

**NPTEL  
NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE**

**Course Name**

**Strategic Communication for  
Sustainable Development**

**by  
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IIT Kharagpur**

**Lecture 04: Sustainability Communication**

Welcome back to the course titled strategic communication for sustainable development. My name is Aradhna Malik and I teach at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kharagpur, West Bengal India and I am helping you with the course for the next few sessions. So we have discussed a few basic concepts.

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In this course we have discussed what sustainability is, what sustainable development is, and how communication becomes a part or how communication is necessary for sustainable

development. Today we will discuss a concept called sustainability communication, this is the time when all of this starts coming together and this is a new concept and a lot of debate is going on regarding how or what should be included in this concept and a lot of discussion is going on, and a lot of eminent researchers and activists in the field have come up with various definitions and various explanations of this concept.

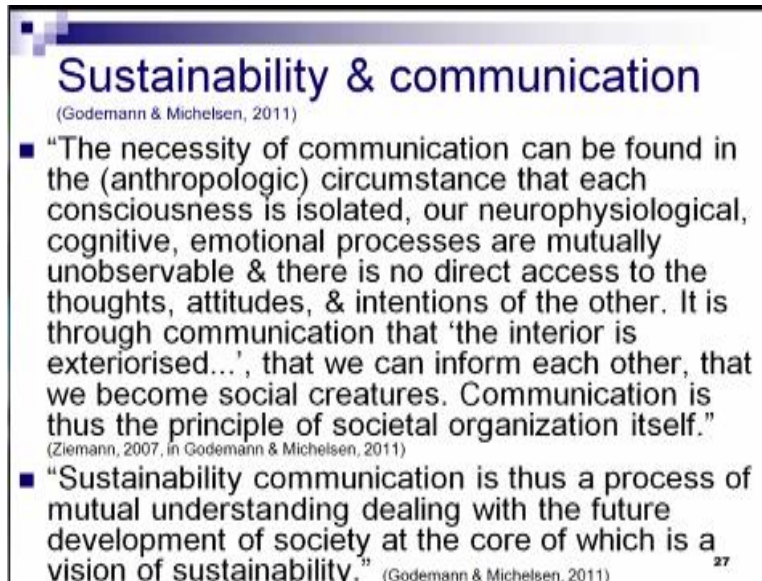
But it is such a wonderful concept because, you know it is not sustainability alone, it is not communication alone, it is communication for sustainability or sustainability communication which is a little more integrated than just communication for sustainable development.

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So to revisit a little bit.

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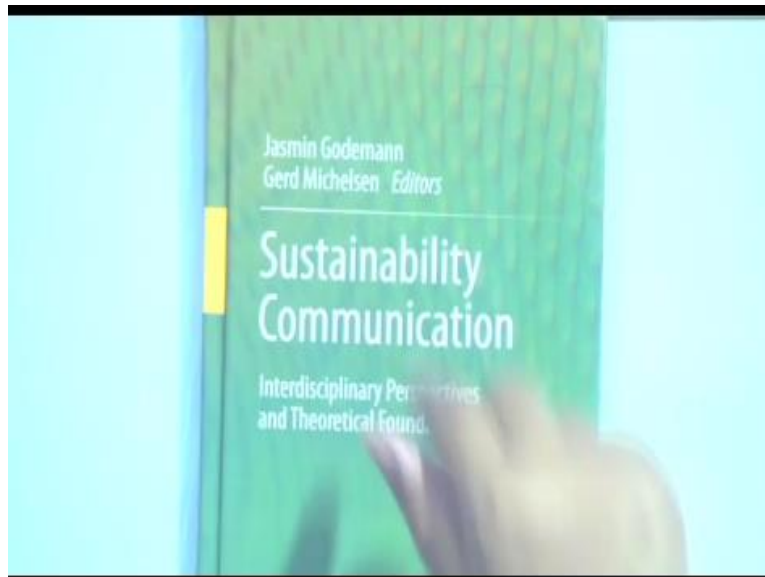


**Sustainability & communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- “The necessity of communication can be found in the (anthropologic) circumstance that each consciousness is isolated, our neurophysiological, cognitive, emotional processes are mutually unobservable & there is no direct access to the thoughts, attitudes, & intentions of the other. It is through communication that ‘the interior is exteriorised...’, that we can inform each other, that we become social creatures. Communication is thus the principle of societal organization itself.”  
(Ziemann, 2007, in Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)
- “Sustainability communication is thus a process of mutual understanding dealing with the future development of society at the core of which is a vision of sustainability.” (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011) <sup>27</sup>

