



**Communicating Sustainable  
Development and the SDGs in Europe:  
Good practice examples from policy,  
academia, NGOs, and media**

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# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION ‘OF’ SUSTAINABILITY VS. COMMUNICATION ‘ABOUT’ SUSTAINABILITY</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: COMMUNICATION IN THE 2030 AGENDA AND AT THE UN LEVEL</b> .....	<b>8</b>
COMMUNICATION IN THE 2030 AGENDA .....	8
UN COMMUNICATION OF THE SDGs .....	9
<i>General UN Communication and Awareness Raising Tools</i> .....	9
<i>UN SDG Action Campaign</i> .....	9
<b>CHAPTER 3: EUROPEAN NATIONAL LEVEL GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES IN SDG COMMUNICATION</b> <b>11</b>	
FINLAND: MAXIMIZING VISIBILITY WITH MINIMUM RESOURCES .....	11
FRANCE: ENERGY OBSERVER PROJECT .....	12
GERMANY: COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION, AND POLICY-MAKING .....	13
ICELAND: TELEVISION CAMPAIGN FOR THE SDGs .....	14
<b>CHAPTER 4: STAKEHOLDER GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES IN COMMUNICATION</b> .....	<b>15</b>
PULSE OF EUROPE .....	15
NETZWERK WEITBLICK .....	16
PROJECT17 .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 5: INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER AND MORE EFFECTIVE SDG COMMUNICATION</b> .....	<b>18</b>

## Introduction

The topic of this European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) Quarterly Report (QR) is communication for sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It provides an overview of communication for sustainable development and how to focus communication campaigns to better and more effectively communicate sustainable development and the SDGs, as well as provides an overview of some good practice cases from the European national level in a few select European countries. This Report will also feature what other stakeholder groups, such as NGOs and journalists, are doing to also communicate sustainable development and the SDGs and what some important requirements are in being able to more compellingly communicate sustainable development and the SDGs to a myriad of stakeholder groups. This Quarterly Report also serves as a continuation of the ESDN's work on the topic of communication, which was started in the ESDN's [Quarterly Report 44](#), published in April 2017.

The topic of communication for sustainable development and the SDGs was also the theme of the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop, which took place in November 2018 and focused on communication and how to more effectively communicate the complex topic of sustainable development and the SDGs. The findings from the Workshop, which brought together 70 stakeholders and policymakers from 17 countries for 2 half-days of exchange and learning will, therefore, be addressed in this Report, as the many insights and good practice examples of communication for sustainable development and the SDGs that were gathered from these different stakeholder groups are very valuable.

Chapter 1 of this QR seeks to frame the concept of communication for sustainable development by looking at scientific literature on how sustainable development communication takes shape and the prevalent discourse and delivery of sustainable development topics to different stakeholder groups. The chapter will focus on communication of sustainable development, communication about sustainable development, and communication for sustainable development, as the differences between the manner in which, and by whom, sustainable development is communicated, makes a seemingly significant difference. Being able to change the way in which sustainable development is communicated should have the potential to improve the overall efficacy and uptake of desired messages by diverse societal actors.

Chapter 2 focuses on communication in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the activities and initiatives the UN is undertaking to communicate the SDGs.

Chapter 3 will take a look at the European level and at a few good practice case examples from Finland, France, Germany, and Iceland regarding their SDG communication.

Similarly, Chapter 4 looks at the stakeholder side of communication and how they communicate the SDGs to their audiences.

Chapter 5 then draws on the experiences from each of these levels and looks at where the future needs of communication for sustainable development and the SDGs lays. The results come from participants of the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop, who, after two days of listening to keynote presentations, good practice examples of communication regarding sustainable development, and interactive group work, were able to reflect on the future needs of communication for sustainable development and the SDGs and where they can better improve their efficacy regarding their own communication of sustainable development and the SDGs.

## Chapter 1: Communication 'of' Sustainability vs. Communication 'about' Sustainability

This chapter seeks to frame the concept of communication for sustainable development by looking at academic literature on how sustainable development communication takes shape and the prevalent discourse and delivery of sustainable development topics to different stakeholder groups. The chapter will focus on communication *of* sustainable development, communication *about* sustainable development, and communication *for* sustainable development, as the differences between the manner in which, and by whom, sustainable development is communicated, makes a significant difference in how it is perceived. Being able to better understand the ways in which sustainable development is currently communicated and moving towards more receptive forms of communication for sustainable development should have the potential to improve the overall efficacy and uptake of desired messages by diverse societal actors.

As global sustainability issues are characterized by high complexity and uncertainty, effective communication processes between the many actors involved are crucial to develop a mutual understanding of which actions to take.<sup>1,2</sup> In their article *Communication Regarding Sustainability: Conceptual Perspectives and Exploration of Societal Subsystems*, Newig et al. (2013) developed a framework that consists of two components addressing the way in which sustainability is communicated. These components, which are separated as process-centered and content-centered, reflect on the differences between communication *of* sustainability and communication *about* sustainability.

In the process-centered component, the authors break down the two themes, communication *of* sustainability and communication *about* sustainability, into the direction of the communication flow, the communication's function, and the measures of the communication's effectiveness. With respect to **communication of sustainability**, the direction of communication is transmissive in nature and focuses on a one directional pathway of sender of information to the receiver of that information and is typically characterized as communication from one to many. As the demands of society for sustainable action grow, actors may see the need for communication *of* sustainability as a measure to defend or legitimize their behavior. Corporate sustainability reporting is one example of this type of communication. **Communication about sustainability**, on the other hand, is deliberative, horizontal, and features an information flow from many providers to many receivers.

