Green Culture

An A-to-Z Guide

The SAGE Reference Series on
Green Society
Toward a Sustainable Future

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Introduction

Culture can be a rather slippery concept to define—something that seems to bleed into almost all aspects of our social lives. It can seem to be everywhere at once, and thus may be nowhere at all. Culture is a set of common human practices (like saying "bless you" after someone sneezes), but is also a set of dispositions or ways of seeing (or not seeing) the world around us. The need to acknowledge that someone has sneezed, and to lay upon him or her some sort of secularized blessing, is both a common ritual and a set of understandings about what is appropriate and polite. In some other cultures, such an acknowledgment might be embarrassing—culture is variable by geography, society, language, race, ethnicity, and many other social cleavages. In short, though, culture is a way of doing things and a way of understanding the world that is common to a specific group of people. One could attempt a definition thus: Culture is a durable system of meanings, symbols, signs, and understandings common to an identifiable social group.

Culture can be made visible in many ways, but even when it is relatively invisible to us, culture is salient. We might speak of "material culture" in the form of a comic book, a newspaper, or a novel. We see cultural expression in fashion, architecture, or public art. Popular culture is a form that is mass-produced explicitly for consumption by a large audience—movies, television, pop music, and video games are clear examples.

So what is "green culture"? There are multiple ways that culture affects the environment (and vice versa). The phrase *green culture* is a way of wrapping those many layers together into a coherent concept. Of course, there might be a culture of environmentalists (an identifiable group of people); in fact there are many cultures of different environmentalists (radical greens, deep greens, ecofeminists, and so forth). These groups of people may choose to live in sustainable ways, and their cultural understandings, rituals, and symbols may reflect their ecological worldview. Thus, there are cultural aspects to the way we live, and how we live can be more and less sustainable.

Similarly, there are cultural aspects to how we produce and consume goods in society. In the Western world, of course, it is primarily through the market that most people meet their daily needs. We shop in grocery stores or eat at restaurants for food, we buy clothes and necessary items at stores, and sometimes we treat ourselves with a luxury purchase. All of this implies a certain set of cultural understandings: many would be baffled by someone who grows his or her own food, makes his or her own clothes, and lives a life of voluntary simplicity.

But we don't buy everything we need from the market—we also pay taxes and have some services provided to us by local, regional, or federal government. This, too, has a

cultural aspect to it. We have a set of understandings about the quality of the water that comes out of our faucet, about the cleanliness of the air we breathe, and about the regulation of traffic, commerce, and international relations. Some of these are sustainable practices, but many are not.

On top of this, there are sets of cultural understandings about the proper relationship between humans and the natural world—systems of understandings that are relatively durable, but change over longer periods of time. For instance, it once was considered appropriate to shoot buffalo from passenger trains. Now, we value the American bison as an endangered species. Our culture has changed, and with it the way we behave toward animals and nature.

The concept of sustainability is also a difficult idea to define simply, but for our purposes here, let's call it a set of human practices that allows for continued use of resources for all foreseeable future generations (and, one could argue, for future generations of other species as well). In an attempt to bring all this together, then, "green culture" is a way of understanding human practices common to identifiable groups, which has an ecological component that affects sustainability.

The volume is organized to reflect the many ways in which culture cross-cuts everyday ecological practices. The dominant form of culture, of course, is the media. The entries in this section focus on the ways in which environmentalism is portrayed in the media, and how ecological communication happens. Environmentalism is also nearly synonymous with activism. The section on "Actions and Activists" highlights both important individuals and social groups who engage in environmental activist, but also global, regional, national, and local actions and activities. These are often exceptional or spectacular moments, but how people live and work every day has clear cultural and environmental implications, so the section on "Living" is a central one. Where we live, how we get to work, and what we do on the weekends are all subject to strong cultural forces, which contribute to our level of sustainability. Perhaps the most important contributor to our ecological impact is what, how, and where we eat, so "Food" has its own section. Finally, a special section on "People" highlights the important contributions of selected individuals and important groups.

This volume provides an overview of the many elements of green culture and associated institutions, movements, organizations, and key actors and locations. The many entries are from diverse academic perspectives, and represent the latest thinking on the topics at hand. Some are about environmental "goods" and others about environmental "bads," but all represent important aspects of our shared human culture. These are key characteristics that we must consider as we contemplate moving to a more ecologically sustainable culture and society.