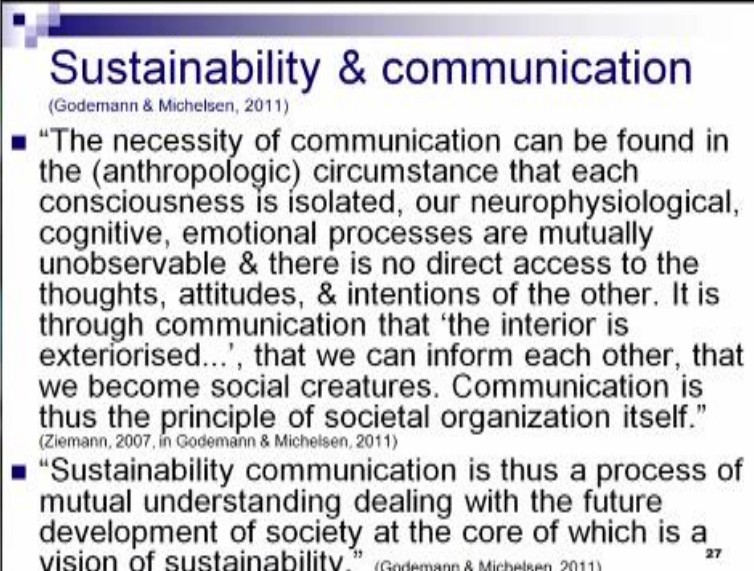
Sustainability and communication why is communication necessary for sustainability. Again this is this book by, you know edited by Godemann and Michelsen and I have shown you this book, you know in the previous class.

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So yeah, thank you. So this is a book called sustainability communication interdisciplinary perspectives and theoretical foundations it is not a textbook but this will serve as a very good reference book and it is been edited by Jasmine Godemann and Gerd Michelsen. And it is been published by Springer in the year 2011, a lot of material has up after this book was published also. But, you know this is such a wonderful, it provides such a wonderful introduction or inside into this whole concept of sustainability communication.

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**Sustainability & communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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(Ziemann, 2007, in Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)
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And Godemann and Michelsen discuss how communication relates to sustainability and, you know it is a very long sentence where we talk about, you know this necessity of communication can be found in the anthropologic circumstance that each consciousness is isolated our neurophysiological cognitive emotional processes are mutually unobservable. And there is no direct access to the thoughts attitudes and intentions of the other. It is through communication that the interior is exteriorized.

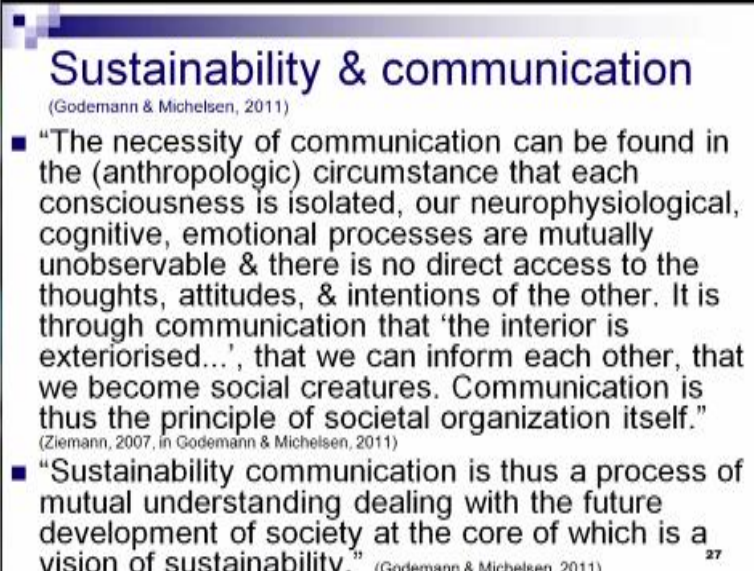
And putting it very simply that, you know we cannot find out what is going on in another person's mind. So it is only in and through communication, it is only in and through the exchange of ideas and interpretation of another person's ideas that we understand what the other person is really thinking, what they have, what they are going through, how much help they need, you know what we can do together. So it is only in and through communication that we can inform each other that we become social creatures. So communication is thus the principle of societal organization itself.

When we live in a community, communication is what helps us bind with each other, what helps form the community, it forms the basis of any social fabric and especially in development efforts

where no one person can do anything single-handedly when a team is required, when large teams of people are required to do different things in order to alleviate the standard of life I would not say standard of living because that includes the quantification of whatever a person has but the standard of life.

How comfortable you are, how your value systems evolve all of those things. So when we talk about alleviation of standard of life of people that is when we start, you know we need teams nobody can do it single-handedly and in order for us to form a team we needs to be able to understand what other people in the community are thinking, feeling, what they want, what their value systems are, what their resources are, and we cannot find that out till we communicate with them.

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**Sustainability & communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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And sustainability communication is thus a process of mutual understanding dealing with the future development of society at the core of which is a vision of sustainability. So at the core of our values and ideas and beliefs, you know there is the thought, is the vision that we need to maintain a certain set of assets in terms of the social fabric, in terms of the material wealth that

we have and in terms of the environmental resources that we have. And we need to build on that basic set of assets and we need to use whatever we have built on that basic set of assets.