The function of these two types of communication also differ: the function of communication *of* sustainability seeks to transmit information and knowledge about a particular objective that has already been defined by the information transmitter. The function of communication *about* sustainability is the production of intersubjective knowledge or information, as well as the development of shared concepts and frameworks and is deliberative in nature. Objectives, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Schneidewind, U.; Feindt, P.H.; Meister, H.-P.; Minsch, J.; Schulz, T.; Tscheulin, J. Institutionelle Reformen für eine Politik der Nachhaltigkeit: Vom Was zum Wie in der Nachhaltigkeitsdebatte (in German). *GAIA* 1997, 6, 182–196. As cited in Newig, J., Schulz, D., Fischer, D., Hetze, K., Laws, N., Lüdecke, G. and Rieckmann, M. (2013). *Communication Regarding Sustainability: Conceptual Perspectives and Exploration of Societal Subsystems*. *Sustainability*, 5(7), pp.2976-2990.

<sup>2</sup> Godemann, J.; Michelsen, G. Sustainability Communication—An Introduction. In *Sustainability Communication: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Theoretical Foundation*; Godemann, J., Michelsen, G., Eds.; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, New York, NY, USA, 2011; pp. 3–11. As cited in Newig, J., Schulz, D., Fischer, D., Hetze, K., Laws, N., Lüdecke, G. and Rieckmann, M. (2013). *Communication Regarding Sustainability: Conceptual Perspectives and Exploration of Societal Subsystems*. *Sustainability*, 5(7), pp.2976-2990.

would be defined through the deliberative process and not necessarily be set by any one information transmitter as is the case in communication *of* sustainability.

Measuring the effectiveness these communication pathways is different. In the case of communication *of* sustainability, success is reached if the objective of the sender is fulfilled, for example convincing people to reduce their carbon footprint by eating less meat or taking public transportation more often instead of driving their car. However, in the case of communication *about* sustainability, the success and effectiveness is measured by the quality of the discourse and the compatibility of concepts to sustainability. This pathway is very much about the process and not only the results of the process.

The authors of the article also depict the types of actions actors might take in each particular communication pathway and separate them into three categories: 1) communication *counterproductive to* sustainability; 2) neutral communication *on* sustainability; and 3) communication *for* sustainability.

Examples of the three above-mentioned categories in relation to communication *of* sustainability would be the act of greenwashing in sustainability reporting, which the authors classify as being counterproductive to sustainability. Occupying the neutral category is scientific communication of 'facts' and the public's understanding of science. In the category of communication for sustainability, communication *of* sustainability could be characterized as educating students or the public on sustainability.

With respect to communication *about* sustainability, the category example that would be counterproductive to sustainability would be active discourses that are oriented to disrupt sustainable development. A neutral example of communication *about* sustainability would be scientific debate and deliberation about sustainability related-phenomena. Moving to the transformative category and communication *for* sustainability, an example of communication *about* sustainability in this context would be participatory dialogues focusing on sustainability issues, such as Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

These pathways were elaborated on in the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop by Professor Kleinen-von Königslöw. Apart from discussing these types of communication avenues, she also discussed about the overall importance of sustainable development communication by outlining the challenges it faces, and thereby highlighted the fact that that which makes communication important also makes it very difficult.

Some of the **inherent difficulties in being able to communicate sustainability and sustainable development** are: 1) the complexity of sustainable development and the scientific and political uncertainties that are involved; 2) the ambivalence of sustainability issues and the interdependence of different SDGs, which pose many conflicts of interests and values; 3) difficult implementation of solutions, with multiple stakeholders on different levels coupled with the fact that policies are useless without public support are all contributing factors; and 4) the sheer enormity of necessary efforts, which often leads to frustration, hopelessness, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the main learnings to come from communication of sustainability are that the overall impact on knowledge and attitudes are limited in affecting the actions of people. There are also important barriers to knowledge transmission that exist, such as knowledge "hooks" that have an everyday relevance for people or bring personally relevant issues to the fore, as more information only generates issue fatigue. Also very relevant in communication of sustainability is the knowledge-

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<sup>3</sup> Mulholland, E (2018). "Communication of Sustainable Development and the SDGs: Strategies and Good Practices", 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop Report, November 2018, ESDN Office, Vienna.

action disconnect, which posits that the guilt a person might feel towards a certain issue, i.e. climate change, leads to selective exposure and the embracing of alternative explanations that fit more in line with what a person wants to believe, or already believes. In the same line as feelings of guilt regarding issues, feelings of hopelessness have very similar outcomes; people tend towards selective exposure. Feelings of fear regarding impacts on one's social standing can also have negative impacts, in that it creates polarization on sustainability issues. Therefore, the main take-away message is:

**Knowledge alone does not motivate action. Communication needs to take into account everyday concerns of people and decision-makers, encourage social norms and identities that promote desired actions, increase perceptions of response-efficacy, and move from communications of sustainability to promoting communication *about* sustainability.<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2: Communication in the 2030 Agenda and at the UN level

This chapter focuses on communication in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the activities and initiatives the UN is undertaking to communicate the SDGs. This chapter, therefore, looks into the 2030 Agenda itself, as well as into the UN SDG Action Campaign.