Kevin Wehr
General Editor

Reader's Guide

Actions, Activists, and Law

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Antiwar Actions/Movement
Art as Activism
Censorship of Climatologists and Environmental Scientists
Chipko Movement
Communication, Global and Regional
Communication, National and Local
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Corporate Social Responsibility
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United Farm Workers (UFW) and Antipesticide Activities
Veganism/Vegetarianism as Social Action

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Sprawl/Suburbs/Exurbs
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Environmental Communication, Public Participation

People, places, and planning—public participation and communication practices related to physical environments have captivated scholars and practitioners for centuries. Recent work in this area has emphasized public involvement in sustainability planning and decision making. Complex environmental issues ranging from national energy policy to local waste and recycling programs have spurred broad public participation initiatives. Public participation requirements are now incorporated into many pieces of federal environmental legislation in the United States, with responsibilities for engaging the public often falling to local government agencies. Although there is considerable debate about the nature and merits of various public participation models, commonalities include an orientation toward particular communication practices such as conflict resolution, public deliberation, and collaboration. Still, difficult questions related to expertise, public knowledge, and the definition and assessment of meaningful participation persist. Central to these questions is a concern about how to meaningfully engage culturally diverse populations in environmental decision making.

Although conceptions of "the public" vary, the term is typically used to refer to individuals acting as citizens and/or as representatives acting on behalf of particular organizations or constituencies. The term *stakeholder* is also frequently used to refer to parties directly impacted by or interested in environmental decisions. "The public" is not a given entity but a concept that is constructed and interpreted in different ways. In some cases, "the public" may refer to people selected purposively based on a particular set of desired skills or characteristics. In other cases, "the public" may refer to special interest groups or stakeholders directly impacted by a particular issue. In many cases, use of the term *public* may serve to include or exclude particular populations depending on how it is employed and understood. There has been significant scholarly debate about the extent to which any one conception of "the public" is sufficient to capture the multiplicity of publics with environmentally related interests. Historically, particular groups such as women, minorities, reform organizations, and working-class publics have been neglected by traditional conceptions of "the public" used to identify potential participants.

Public participation related to environmental issues typically involves activities such as assessment, planning, decision making, conflict resolution, and evaluation. Public participation also includes social activism designed to influence government decisions—including the mobilization of public concern, lobbying, or interfering with the implementation of decisions. Parties use a wide variety of techniques for structuring participation, and communication processes shape and are shaped by ideologies, structural requirements (e.g., laws and regulations), personal and institutional preferences and resources, and situational factors (e.g., scope of issue). When information acquisition or exchange is the primary goal of public participation, the process is based on a simple sender-receiver model of communication, typically from government to publics for comment. When social or ideological learning and transformation are sought, communication processes become more complex.

In recent decades, public surveys have captured growing public distrust of government, and government-managed public participation processes have frequently generated cynicism. Public and business administration programs have often promoted the management benefits of strategically engaging stakeholders so that terms like *buy-in* and *political consensus* have become associated with carefully managed campaigns rather than open-ended

public participation processes. Even well-intentioned community and global development organizations have frequently mandated participation models without sufficient attention to the complexity of everyday collaborative work confronting diverse communities of citizens and practitioners. Criticisms typically relate to questions of legitimacy, quality, and efficiency of public participation processes.

Public Participation Models

Since the 1980s, public participation has moved from concerns about relatively infrequent acts of "expressive" participation such as voting, political campaigning, and protest to conceptualizing participation as an ongoing, social aspect of democratic citizenship and governance. The shift from participation conceived as an individual "act" to participation as collective "acting" has been rapid, and diversifying conceptions of what it means to be active in public life have complicated the conceptual and practical field. Public participation in its broadest sense has become a catchall term among scholars, government officials, and publics for a wide variety of practices, processes, and perspectives on citizen engagement in policy discussions and decision-making processes.

Scholars and practitioners who engage in environmental public participation work are scattered across fields like communication, sociology, public affairs, political science, environmental science, and development studies. This makes it difficult to characterize the scholarly work in a succinct way. Even a narrower focus on environmental communication and participation involves both scholarly research and practitioner work across numerous fields. Such diversity offers benefits associated with the existence of many different models of participation, multiple perspectives on public-government interaction, and numerous facilitation techniques for all types of groups, issues, and processes. A drawback to this diversity, however, is that literatures often talk past each other, terms and concepts are saddled with multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings, and few models of public participation receive empirical attention. Existing public participation research has not always lent itself to comparisons, and much research on public participation and communication focuses on highly general aspects of public participation design or, alternately, on localized case studies.

Public Participation and Deliberation

Despite fragmentation, much of the public participation theory and research has emerged from within a liberal democratic framework. Attention to environmental communication and participation issues such as representation, voice, and deliberation frequently draw on John Rawls's notion of justice as fairness and Jürgen Habermas's conceptions of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation. Habermas put forward the notions that (1) discourse in the public sphere affects public policy by establishing the terms of legitimate public debate, (2) public deliberation should be guided by communicative rules (e.g., claims must be acceptable to all potentially affected), and (3) equitable deliberation requires certain conditions be met (e.g., every person must be allowed to question, introduce, and express opinions). Although debates about the nature and efficacy of public deliberation continue, it is generally conceptualized as a process unmediated by power differentials during which information is exchanged so that participants may consider as many sides of an issue as possible.