So that is what the whole principle of sustainability talks about and it is sustainability communication is a process in which we communicate, in which we share this vision with everybody around us and we come to a mutual understanding of how much, you know through which we quantify in a manner of speaking these set of assets that we have and we decide where do we draw the line between preserving what we have and when do we start using what we are earning..

So how do we decide how much we have already, how do we decide where, you know how much we are going to use and how much we are going to save for future generations. And that happens in and through this communication about different aspects of sustainability. In the previous class we discussed communication of sustainability, communication about sustainability, and communication for sustainability. So all of these three aspects are covered.

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**Theoretical framing of sustainability communication** (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- **Characteristics of sustainability communication:**
  - “Reflexivity in regard to a problematic situation and how to handle it
  - Establishment of sustainability as an intrinsic social value & the related issue of creating acceptance, with the possibility of different interpretations of sustainability clashing with each other
  - The tendency to normalisation with the consequence that the more sustainability becomes a topic the less attention it receives & the less pressure there is to reach understanding
  - Medialisation, which is an attempt to counter the tendency to normalisation in sustainability discourse by coupling it to the media.”

28

Then we come to the theoretical framing of sustainability communication some characteristics that have been proposed by Godemann and Michelsen are the first characteristic of sustainability communication is reflexivity, reflexivity relates to or indicates an ability to look at a problem, to look at a situation from various angles and then adjust and adapt to this holistic interpretation of a situation..

So reflexivity in regards to a problematic situation and how to handle it, acceptability of other people's points of view, acceptability of other aspects of looking at a situation, understanding that no one aspect can be totally complete and it has to be an integration of various aspects of a problem integration of the way different people from different domains, the way different people with different value systems look at a problem. The second characteristic of a sustainability communication is establishment of sustainability as an intrinsic social value and the related issue of creating acceptance with the possibility of different interpretations of sustainability clashing with each other.

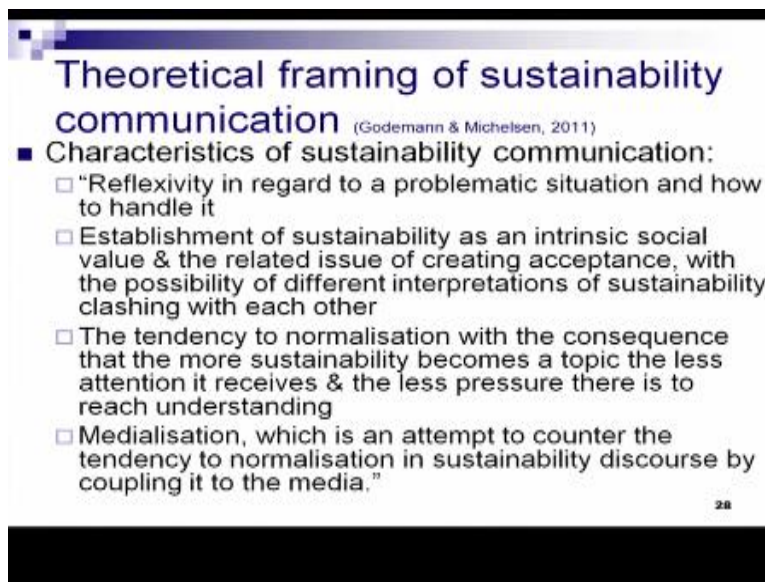
So what is it what is it that sustainability means. So establishment of, you know sustainability should be something at the very core of everybody's, you know we should all want to want to keep, want to preserve our assets and then eat off of the profits that should be at the very core of how we look at our resources. Now how where do we draw the line, how do we decide what our resources are, how do we decide to use them all of that can change but at the core of everything should be the firm belief in the minds of everybody, who is discussing, whose voice is going to be heard that this is what we need to do.

We need to preserve a certain set of resources in terms of the social fabric, in terms of our material wealth, and in terms of our environmental resources. And that needs to be ingrained in all of us or as many people around us as possible. For example, we have a lot of people talking about environmental sustainability, you know many of us talk about the importance of a green environment and then I am just as guilty as anyone else regarding this I am talking about sustainability and I have a bottle of a bottle, you know a plastic bottle can you please focus on this bottle.



Yeah, yeah can you please focus the camera on this bottle? Thank you. So I am carrying a bottle of water with me and so, you know this is a plastic bottle and I am using this, I am not using anything else, you know I am not, I refill it occasionally and once in a while I will just go and buy a brand new bottle of water. So when we talk about sustainability I am not totally, you know I am just as guilty as anyone else of not being totally committed to the concept of sustainability. Because I feel that this is the safest form of drinking water that will not upset my stomach.