### Communication in the 2030 Agenda

In order to be able to understand the important role communication has in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda for SD needs to be more closely examined. While the overall 2030 Agenda does not make an explicit reference to communication, or how communicating the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs should be undertaken by the UN or its Member States, messages of communication can still be inferred. Since the 2030 Agenda aims to not be overly prescriptive, and because the contexts in each country can be vastly different, such a clearly outlined communication strategy would probably have been inappropriate. UN Member States are in the best position when it comes to understanding their needs and what works best for them regarding communication strategies and challenges.

However, despite the lack of a blueprint on how to effectively communicate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to all stakeholders, the 2030 Agenda does stress the importance of incorporating every facet of society, and leaving no one behind.

The UN and the 2030 Agenda make it clear that the role of the state and national governments will be paramount to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. **Communication and awareness raising for the SDGs is embedded in effective implementation.** As paragraph 45 of the 2030 Agenda alludes to, it is the main role of national governments to be able to communicate the 2030 Agenda to their policymakers, in order to create policies that take the SDGs into account. However, this line of communication must be taken further, so that those levels closest to civil society, the local and municipal levels, as well as other stakeholder groups are also informed on priorities, as they will be the agents of 'on the ground change' regarding meeting SDG targets.

§45 We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. **Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others.**

Although the official 2030 Agenda does not delve into specifics regarding communication and awareness raising, as it is seen as mainly a country specific challenge. As such, countries and national governments are the more appropriate choices when it comes to knowing how to communicate and with whom to communicate. Since no two countries have the same set of circumstances, it is hard to prescribe a 'one-size-fits-all' approach when it comes to communication and awareness raising strategies. Much like the implementation of the 2030 Agenda into national legislation depends on the contexts of each country, so, too, do the communication and awareness raising activities and strategies.

# UN Communication of the SDGs

## General UN Communication and Awareness Raising Tools

While the official 2030 Agenda may not explicitly mention communication and awareness raising strategies regarding the SDGs in the actual text, that does not mean the UN itself is not undertaking communication and awareness raising activities. The UN has a [website dedicated to sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda, and the SDGs](#). The website gives readers an overview of the 2030 Agenda and how it is a more ambitious than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs themselves have their own [page](#), where visitors can click on each goal to learn more about it and its indicators.

The UN also has developed an initiative called the “**Be the Change Initiative**”, which provides an opportunity for everyone to “walk the talk” when it comes to the SDGs. This Initiative guides and encourages people to live more sustainably at work and at home by changing consumption patterns, using active transport, such as cycling, and buying local foods. Everyone is welcome to participate, as every little step helps when it comes to becoming involved in the realization of the SDGs. The Be the Change Initiative has also made a guide available, entitled [The Lazy Person’s Guide to Saving the World](#), which lays out the small things people can do in their everyday lives that can help them in reducing their impact on the environment, or increase their impacts for social justice issues, which all contribute towards reaching the SDGs.

## UN SDG Action Campaign

The UN SDG Action Campaign is a special inter-agency initiative of the UN Secretary-General mandated to scale up, broaden and sustain the global movement of action for the SDGs. This is done by mobilizing and inspiring individuals and organization to take action on the SDGs.

Communicating to the general public, and with a strong focus on youth, about the SDGs is the core of the Campaign’s work, in order to raise awareness and engagement of individuals and organizations in the global movement that is taking action for the SDGs.

The Action Campaign does this by mobilizing – Calls to action, coordinating a Global Day of Action, which seeks to inspire, leveraging the power of arts, music, new media and new technologies to increase the visibility of SDG doers and the actions they take, as well as attract new audiences to be part of the movement. Every action, campaign, activation is open and everyone can take part. Actions are turned into toolboxes and guidelines, generating an ever-growing resource hub for everyone to join the Action for the SDGs.

Some of the Action Campaign’s key communication tools include:

- **Digital platforms – dedicated website** and **micro-sites** that provide resources, a space for partners to share their initiatives with the global movement, and **social media**.
- **New technologies – Virtual reality** and **360 media, experimental Augmented Reality**
- **Crowd-sourced content – narrative photo and film series** created by individuals and organizations from across the world.

Some specific examples of the communication activities of the Action Campaign include **SDG Storytelling, crowdsourcing and training programs**. One such program is the [MYWorld360](#), which invites youth worldwide to become a 360° SDG media creator. The [Young People Program](#) is another example of a communication activity that seeks to bring renowned photographers and journalists to work with young students on photo and video series on SDGs in their communities.

The **Butterfly Effect Campaign**, #SpreadyourGoals is a transmedia campaign combining illustration, geolocalized advertising, alternate reality and cinema spots to invite young people to interact with the Goals and voice their support.

The **Global Day of Action** is another activity that seeks to leverage the anniversary of the SDGs to mobilize and drive attention to action for the SDGs locally and globally.

When it comes to establishing whether the SDG Action Campaign has been successful in its communication activities, the Campaign uses two key indicators. They look at two key indicators: 1) The number of people joining an action, a campaign, or being exposed to it; and 2) The capacity of reaching out to new audiences/outside the usual suspects. The tools the Campaign uses to measure these key indicators are Google and open social media analytics, as well as participant surveys.