Two dimensions of public deliberation help to frame the concept—deliberation's stated goals and its purported effects on participants. Three goals are commonly associated with public deliberation: (1) education, where the purpose is for participants to learn about the

various dimensions and perspectives on public issues (e.g., climate change literacy forums); (2) consultation, in which participants deliberate and offer an informed opinion or proposal to policy makers who use it as one more data point when considering their final decision (e.g., land use planning advisory groups); and (3) decision making, a process in which participants have ultimate decision-making authority. Because decision making in the public deliberation mode is extremely rare, the categories of educative and consultative deliberation have received the most attention from researchers.

Chief among claims about public deliberation's benefits are (1) deliberation increases participants' understanding, complex thinking, and flexibility about issues; and (2) involvement in public deliberation increases engagement in other methods of public participation. Several reviews of deliberative democracy research have concluded that public deliberation can affect individuals' understanding of an issue and increase participation, but in the absence of longitudinal studies it is difficult to determine whether these effects persist over time.

A popular deliberative forum is the citizen jury, in which a randomly selected group of stakeholders is convened for the purpose of learning about and discussing policy options with the goal of presenting a consensus statement to the convening party (e.g., government agency). Citizen juries have been used around the world. One citizen jury in India brought together indigenous farmers for four days of deliberation concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the future of farming in their communities. The participants heard from and questioned expert witnesses in government, business, and agriculture who presented a wide range of positions on GMOs, allowing "citizen jurors" to navigate the complex realities of biotechnology in light of social, political, and environmental concerns. A report from the Environmental Mainstreaming Initiative concluded that the diversity and lack of disciplinary boundaries among the participants in this process demonstrated that deliberation practices could enrich democracy and ensure greater accountability relative to food and agricultural decisions.

Alternative Communication Approaches

Unlike deliberative models, which seek to reduce conflict and pursue consensus, critical approaches to environmental communication and public participation emphasize contestation and difference based on the assumption that conflict is both unavoidable and potentially productive. Those who favor this approach critique traditional consensus-based deliberation processes as neglecting or minimizing the influence of power differentials on social interactions. Critical communication theorists suggest that liberal democracy's reliance on public deliberation mechanisms is insufficient to ensure meaningful participation from diverse publics. Public deliberation processes typically assume that all members of the public have equal access to participate meaningfully in deliberative forums. Scholars and environmental justice activists argue that existing participation systems favor particular cultural norms and frequently exclude populations without the economic means, technical knowledge, or social access to engage in deliberation about environmental problems and inequities.

Many scholars and practitioners also adopt a pragmatic approach to addressing public participation in environmental problem solving based on early work by John Dewey. This approach is future oriented and attentive to the social construction of reality. The practical consequences of environmental theories and measures are important not in relation to some complete or perfectly verifiable truth but in terms of their capacity to guide future actions related to environmental policy formation and social behavior. In recent decades, a number of pragmatic scholars have worked with practitioners to develop new

communication practices to help resolve tenacious environmental conflicts. In some cases, formal models have been crafted in response to environmental legislation, and in other cases, conflict resolution efforts have relied on more informal communication related to dialogue and/or collaboration.

Public Participation and Dialogue

Public dialogue is grounded in the work of physicist David Bohm, existential philosopher Martin Buber, and psychotherapist Carl Rogers, among others. Public dialogue takes as its starting point the assumption that understanding self and other is central to constructing better public policies and ultimately better publics. Whereas public deliberation is focused on developing public policy that is responsive to the greatest number of people, public dialogue's primary purpose is to heal social rifts between parties so that progress can be made on policy disputes.

Unlike deliberation, dialogue has not been widely embraced by governments and the public as a form of policy discussion for two reasons. The first reason is revealed clearly in the title of Daniel Yankelovich's influential 1999 text, *The Magic of Dialogue*. Dialogue, as the term is used by participation scholars in this tradition, cannot be manufactured or mandated; one cannot be ordered to dialogue and, even if one enters into a possible dialogic space, dialogue itself may not manifest. In this sense dialogue is "magic," something that happens spontaneously in the moment, cannot be re-created, and is not necessarily bound to last. All dialogic theorists agree on this point: only the conditions for dialogue can be created, not the dialogic experience itself. The conditions for the possibility of dialogue vary from author to author, but those who have given thought to a systematic approach generally agree that dialogue is marked by (1) an acknowledged equality among participants, (2) the bringing of assumptions to the fore of discussion, (3) listening with empathy, and (4) a disavowal of communication structures (i.e., rules). Many advocates of the dialogic approach suggest that these characteristics make it particularly effective for intercultural participation initiatives.