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**Theoretical framing of sustainability communication** (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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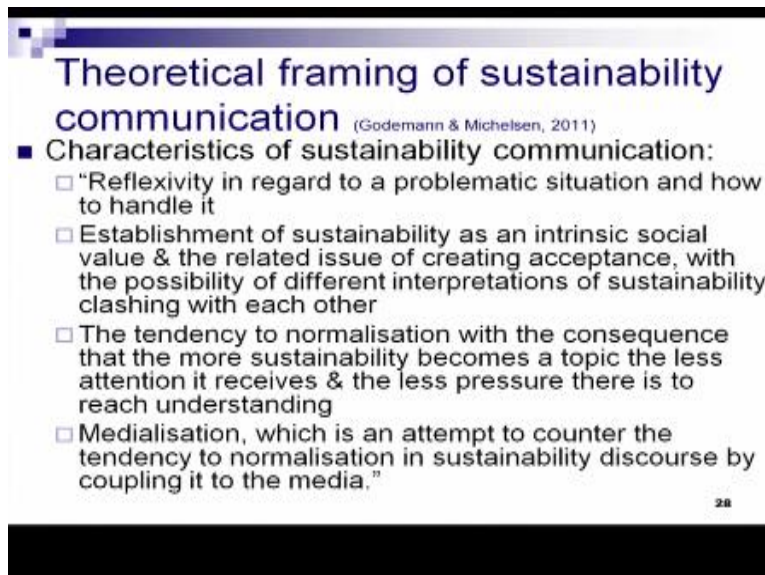
And that is the reasoning most of us have or when we randomly print a large amounts of paper and then just discard things, you know we in our offices we tend to print a lot of things, we tend to leave the Air conditioning on for long periods of time. So or we tend to switch on our geezers and forget about them and, you know we tend to use electricity where we do not need to use it. So when we talk about sustainability we all need to be careful about this, we tend to discard our plastics into the environment without really realizing how they are going to harm the environment.

So on the one hand we are talking about sustainability on the other hand we are generating so much of plastic and throwing it indiscriminately in places where we know it will not be recycled, where we know it will be harming the environment. And that is where, you know all of us falter many of us do not even think twice, so I could, you know go on publishing papers about sustainability and doing these things on the side and that is where the disconnect occurs. So this is what we are talking about establishment of sustainability as an intrinsic social value.

Now here is where communication comes in I am talking to you about this and at the same time I am reminding myself and feeling guilty about carrying a plastic bottle with me wherever I go. So, you know we, communication helps you reflect it helps you reason out things with yourself and among other people. The third aspect of sustainability communication is the tendency to normalization with the consequence that the more sustainability becomes a topic, the less attention it receives and the less pressure there is to reach understanding.

And this aspect is so important because when we talk about the tendency to normalization we are essentially talking about the.

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**Theoretical framing of sustainability communication** (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)


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You know making it, it is not going to be, we are talking about it not being such a hot topic such something that requires a lot of discussion because we start understanding it, we start internalizing it. And, you know it is just sort of, there is no pressure to find out what it means. So it is all about internalizing it, it is all about understanding the very core of sustainability. Another characteristic of sustainability communication is the medialization which is an attempt to count of the tendency to normalization and sustainability discourse by coupling it to the media.

So when we bring something into the media then the discussions go on and on and on and a lot of things are repeated and they are brought up for discussion, the media has of course, you know there is there is a lot of merit to that because the media helps us clarify a lot of concepts by involving a lot of people in discussions, by throwing it out to the public, by throwing it out to the stakeholders who can comment on it. So, you know it helps us define these, the understanding that we have of these concepts.

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**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- **Social marketing:**
  - "An approach in sustainability communication [in which] the same principles in selling goods & services can be used to support a process of voluntary, individual behavioral change regarding such social issues such as saving energy or conservation."
  - Rests on word of mouth communication

29

And then let us talk a little bit about methods in sustainability communication how is sustainability communication operationalized, what how do we do sustainability communication that is what we will talk about. One of the methods used in sustainability communication is

social marketing, social marketing is a very interesting concept it is an approach in sustainability communication in which the same principles in selling goods and services can be used to support a process of voluntary, individual behavioral change regarding such social issues such as saving energy or conservation.

Now this means that, you know we can use the typical, traditional, business methods to propose to propagate a topic of social importance to propose, to propagate a topic of social value something like sustainability or social development. What is marketing, marketing is influencing the masses, convincing people, helping people understand that there is a need to get something, to buy something.

So here instead of buying material goods we are helping them buy into an idea of maintaining their social environment that inputs their economic environment there be so preservation of the social and cultural fabric or catering to the interests and needs of the community and maintaining their material wealth. So we are essentially helping them buy into the idea of social development by convincing them using traditional methods of hardcore business profit marketing.

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**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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And it rests on word-of-mouth communication the more the people talk about it, the more the people are get interested in it, and the easier it becomes to convince people. So this WOM theory WOM, WOM theory is what social marketing rests on.