## Chapter 3: European National Level Good Practice Examples in SDG Communication

This chapter looks at a few good practice cases from a few select European countries that were present at the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop. The countries featured below found varied ways in which to communicate the SDGs. Finland, for example, uses social media for its outreach and communication, because it is effective and requires very few resources compared to other communication activities and campaigns. France, on the other hand, has supported a very unique project that communicates along many different channels, such as social media, documentaries, meeting active people all over the world, etc. In Germany, communication was identified as being one of the main areas for improvement regarding the country's Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS). Iceland is also unique when it comes to communication, because they launched a countrywide television campaign to promote the SDGs and it aired on national TV.

### Finland: Maximizing Visibility with Minimum Resources

**Finland effectively makes use of social media campaigns** to communicate and raise awareness regarding the SDGs in an effort to maximize the viability of the SDGs with as few resources as possible. The Prime Minister's Office, which is responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Finland, makes many different attempts to communicate the SDGs by using many different platforms and types of media. In addition to more traditional communication tools that are employed, such as a website that acts as a home base and a newsletter that is sent out 1-2 per month to 3,000 recipients. Finland and the Prime Minister's Office is also active on social media outlets like Twitter and Facebook, where they have 2,600 and 4,500 followers respectively, which given the country's population of 5.5 million, makes up more than 1% of the population following the country's activities regarding sustainable development.

Social media campaigns and developing tools that make it easy for people to engage with campaigns, actions, initiatives, etc. are relatively easy to create when it comes to resource demand (funding, people, expertise, etc.). In using social media, or any communication method for the SDGs and sustainable development, it is worthwhile to know who the audience is and what matters to them. Being able to have diverse communication avenues that are open to many different stakeholder groups, helps to ensure that more societal actors are reached and brought on board.

Finland does this very well when one considers its entire Sustainable Development Strategy, "Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development", has its own platform "Commitment2050", where it calls upon all societal actors within Finland to undertake some kind of action to help with sustainable development and commit to those actions on the platform. To date, there are 1,007 commitments that are being made towards sustainable development, many of which come from companies, municipalities, schools and organizations. "Commitment2050" is a tool that allows stakeholders to make concrete actions that then have measurable results. Through the commitments being made, more visible change is happening in Finland.

The Commitment2050 service is part of the Society's Commitment to Sustainability working model, which is one of Finland's key tools for implementing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More than 1,000 operational commitments have already been made through the service. So far, they have mostly been made by companies, municipalities, schools and organizations.

In an effort to more actively engage with Finnish citizens, The Prime Minister's Office announced the release of the Commitment2050 service for citizens at the Prime Minister's "Finnish Climate Actions" discussion, which took place in December 2018. Using the service, anyone who wishes can draw up a

personal plan and commit to reducing their carbon footprint. In the background of the unique new service is the [online Sitra Lifestyle Test](#) (available in English), which has already been completed more than half a million times.

The Commitment2050 service and the Lifestyle Test calculates a user's carbon footprint and points them towards everyday actions that are specifically tailored to their needs. The 100 different actions in the service help users to reduce their carbon footprint one step at a time. Users can select the actions they are prepared to commit to. A similar service offering people tailored advice on halving their carbon footprints is not yet available in other countries.

Users can find inspiration for a more sustainable everyday life by looking at other Finns' plans. Users can also post their commitment on the service, share it on social media, and inspire others to get involved. Commitments can also always be updated, and the service can be set to remind users about the progress of their actions. For those users worried about anonymity, the service allows users to make commitments using a pseudonym.

"Around 68 per cent of our everyday impact on climate change comes from how we live and move around, what we eat and what kinds of goods and services we consume. If, for example, one adult in every Finnish family cuts their emissions by 20 per cent by the year 2030, we will achieve a total of 37 per cent of Finland's emissions reduction target," says Project Director Markus Terho from Sitra.<sup>5</sup>

"Every individual plan is important and contributes to the national emissions reduction target. By making sustainable everyday choices, we can also improve our quality of life and health while saving time and money. The easiest way to achieve significant reductions in emissions is by avoiding unnecessary air travel, switching to electricity produced using renewable energy sources, adding more local vegetables, berries and fish to our meals and buying and renting used goods," says Chief Specialist Anu Mänty from the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>6</sup>

The national launch campaign for the Commitment2050 service began on 27 December 2018, and it is visible to citizens via digital channels and social media, as well as in street advertising. In addition to the citizens' campaign, companies, cities and other organizations are also encouraged to participate in making a personal commitment.

## France: Energy Observer Project

With respect to a very unique project, France had the idea to communicate the SDGs in such a way as to take people on a journey, and so the French Government supported the Energy Observer Project, which is a project that seeks to draw attention to more sustainable modes of transportation, as the Project takes place on a hydrogen and solar panel powered boat that will travel the world's oceans over the course of six years. The project helps citizens and stakeholders discover the 17 SDGs and links them to concrete stories of women and men who invent and act to create the world of tomorrow.