The second reason dialogue has not made significant headway in contributing to environmental participation practices is its lack of emphasis on decision making. Decision making, which invariably follows procedural rules, closes off routes to dialogue by promoting movement in a linear fashion orientated toward a final goal. As pre-interactional aspects of communication, decision-making rules can be structured to give one or more parties advantages over others, violating the equality principle of dialogue. More importantly, the goal of decision making places participants in an antagonistic relationship, the result of which is likely to be debate, not dialogue, which violates dialogue's empathy principle. Since dialogue is conceptualized as a way of gaining an understanding of others and questioning one's own assumptions, encountering others and interrogating our own assumptions cannot be a linear process with objectifiably measurable outcomes. Dialogue is an open-ended phenomenon directed at continually reopening questions and relations. This makes it unlikely that dialogue will contribute directly to environmental policy making unless it is coupled with other communication and participation models that facilitate time-sensitive decision making.

Public Participation and Collaboration

Environmental collaboration efforts have become increasingly common in recent decades. Most work in this area has originated from projects and studies related to conflict resolution

or environmental resource management. Although various collaborative models exist, environmental collaboration efforts typically share several common assumptions and characteristics. In most cases, these efforts involve participants who do not normally interact on a regular basis, and, in some cases, these participants are already engaged in adversarial relationships. Collaborative models typically rely on voluntary and uncompensated participation. Rather than attempting to minimize differences, most collaborative processes seek to engage differences in order to generate new perspectives and solutions to environmental problems. Theorists typically advocate collaboration models that engage public participants early in a process, assuming that it is important to allow participants to constructively explore differences prior to establishing agendas or identifying solutions. In this sense, environmental collaboration is not a vehicle for achieving consensus around existing solutions but a process that allows for more complex understandings of environmental problems and for more creative solutions.

Advocates for environmental collaboration models often point out that successful collaboration has the potential to generate outcomes that individuals or homogenous groups would be unable to achieve on their own. However, a reliance on voluntary participation coupled with attention to difference also makes collaborative processes tenuous and easily disrupted. If participants are unable to identify shared goals or develop and sustain trust, a collaborative process may be untenable. For this reason, many collaborative efforts rely on skilled facilitators and mediators to help design and implement effective communication practices. According to Barbara Gray, effective collaborative processes should involve all participants in defining problems, establishing a direction, and implementing and monitoring agreements.

In the mid- to late 1980s, a number of governmental agencies began adopting collaborative models for engaging the public in long-term resource planning. Initially, these efforts were promoted most heavily at local and regional levels where policy makers were faced with difficult decisions related to land use planning and watershed management. Over time, a number of federal agencies adopted various environmental collaboration models. For example, the U.S. Forest Service has used outside facilitators to help direct and mediate collaborative roundtables tasked with revising forest management plans. Environmental collaboration efforts are most often implemented at the local level in relationship to specific projects or issues, but new communication technologies are contributing to expanded conceptions of collaboration.

Public Participation Challenges

Although the focus so far has been on points of agreement among the models of public participation, there are also enduring conflicts. Two common points of contestation related to public environmental participation and communication involve questions of knowledge and legitimacy. There is significant disagreement over the degree to which nonexperts should be involved in activities and decisions typically assigned to experts. Many scholars and community activists have argued that traditional approaches to environmental planning and problem solving neglect the potential contributions of local culture and knowledge. They argue that particular ways of knowing and communicating are given preference in ways that exclude important stakeholders. Critics point out that certain forms of public participation in environmental decision making have the potential to supplant scientific facts with opinion or conjecture. Some critics suggest that comprehensive participation processes cost too much and take too much time when responses to

environmental crises are time sensitive. There is also debate about when the public should get involved in addressing environmental issues. Despite these challenges, new approaches to public participation and communication may offer alternative ways of engaging diverse populations in a wide range of environmental decision making and planning processes.

See Also: Communication, National and Local; Public Opinion; Social Action, National and Local.

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Environmental "Goods"

How we understand environmental "goods" and what they mean to our decision making as people on Earth is critical to our collective and individual health as well as that of the planet. We have always had a material, and thus an economic, relationship with our environment. It is one that both informs and, conversely, is informed by our particular relationship vis-à-vis nature. How we understand and determine economic values for the physical natural world that surrounds us is based on our worldview. Do we save a mountain from mining or highway construction because it has a spiritual connection to our gods or because it has great recreational value? If we perceive it to have tangible public value—how do we decide or know this? Do we develop sustainably harvested forests for the health of the forest and wildlife or because they create longer-term market strategy for us as consumers? The struggle with advantaging environmental goods with a concurrent positive economic impact is the