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**Methods in sustainability communication (Contd.)** (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- **Empowerment strategies:**
  - "... involves developing the competence to recognize the non-sustainable activities & then apply knowledge about sustainability to remedy them."
  - "Communication & participation together with educational processes are meant to strengthen civil society, promote individual engagement & support political education processes that enable individuals to actively take part in shaping a sustainable society."



Another method in sustainability communication is empowerment strategies and these strategies involve developing the competence to recognize the non-sustainable activities and then applying knowledge about sustainability to remedy them. Communication, participation together with educational processes are meant to strengthen civic society, promotes civil engage, individual engagement and support political education processes that enable individuals to actively take part in shaping a sustainable society.

So we, you know another method is to empower the community developing the competence within the community to understand what they are doing that is harming their environments, that is harming their material wealth, that is harming their social fabric, that is harming the other stakeholders, that is harming the community and then applying knowledge about sustainability to fix these problems.

So understanding where we are going wrong, becoming aware of where we are going wrong, and gone how we are hurting our environments and then taking steps to stop these to stop making these mistakes. So, you know that is another empowerment strategies which means we do not tell people what needs to be done. We educate them, we propagate the word and then they start realizing themselves they identify their problems and they start rectifying these problems themselves in and through the competence that they have achieved.

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**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- Increasing participation opportunities by using participation instruments:
  - “Involves the ability to reflect critically on the uncertainties & risks, different types of rationality as well as the consequences of one’s own actions, which are an intrinsic part of such an engagement.”
  - Participation instruments – Workshops, conferences, discussions, nukkad natak, theatre etc.
    - Theatre for the oppressed: Researching options participation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuNbA> from <http://www.parteciparte.com/it/>



Increasing participation opportunities by using participation instruments, this is one of my favorite methods of sustainability communication. It involves the ability to critically reflect on the uncertainties and risks different types of rationality as well as the consequences of one’s choices, one’s actions which are an intrinsic part of such an engagement. Now sustainability brings with it a whole bunch of risks when we talk about sustainability we are, I am sorry, if sustainability essentially involves an attention to risks.



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**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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And when we talk about sustainability we are essentially talking about the things that happen in the environment that we can and cannot predict. So we will discuss this more when we talk about risk communication being a part of sustainability communication in the next lecture. But today in this lecture we will discuss some participation instruments, how do we reflect critically on what has happening, you know when we are part of a community we just go through the experiences it is run-of-the-mill, you get and you do something and come out.

But then we need to stop and think about what is going on, what we are doing wrong, how are we harming the environment without realizing it. And at this point I would like to show you a clip.

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## Methods in sustainability communication

(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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We have some participation instruments, we have workshops, we have conferences, we have discussions, we have something called as a nukkad and natak, nukkad is the square or the corner of a street and natak means theater. So we have theater groups extra, and I would like to show you a clip called theater for the oppressed researching options through participation.



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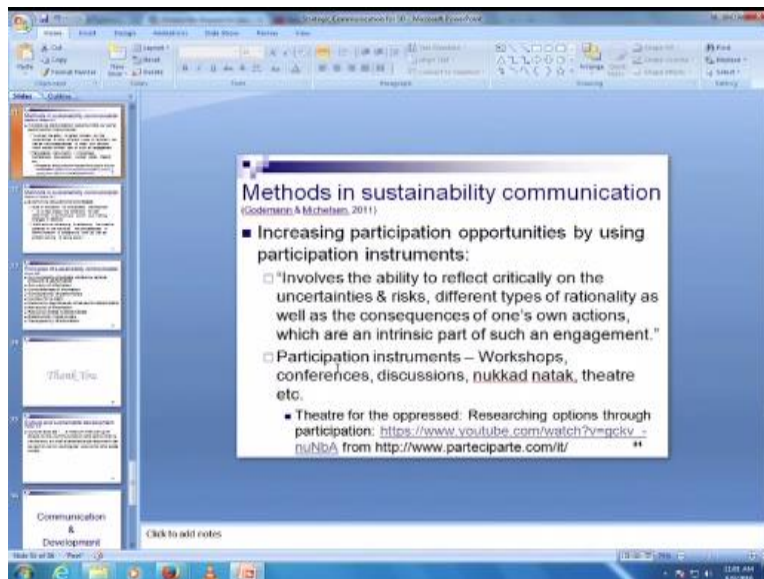


## Methods in sustainability communication

(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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The image shows a screenshot of a presentation slide displayed in a software application. The slide has a blue background and contains the following text:

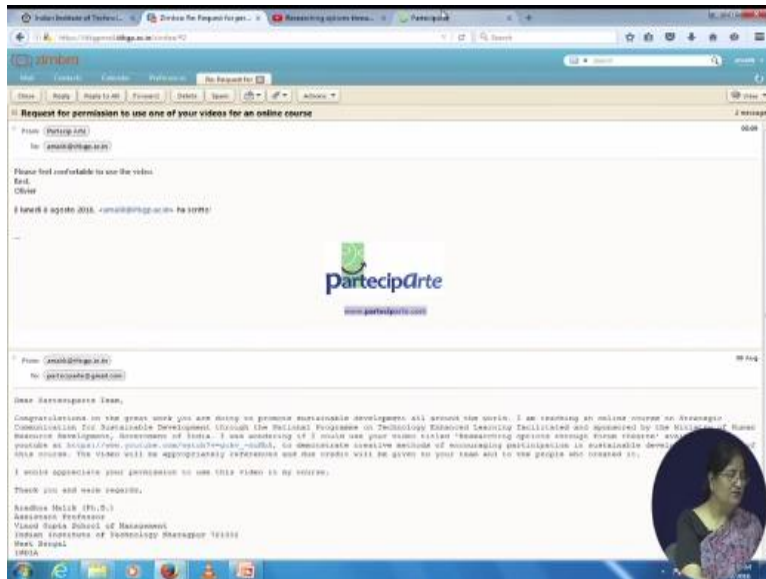
**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Codemans & Michéaux, 2011)

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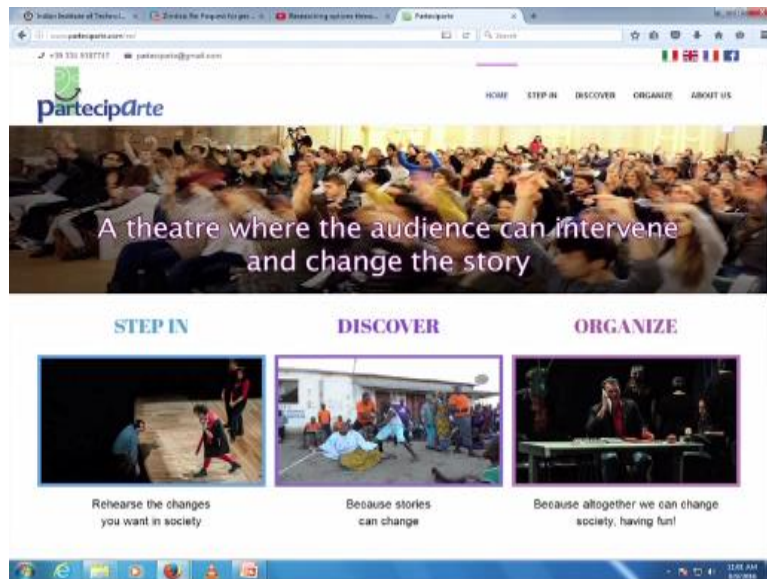
The slide is part of a presentation, as indicated by the navigation pane on the left and the status bar at the bottom.

This has been designed, devised by a group called a parteciparte.com which is in Italy and I would, I will first show you the website.

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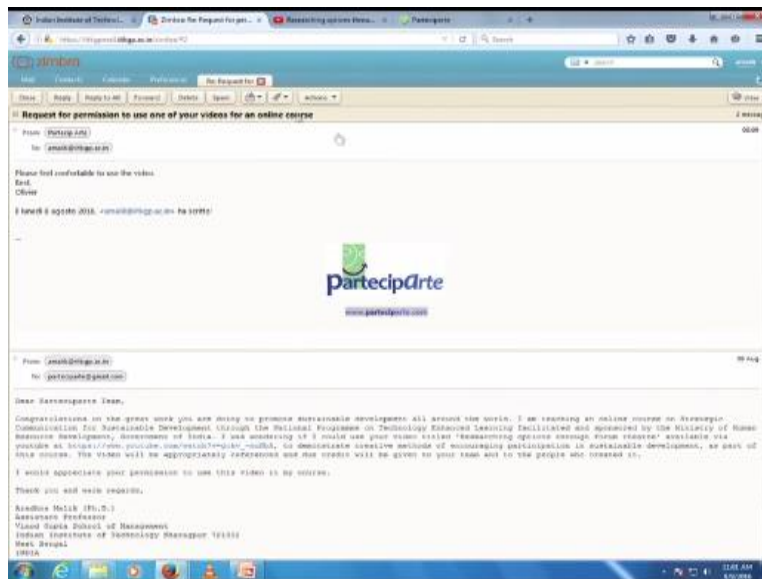