Energy Observer is more than a boat, as the 22 member crew and team of Energy Observer also create documentaries for international and national broadcast. The first season consisted of 8 documentaries that were each 52 minutes long and shot in 2017 and 2018. In addition to making documentaries, the crew also keeps logbooks, in which they share their day-to-day work and their encounters with engaged people. Since 2017, Energy Observer has generated a massive media coverage:

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<sup>5</sup> [https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/current-issues/article/-/asset\\_publisher/10616/suomessa-avataan-kansalaispalvelu-ilmastonmuutoksen-torjuntaan](https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/current-issues/article/-/asset_publisher/10616/suomessa-avataan-kansalaispalvelu-ilmastonmuutoksen-torjuntaan).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- €18 million advertising space equivalent
- 4,500 media coverage in more than 60 countries
- 1 Billion people reached in 2018

Apart from the documentaries, Energy Observer has also developed a web series that features two minute long positive and inspiring videos, which highlight a concrete solution to a problem through a human prism. Each story visually identifies at least 2 SDGs in an effort to raise awareness and help people learn about the SDGs, in general. 70 such short videos have already been made and it is hoped that with at least 10 European nations involved this number will reach beyond 300 episodes per year.

Energy Observer has also established a platform and app as a way for countries to promote their own local solutions in an effort to help these countries educate their citizens. The app helps find events that deal with certain SDGs, so that people can find initiatives that align with their interests.

Energy Observer also has sponsored posts and stories on social networks to generate more organic outreach and allows them to be cross posted by Energy Observer's partners and shared by the community. A digital channel will aggregate the SOLUTIONS web series and other Energy Observer contents (documentary series, podcasts, articles, Energy Observer log book, and more). A non-exclusive multiplatform broadcast, hosted by Energy Observer's partners: Groupe Canal+, Molotov and Alchimie, are already airing its contents on amazon, Orange, Vodafone, AppleTV, Samsung, LG, etc., to optimize the overall reach of Energy Observer and all its associated activities and initiatives.

## Germany: Communication, Participation, and Policy-making

At the beginning of November 2018, Germany published its review on its Sustainability Strategy (adopted in January 2017), where one of the key aspects of this update had to do with communication, which is of essential importance for politics, in general, as well as for sustainability. In order to communicate better, stakeholders need to be involved in more participatory processes. Therefore, Germany has developed different avenues for citizens and stakeholders to participate in policy-making.

In the case of Germany, some of the paths that it has chosen to proceed along regarding its communication of sustainability are:

- Forum "Sustainability"
- "Dialogue Forum"
- "Dialogue Group"
- SDG Communication Campaign
- Online Dialogue "Action Programme for Insect Protection"

The **Forum "Sustainability"** was newly established in 2016. It serves as a forum for the Federal Government to exchange views with key players on the status and future of the implementation of the German Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) and the 2030 Agenda. Once a year, over 100 experts come together from civil society, business, science, churches, German Federal States, and municipalities to make sure that their voices are heard. All sustainability coordinators from all ministries are also present. Unsurprisingly, experts strongly underlined that youth participation must be strengthened and that communication on sustainability, in general, must be improved.

In addition to the Forum "Sustainability", the Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry for Development jointly organize the **"Dialogue Forum"** on the 2030 Agenda. In this forum, views are

regularly exchanged with interested stakeholders on efforts to achieve sustainable development at the international level.

Another interesting means of communication is the new "**Dialogue Group**". With the help of this group, the Federal Government intends to involve civil society more transparently in the preparation of the meetings of the State Secretaries Committee for Sustainable Development. The Committee of State Secretaries is the central steering body of the GSDS.

The **SDG Communication Campaign of the Federal Press Office** will be dealing more with the suggestion made in the German Peer Review of the GSDS to improve and intensify its communication regarding sustainable development. The Federal Government will, therefore, continue its communication activities and has finally succeeded in ensuring a communication budget for sustainability.

With these resources, the Federal Press Office is currently designing a Communication Strategy. One element of the strategy, which will also involve classical marketing instruments, such as posters and ads, is a website. The idea is to explain the SDGs in an understandable way. These articles that are intended to be featured are currently being discussed. However, in the end, the Federal Government will present one of the 17 SDGs every month and explain why sustainable action affects everyone and what the status of implementation is in Germany.

## **Iceland: Television Campaign for the SDGs**

In Iceland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a television campaign to raise awareness for the SDGs within Iceland. The Government recognized that Iceland will not reach the SDGs if its citizens did not know about them. Hence, the government wanted media campaigns and decided on videos and came up with the idea to create a news program called "Good News from the Future", which transports viewers to the year 2030 and how the world is at that time, or how everyone would like it to be. It aired in print media and in movie theaters. The target was to reach 80% of viewers by airing 3 different videos 9 times. The videos aired in March 2018. When measuring the success of the television campaign: 85% saw at least one video one time, 45% saw them 2 times, and 32% saw it the 3rd time it aired. However, the government did not only want to know if people saw the videos, but also wanted to know more, so they conducted a survey in order to measure the awareness the television campaign raised, which asked questions regarding knowledge about the SDGs, whether they had seen the SDG television campaigns, etc. All of these indicators showed positive improvements after the television campaign aired.

In addition to the "Good News from the Future" the government also made a mini-series that follows a 15-year-old girl and her experiences living with both a rural and urban family in Uganda.

## Chapter 4: Stakeholder Good Practice Examples in Communication

This chapter is similar to Chapter 3, but looks at the stakeholder side of communication and how they communicate the SDGs to their audiences and includes helpful advice on how to tell good stories to maximize information and objectives one wishes to impart to their target audience.

