problems outlined as being relevant at national and global level in issues that are encountered in the everyday life of each individual. This is possible by taking in account that people are not interested in the whole sustainability agenda, using opportunities to demonstrate the links between policy goals and personal interests, highlighting roles and positive outcomes for people, creating enabling contexts etc. (Ziemann, 2011).

Strategic communication for sustainable development is a two-way process that involves on the one hand providing information to the public by a variety of means and on the other hand receiving information from the public toward building consensus and partnership (Mefalopulos, 2008). Norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, culture, social relations, means used etc. are all influential factors that have impact on the effectiveness of communication (Radulescu et al., 2015).

We are aiming to organize information toward a better understanding of the importance of strategic communication for sustainable development and of the means by that it can be transposed

in practice for increasing the effectiveness of the measures that are used to implement governmental programs. In this respect, the first section will discuss the main reasoning that underpins the need of strategic communication. The second one will explain the contribution of each component. In the following sections more detailed information is provided for the education component in order to emphasize some aspects of practical and theoretical relevance.

1. WHY STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IS NECESSARY?

Communication is a process that is inherent in many contexts, including the one of sustainable development. Even if there is no special interest in communication, it still occurs since each individual will act in accordance with the information received from various sources.

The importance of communication is well acknowledged for businesses where it was approached in an analytical manner by explaining its content, demonstrating its role, and designing methods and techniques that are adequate in different situations (Rotariu, 2007). The communication related to development issues that are of public concern is generally accepted as important, but is less well understood (Mefalopulos and Grenna, 2004).

The strategic approach of communication assumes that this inherent process is not enough for accomplishing the goals of sustainable development. This shortcoming is determined by the fact that sustainable development is considered a participatory process meaning that people should not only comply with the provisions established at governmental level, but they must participate in all stages of policy development and implementation. This builds especially on the right to be informed, but it also has a practical purpose based on the assumption that participation will improve the effectiveness of the overall process. For instance, it was reported that project based on the involvement of beneficiaries were much more successful that the one implemented without such involvement (WB, 2003).

On its turn, participation should not be assumed as inherent. This means that people or stakeholders willingness to participate and proper contribution although possible without any special focus in communication will not necessarily occur because there are many factors that could prevent it (Bretcu, 2016). These include poor access to information, lack of a good understanding of the information, reluctance of expressing opinion in matters that fall outside expertise, lack of interest to name only a few.

The occurrence of such failures could be easily understood by recalling basics of communication science. Thus, communication is defined as the transfer of a message from one issuer to a receiver. For being effective, the meaning of the message should be the same for both. This is true when the issuer and the receiver use the same codes for messaging and suggests that there are possible situations when the two actors are not having the same codes, as it is the case then two speakers of different languages try to communicate. Likewise, in sustainability related communication are very likely situations in that stakeholders are "speaking" different "languages".

What is less well understood, although quite frequently reported, is the fact that even provided with adequate information, stakeholders willingness of participation and effective contribution is still not a necessary outcome (Reed, 2008). For instance, the communities of a watershed might find unattractive participating in prolonged meetings that prevent fulfilling routine duties that directly affect their immediate income. For an adequate participation to occur it is therefore necessary to create an enabling framework.
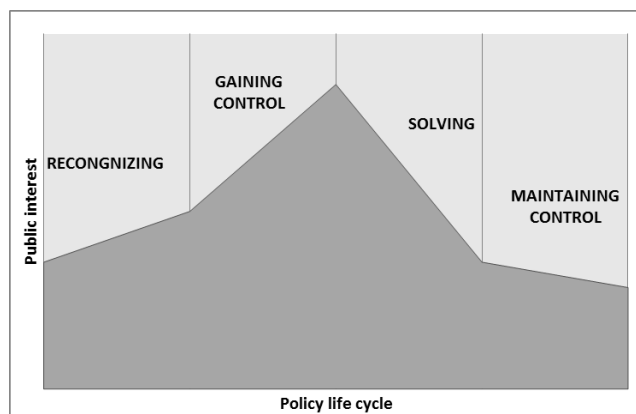
Figure 1. Public interest and policy life-cycle
Source: Madsen et al. (2011) data

Communication is important during the entire life cycle of policy, but in different stages, different stakeholders are important and communication should be adjusted accordingly by considering interests, perceptions and other factors. Figure 1 presents the stages of policy life cycle and how public interest varies across them. For each stage, there are recommendations regarding the type and means of communication. Surveys, content analysis, networking, meetings are actions needed in the recognizing stage. Further, knowledge, practice and attitude need to be monitored for the design of the communication strategy that will allow control. In the solving stage interest is high and it is coming from a relatively well prepared public the most important aspect being of providing enough information and linking participatory inputs with results. In the last stage, interest is falling, but it should be kept and monitored by updates and surveys.

For being successful, communication should consider numerous aspects that are treated by various fields of science. In the process important decisions should be made upon the approaches that will be adopted. The most common choices should be made for the following aspects:
-    Theoretical basis of interventions: psychological or socio-political;
-    Models for conceptualization: attitudinal and behavior or economic;
-    Level of intervention: individual or community;
-    Communication model: hierarchical, sender oriented or horizontal, participatory;
-    Conception of audiences: active or passive;
-    Role of participation: means or outcome.

Sustainable development should not become an ideology to believe in it. On the contrary, it should become a goal that is shared by individuals, communities and businesses not because it is presented as the only option by the authorities, but because they understand that at various timeframes this will lead to benefits correlated with the degree of complying with specific requirements. Achieving such widespread acceptance that is transformed in the desired actions by appealing to ration and not believe is much more challenging. This is true in terms of information volume to be delivered, but also as facilitating effort.