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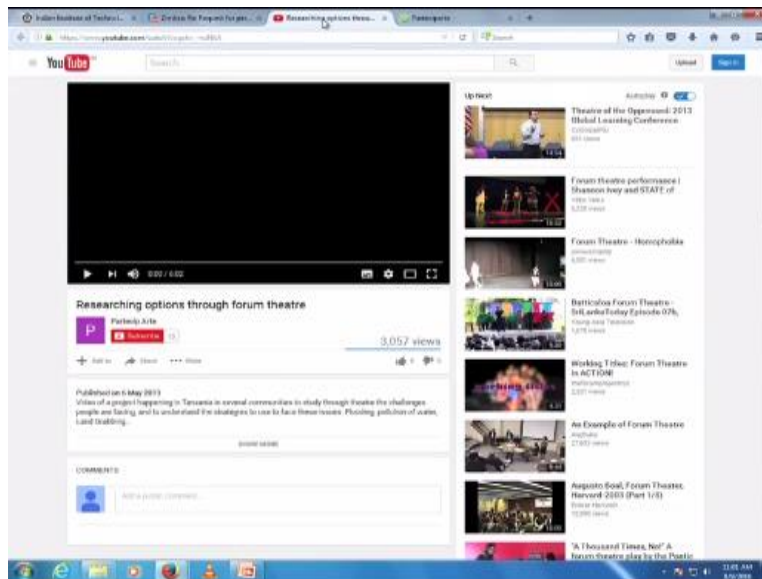
Of this organization, they are doing a lot to, you know they are using creativity; they are using theater to educate people about social development. And I found that video on YouTube and here is the permission.

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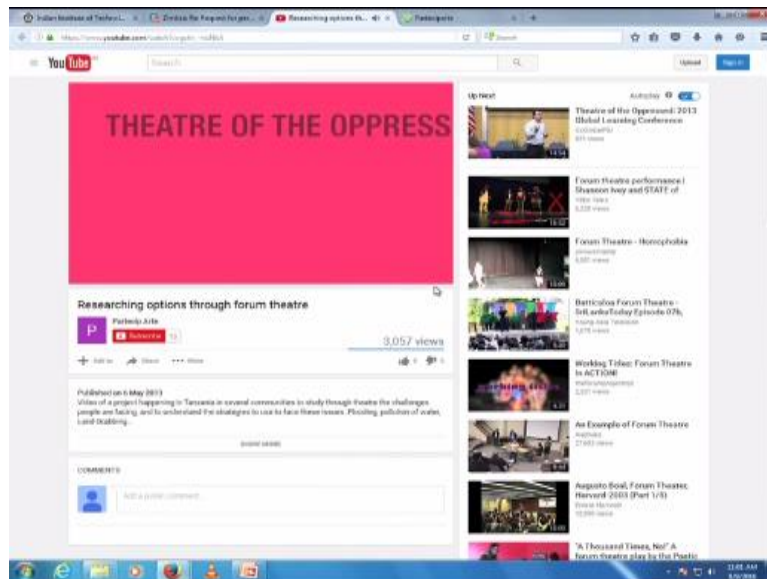
I requested them for permission to use the video in this course and I received permission and only after getting this permission I am showing you this video. So there is no copyright infringement here.

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And with their permission I am showing you this video and I am very grateful to the team at parteciparte who has, that has created this video and that has given me permission to use this video to share it with all of you. So it is a six minute video and I am going to play it here now.

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Human activities on earth provoke important environmental changes. Pollution, floods and land grabbing deeply affect people's lives and works. How do people cope with these changes? What are the consequences? Who pays the price for these changes? What do people want? What do they expect from local authorities? What do local authorities already do? To answer these questions we have started a research project that involves communities by using the theater of the oppressed. The theater of the oppressed is a set of tools that enable people to bring their issues to the stage and invite audiences to propose a solution.

First, through a series of games and exercises, participants are able to deepen their relationships. Games can create challenges and also encourage solidarity. Participants gain the confidence to share their stories and talk about oppression. The goal is to create a play that reveals the most urgent problems the community is facing. Questions are then raised about the stories: What happens before or after? How would you react if this same thing happen to you? How do you generally cope with such a situation?

Once all participants have agreed on a shared concern to enact, and the play is ready, it is performed for a larger audience. The audience is invited to intervene: to analyze the situation, to

offer comments and assess whether the problem is addressed effectively, and to propose new options or strategies to tackle the problem. They then rehearse the changes they want to see made in the play in order to better overcome oppression.

A facilitator, called the joker, stimulates participation through games and questions, focusing activities on the specific problem the community wants to address. The Joker also collects proposals. These proposals are then brought to local authorities in order to determine what can be done, what is already being done, and what additional challenges there are to overcome.

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Okay, so.



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India Institute of Technology, ... Video For English for ge... Researching options th... Portage Arts

ACC DAR  
Advancing water & climate change in Central Dar es Salaam

This video has been realized with the support of:  
ACC Dar project partners, ARDH University, Sapienza University of Rome  
and the associate Dar es Salaam City Council

ARDH UNIVERSITY  
SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Researching options through forum theatre

Portage Arts  
3,057 views

Published on 6 May 2013  
Video of a project happening in Tanzania in several communities to study through theatre the challenges people are facing, and to understand the strategies to use to face these issues: Flooding, pollution of water, Land grabbing.