### Pulse of Europe

Pulse of Europe is a movement that seeks to contribute its share to ensure that Europe, now and in the future, remains united and democratic and continues to be a community in which regard for human rights, the rule of law, freedom of speech and assembly, as well as tolerance and respect, remain integral parts of its essence. The movement has no specific political program, but a clear pro-European attitude. The movement seeks to connect with its self-conception to bring people together to talk about Europe and get them to listen to one another, which creates an offline, shared experience. The movement also seeks to spread knowledge about Europe and its institutions and attempts to reduce the gap between the EU and its citizens. Because Pulse of Europe strives to be non-partisan, it has a positive reputation that makes use of more than 500 activists and hundreds more supporters. Demonstrations all over Europe in many European cities allow people to tell their own personal story of Europe. Pulse of Europe is unique in that the protests it conducts are not necessarily in response to something that has gone wrong or to some unfavorable ruling, but rather stages protests about issues that are important, as they argue that it is already too late to start protesting once things have already gone wrong.

One of the projects that Pulse of Europe has launched that is different from protesting for a united Europe, is the European HausParlamente (House Parliament) Project, which is a way for a potential person, a host, to invite 5-8 friends or acquaintances to their home to debate on topics that are relevant to Europe. Pulse of Europe provides the host with a DIY toolkit, which asks the participants to address certain European issues. Through the group discussions on the provided topic, Pulse of Europe is able to collect many different answers and viewpoints on topics, whereby it processes them into formal results and formal advice for EU politicians. EU politicians then give substantial feedback on these results.

For Example, in round 1 of a typical House Parliament Project, the questions were:

1. Should the EU substantially change its Foreign and Security Policy in the light of “America First”?
2. Does the EU need a foreign secretary with decision-making authority?
3. Should a European army replace the national armies?
4. If no consensus can be reached among all member states, should member states that agree on certain positions be allowed to formulate EU foreign policy)?
5. Is a closer relationship with other strategic partners (China, Russia) advisable?

The political partner for this round was the German Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office, Michael Roth. The results of this iteration of the HausParlamente Project saw 211 HausParlamente take place and were estimated to involve 1,200 participants, where 84% gave positive feedback and where 54% think a new foreign policy is needed.

## Netzwerk Weitblick

When it comes to **expert knowledge**, “[Netzwerk Weitblick](#)” (“network foresight and vision”) provides knowledge to journalists, aiming to support quality as well as quantity of reporting on topics relating to sustainability. The SDGs are the basis of the Network’s understanding of sustainability.

The main target audience of Netzwerk Weitblick is journalists. The Network provides trainings on all aspects of the SDGs and teaches how to communicate them in media. The Network communicates the SDGs in such a way that they focus on them as being one aspect, rather than 17 different ones, so that the SDGs become as commonplace as mentioning the nutritional value of foods or whether food is genetically engineered. It is also useful to find a link to the daily life of people.

A representative from Netzwerk Weitblick, Ms. Heike Janßen, was present at the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop and presented on the Network’s position on what constitutes a typically good story and how people can become better at telling good stories to their target audiences in a way that is more effective at getting them to change behaviors or care more about certain issues.

Ms. Janßen shared that for journalists expert knowledge is important in telling a compelling story, because most journalists are generalists, and topics like climate change and sustainable investment are complex. Because journalists do not have the time to become experts on the diverse topics they may write about, they are easily influenced by experts in their writing fields, which can lead to the journalist being influenced by lobby groups that do deal with specific issues on a regular basis. Therefore, if journalists are a main target audience of policymakers, then they should keep this knowledge in mind when attempting to reach out to journalists.

Ms. Janßen also touched upon the **importance of knowing one’s target group**, which becomes especially important regarding sustainable development and the SDGs, as this topic is difficult to make appealing, such as topics that relate to war, sex, crime and catastrophes. These topics tend to attract the attention of people. However, no one wants to listen to stories about climate change or loss of biodiversity, dwindling food resources or similar things, as these types of stories often cause feelings of horror, powerlessness, and even guilt. Guilt feels bad to people, because it means they would have to change their habits, but mentalities, such as: “meat tastes good”, and “it is so nice to book a trip to the Bahamas, or elsewhere where it is warm and beautiful” are in direct conflict with these feelings of guilt and people tend to ignore the feelings of guilt.

Another important aspect that Ms. Janßen cautioned participants to keep in mind when communicating is that people tend to believe things that seem to fit their core beliefs. In a more and more complex world of systems interacting, e.g. energy supply systems and transport sector having influence on air quality and public health, many prefer simple, linear solutions like straight denial, while some people prefer “truths” that don’t require them to change their lifestyle, question their habits, or their ways of thinking. People need to be convinced and excited. To stand a better chance of success, it is better to understand their core beliefs and to see how to shift their respective conclusions away from bad habits and towards better action for their own benefit. Therefore, in identifying a target group for communicating a particular idea, e.g. the SDGs, the story should relate to the target’s daily life, such as plastics that go into the oceans return in the food they eat.

Netzwerk Weitblick also focuses on the characteristic of good storytelling and the importance of having a good topic. Some of the ingredients that make a good topic are topics that are of public interest. The more current the topic, event, or discussion, the more likely it becomes that people connect with it.