The challenges to be addressed by the strategic approach of sustainable development communication are (WB, 2003):
-    Acknowledging what is concerning the stakeholders;
-    Empowering communities to take decisions and to participate to their implementation;
-    Raising public awareness by improving understanding;
-    Building consensus regarding difficult choices, but without using manipulation.

In practical terms, the expected outcomes of strategic communication are:
-    Developing policy proposals that could be submitted to public authorities;
-    Capacity development;
-    Enabling partnerships among stakeholders;
-    Foster decision making in private sectors toward cleaner technologies;
-    Stronger public support for sustainable development agenda;

- Foster behavior change among public at large, including consumption behavior;
- transforming

For achieving these goals there are necessary the following types of actions: communicating about development and environment, usually by providing information and guidance; social marketing; sustainability education achieved by formal and non-formal means; civil society mobilization; and conflict management and negotiation. These actions will endorse behavior change and will allow the development of social norms and of consensus.

2. SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION IN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL CONTEXTS

The complex nature of sustainability as a single operational program is overwhelming in terms of technicality for any expert since there is no educational program or field of science that cover all the aspects. This might mean that there is not possible to have experts in sustainability even by appealing to the most performing educational programs. It also means that any expert, regardless its specialization, should have knowledge about how it could contribute toward sustainability.

Sustainability education is important for communication because without minimal knowledge individuals or communities cannot capture the meaning of changes loosing motivation of participation or compliance. Moreover, they cannot identify the necessary changes in their activities, level that is seldom "observable" by the monitoring procedures that collect the data to inform policy making.

In the formal context, there is a good understanding regarding the competencies that should be formed for sustainability. These include (Bran, 2013):
- Holistic/integrative thinking: capability of regarding reality from many different perspective (i.e. economic, social, environmental);
- Critical thinking: using logic and evidence based analysis; questioning "taking for granted patterns";
- Interdisciplinary: openness to information and knowledge provided by different fields of science;
- Creative thinking: looking for explanations and solutions by exploring unusual paths;
- Acknowledging complexity: expecting the unexpected;
- Being transformative: creating enthusiasm

For the public at large it is more appropriate the use of non-formal contexts. Such activities should consider the following goals:
- Acquiring awareness and sensitivity regarding social and environmental issues;
- Reaching a basic understanding how social and environmental problems are born and going beyond the common perception that each of them is a single issue;
- Recognize certain values and develop feelings;
- Develop skills initial environmental and social analysis;
- Participation to sustainable strategy development.

Table 1. Planning stages for a non-formal sustainability education program

	STAGES	ACTIONS
1	NEEDS ASSESSMENT	identification of sustainability issue
		inventory of existing programs
		feed-back from community
2	ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY: CAPACITIES, NEEDS	community goals and priorities
		identification community's need for the program
		determine community resources and capacities

	STAGES	ACTIONS
3	SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM	goals and objectives
		overall assessment of the sustainability issue
		decide format, techniques, and training needs
		explore partnership potential
4	PROGRAM RESOURCES	establish logistical and resource needs
		establish staff competencies and training needs
		acquire facilities, supplies, equipment
5	PROGRAM QUALITY AND APPROPRIATENESS	educational materials
		testing educational materials
		marketing
		strategies
6	EVALUATION	strategies, techniques, criteria
		evaluate program
		use results for improvement

Source: adapted from Simmons (2004)

Non-formal education necessitates intense social interaction. These could be facilitated by planning social events and creating opportunities for stakeholders to interact on the ground of their cultural values and traditional social norms. In the design of the non-formal education programs it might be considered the stages and actions presented in figure 2.

Non-formal education for sustainable development will address identified sustainability issues that are relevant for a certain community or stakeholder. The program will contribute toward a better understanding of the issue and the development of the competences needed for proper action toward solving or complying with governmental prescriptions that are addressing that issue.

Examples of non-formal environmental education programs:
- WIN-WIN (Wonder in Nature – Wonder in Neighborhoods): developed in partnership by many people and foundations it services 7000 students from 19 schools in Denver, USA. Program components include classroom material, classroom visits (4-7), transportation, entry fees, students' interaction with live animals and plants, journals to be filled in etc. and are provided for no costs.
- Green Schools for the Generations of Change: developed by a partnership of NGOs from Romania (WWF, Green Initiative, Viitor Plus) the project aims facilitate the transformation of youth from spectators to participants in the tackling of sustainability issues. The provide educational support materials for different grades, teacher guide, collection of non-formal activities on environmental themes;
- Children Forests: is a program designed and implemented by Viitor Plus that has a powerful educational component and aims to support communities confronted with difficulties in the southern part of Romania. Within the program there various campaign activities including planting, running and other sports,

The advantages of non-formal education for sustainability are important with regard to the goals of strategic communication. Fact is, such activities are encouraged by governmental programs and facilitated by NGOs. Other important actors are administrators of protected areas, organizations that are directly engaged in both community dialogue and delivering of educational activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic communication for sustainable development is necessary because the transfer of information although necessary, it is not enough condition for meeting the purpose of communication. Thus, it must be ensured the proper interpretation of the information on the behalf of the ones for whom the information is conveyed. Further the impact of information transfer

consisting in active participation must be fostered by targeted actions that take in account specific interests and circumstances.

Sustainability education should be part of strategic communication along with information, social marketing, and conflict management. It could be delivered in both formal and non-formal contexts. Given their immediate impact, non-formal programs could be employed as facilitators for delivering concise messages toward targeted stakeholders. Linking them to formal education has the potential to spread the impact over larger groups and pave the way for increased awareness in the mid and long term.

The aspects that should be further considered with more attention in designing communication for sustainable development include are reaching the targeted audience that is already exposed to an assault of media and marketing messages and behavior related issues, since the economic and other rational are not always applicable.

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