COMMENTS

Up Next

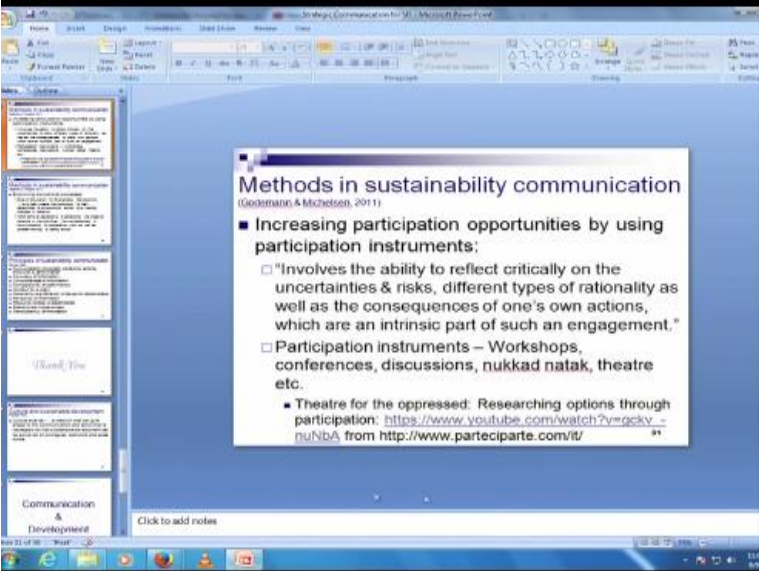
- Theatre of the Oppressed, 2013 Global Learning Conference
- Forum Theatre performance | Shantana Key and STAFF of ...
- Forum Theatre - Heterophonia
- Participative Forum Theatre - ...
- Working Title: Forum Theatre ...
- An Example of Forum Theatre
- Angelo Biol Forum Theatre, Harvard-2003 (Part 1/3)
- "A Thousand Times, Not" A ...

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This is a very interesting method.

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The image shows a screenshot of a presentation slide displayed within a software application window. The slide has a blue background and contains the following text:

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(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

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The screenshot also shows the application's interface, including a menu bar at the top, a toolbar, and a sidebar on the left with various icons and text. The bottom of the window shows a taskbar with system icons and a clock.

Of talking about or communicating about sustainability.

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More theaters like this are available or more of examples of this type are available on the same website.

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**Methods in sustainability communication**  
(Godemann & Michelsen, 2011)

- **Examining educational processes:**
  - Goal of Education for Sustainable Development  
"... is to help create the conditions for self-determined & autonomous action" plus training changes in behavior
  - "ESD aims at developing & enhancing the creative potential in the individual, his competencies in communication & cooperative work as well as problem-solving & taking action."

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The other method in sustainability communication is examining educational processes. The goal of education for sustainable development is to help create the conditions for self determined and autonomous action, plus training changes in behavior. ESD aims are developing and enhancing the creative potential in the individual, is competencies in communication and cooperative work, as well as problem solving and taking action.

So we examine our educational process and we see what kinds of competencies we are developing. And then we help create the conditions for autonomous action and then we train people to change their own behavior we do not tell them how to change their behavior, we stimulate the changes and behavior in the people who are actually undergoing this training and who are also part of the community.

So all of this in turn empowers the community and eventually the word of mouth then sort of encourages the other people in the community to understand the value of sustainability and to start incorporating in their work.

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## Principles of sustainability communication

(Bernhart, 2009)

- Accountability of policies, decisions, actions, products & performance
- Accuracy of information
- Completeness of information
- Comparability of performance
- Context for a claim
- Materiality (significance) of issues for stakeholders
- Reliability of information
- Responsiveness to stakeholders
- Stakeholder inclusiveness
- Transparency of information



So a few principles of sustainability communication that have been proposed by Bernhart are accountability of policies, decisions, actions, products and performance; accuracy of information; completeness of information that is propagated; comparability of performance of different stakeholders; context for a claim; materiality or significance of issues for stakeholders; reliability of the information that is propagated; responsiveness to stakeholders; stakeholder inclusiveness; and transparency of information.

Now if you go through this list and you go through whatever we have discussed earlier in when we were discussing methods and sustainability communication. And if you also revisit the video you will realize that the community is such an integral part of sustainability any discussion, any talk any training in sustainability cannot be complete, cannot even start without understanding what the community is, without becoming, without engaging with the community, without becoming a part of the community. As experts we can give one-sided information, but that is just, you know it will vanish in thin air it will be out there hanging somewhere.

If you want whatever we are doing to have any value if we wanted to make a real difference then we really need to be a part of the community and engage with the community and encourage participation from the community, and only through in and through their input can we moved further with our efforts to help the community alleviate it is the or get rid of its problems or help them deal with their problems. And that is where we will stop today and we will continue with specific approaches to sustainability communication in the next week of classes, thank you very much for listening.