Ms. Janßen, therefore, outlined the types of ingredients that make good stories good. A great story has a good dramaturgy. Stories with the following ingredients are also interesting for journalists, if one wants them to tell one's stories. Great stories have a hero with a problem that is interesting or that represents problems that many people have. The heroine or hero has to overcome big hurdles or fight mighty opponents who want to prevent him or her from reaching the goal. He or she has a brilliant idea to reach the goal or to solve the problem. The idea or invention can be very simple, so that a lot of people can copy it, or it is so brilliant, that we love to hear about that and learn. The hero/ine can be a star, a politician, or one's own neighbor.

A great story is told in a simple way that uses an engaging and accessible narrative that is not technical or distant. The core of the story must be recognizable, which means leave out irrelevant details and concentrate on providing relevant facts for the audience. A good narrative should not be dividing and could be based on all people in the world facing the same big problem(s) and acting together to overcome them. Telling stories that are constructive in nature are also useful, as people who read or watch a lot of stories on seemingly insurmountable issues tend to become overwhelmed, become pessimistic, or passive over time. Consequently, they do not believe they or anyone else could change the world for the better and a lot of grief and depression is caused by the endless description and news of collapsing ecosystems, extreme weather events, crop failures, war on migration, etc.

Constructive, or solution-orientated journalism on the other hand, also called constructive storytelling, sheds light on how to address the challenges with viable solutions. Constructive journalism is critical, as it names and shows problems, but also offers a solution or a possibility for people to spring into action. Constructive journalism seeks to facilitate a public debate not only around important problems, but also around possible solutions to improve the quality and the tone of public discussions.

## Project17

**Project17** and the first issue of their magazine "seventeen goals" is the first SDG magazine in Germany and features a positive, motivating, inspiring, and interesting mix of stories, ranging from old/young/big/small, local/global/art/economy/science that offer a fresh, modern and emotional feel to the SDGs in an attempt to connect them more to people's daily life.

The magazine's articles also show the SDG icons to alert readers to the SDGs the article touches upon. The articles also offer calls to action and tips for the reader on how to participate, support, and become involved with the SDGs.

In raising awareness the magazine is sponsored by ZEIT Publishing House, which has a high distribution in the DACH region, as well as a high degree of credibility and relevance. The [Project17 website](#) has also seen over 5,000 hits since it launched.

## Chapter 5: Insights and Recommendations for Better and more Effective SDG Communication

At the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop, participants were asked to participate in interactive group work, where they were split up into different groups to discuss how good practice cases could be linked to the communication of the SDGs, as well as the future needs that communicating the SDGs may have in different contexts. A total of 6 groups identified the needs for better and more effective SDG communication and from those needs developed recommendations on how to achieve them in practice. Several recommendations that were generated from the ESDN Workshop are listed below:

### Recommendations

#### 1) Know the target audience

One of the main needs that was identified by the interactive groups at the ESDN Workshop was **the need to know to whom one was communicating, or to whom one wished to communicate, as knowing the target audience will ensure a greater degree of communication ‘success’,** however that may be defined by those doing the communicating, than using the same communication strategy on many different target groups. For example, scientists and researchers wishing to communicate their, more likely than not, abstract and complex findings regarding a sustainability topic to their scientific and academic peers would most likely not need to change the way in which their research is presented. On the other hand, attempting to communicate these very same complex and abstract concepts to the non-scientific community would most likely not be the most effective way to impart knowledge that leads to a change or increased awareness of the topic, as the needs of the non-scientific community could be different to the needs of the scientific community. More simply put, the scientific community may need the detailed knowledge of findings, whereas non-scientific audiences may need to know the basics of what the findings want them to do, such as eating less meat to reduce one’s carbon footprint, as well as constructive ways on how they could accomplish this.

**Finland’s recently developed tool** to help all Finnish people reduce their carbon footprints, the **Commitment2050 service**, which was mentioned in Chapter 3 under Finland, would be such an example of knowing the target audience, as the tool addresses all ordinary people and takes an abstract idea and concept, like “Society’s Commitment to Sustainable Development”, which serves as Finland’s sustainable development strategy. Instead of producing only “Society’s Commitment” as a document, the Prime Minister’s Office has gone further with this online testing tool and has taken one aspect of it, which in this case is a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and made it easier for a larger audience to engage with it. By knowing their audience, the Prime Minister’s Office is able to:

- 1) raise awareness on the topic of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions;
- 2) make it accessible and understandable to a large majority of people;
- 3) allows the test takers to see how individual daily actions impacts their individual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions;
- 4) uses that information to not only compare the test taker to Finland’s average, thereby potentially sparking a desire to do better if a test taker finds they are above the Finnish average, but also offer advice on how test takers could further reduce their footprint instead of leaving the test taker with an abstract number that is without context; and
- 5) the Commitment2050 service tool actively seeks to involve test takers to use the knowledge they have gained, the advice they have received to become proactive and commit to making changes, which would then allow the test takers to participate in “Society’s Commitment to Sustainable Development” and use what they have learned to make their own commitment in not only reducing their own carbon footprint, but also that of Finland’s, which reinforces more positive feelings of togetherness.

The helpful way in which this particular tool has been set up, by giving helpful advice based on test taker results, and, given the audience it seeks to address, seems to avoid the pitfall of making the audience feel guilty, which was mentioned by Professor Kleinen-von Königslöw (as outlined in Chapter 1 above) when it comes to communication, as there is no inherent ranking or value judgement that is formed based on test taker results apart from where the stand compared to the national average. The interactive way in which the tool seeks to encourage its audience to make small changes to their lifestyles by checking off changes they feel they can make, such as by turning the heat down by 1 degree Celsius in the winter, shows that making a difference can be easy and effective, as it lowers the carbon footprint, and money-saving. The tool, therefore, takes what could be potentially guilty feelings and channels them into positive actions that the test taker can feel good about on multiple levels.

This also reinforces what was mentioned in Chapter 4 and at the ESDN Workshop by Ms. Janßen from Netzwerk Weitblick regarding **constructive framings of issues or problems**, as it is not enough to merely mention them, since it leaves people more prone and susceptible to feelings of guilt. Therefore, in addition to knowing one's audience, a constructive framing of communication is also critical, as it not only names and shows problems, in this case carbon footprints, but also offers a solution or a possibility for people to spring into action to change whatever it is that is perceived as problematic. In this case it would be Finnish citizens springing into action to do what they can to limit their carbon footprints based off of the constructive feedback and suggestions provided by the online test.

When communicating, it is vitally important to know the target audience and their needs and identify how those needs can be addressed before beginning a communication process, as being able to better and more effectively address those particular needs will most likely result in more instances of whatever the communicator's desired objective is. In the case of Finland, the desired objective was for people to reduce their carbon footprint. The tool is arguably very unique, in that it informs people they do indeed have a need, albeit a potentially unconscious need, i.e. reducing their carbon footprint. The tool also argues along many lines as to why people should take measures to reduce their carbon footprints, such as by saving money. Even climate change deniers would most likely be hard-pressed to say no to saving money.

Another unique aspect of Finland's tool is that it also allows the Prime Minister's Office, or the government, in general, to share the responsibility of reducing overall CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for Finland. The sharing of responsibilities with stakeholders and incorporating them and their ideas more frequently to reach objectives was seen as an effective method of addressing communication needs by Workshop participants.

## 2) Positive communication

As already briefly addressed in the above example, **positive communication** instead of communication based on fear and guilt have **higher rates of success in motivating people to make a desired change**. Germany is approaching positive communication in a very interactive manner, seeking to involve many actors in order to better communicate the government's goals and measures, as this is often very abstract and intangible to most people, as they are so far removed from the process.

In order to overcome that distance, Germany seeks to incorporate more initiatives that are based on citizen inclusion, participation and active contribution in policy-making. As was seen in Chapter 3, Germany uses a range of different dialogue forums and groups to bring society and government

together when striving to communicate and receive inputs and feedback regarding sustainable development.

By allowing citizens a more active role in the policy-making process, Germany seeks to positively spin the way the government communicates with its constituents. Communication cannot be seen without also providing citizens with the means to have a say and to give input. There is not one panacea, but rather a full range of possible pathways to choose from.

### 3) Good storytelling

In chapter 4, the characteristics that make up good storytelling were discussed as they are also very important in any form of communication, as **good stories have wide appeal and are more likely to garner attention.**

The Energy Observer Project in France is a good case example of a good story, as it takes the concept of more sustainable modes of transportation and has done something very unique to raise awareness and communicate about sustainable development and the SDGs. The entire premise of the project has the markings of a good story, as it takes the audience with them along the journey across the world's oceans. Energy Observer is also a good story, because it is able to make many further stories in the form of documentaries, crew logbooks, and short, but inspirational, short videos that deal directly with the SDGs, which further seek to take viewers onboard the project.

Also conforming to the concept of a good story and good storytelling is that the project does not divide people, but tends to bring them together, especially at the places the boat has visited, as well as through the media.

### 4) Connecting and mainstreaming the SDGs in everyday life

Another important need that was identified by Workshop participants was that the **SDGs and sustainable development are not very well-connected to people's everyday lives**, nor are they really in any sort of mainstream media or mainstream consciousness of most people, meaning that the SDGs stubbornly remain a topic for the society's elites.

Potential solutions for meeting this need would be for countries to have **higher coverage in the mainstream media about the SDGs**, such as by having a daily barometer that measures a country's progress, and would eventually be as commonplace and normal as seeing the stock exchange numbers.

Mainstreaming was also taken by participants to mean mainstreaming in education, and not only in educating younger students, but also for politicians and other societal actors.

However, as Chapter 4 mentioned in Netzwerk Weitblick, it is often difficult for journalists to write about sustainable development, because they are not specialists in that particular field, nor do sustainable development topics capture the public's general interest the way in which sex, drugs, violence, war, etc., does, meaning sustainable development and the SDGs, both of which are abstract concepts, have a lot to compete with for attention.

However, making the SDGs and sustainable development relatable to people and to their everyday lives is a way to make these concepts more appealing. Project17, being a magazine, attempts to do that very thing by providing positive communication about the SDGs and combining that with good storytelling by including diverse stories from diverse areas to spark interest and to foster emotional connections to the SDGs.

Iceland is also unique in its approach to mainstreaming, as the government wanted media campaigns and the videos were called, “Good News from the Future”, which transports viewers to the year 2030 and how the world is at that time, or how everyone would like it to be. Not only has Iceland experimented with the idea of featuring the SDGs in the mainstream news media, but they have even took a unique and very positive spin on it, which, as mentioned before in Chapter 4 from Netzwerk Weitblick, is important, because fear and guilt tactics are not as effective as positivity at encouraging people to make changes.

Pulse of Europe is also an interesting case example in communication in that while they do not necessarily target the SDGs, they still attempt to bring people together, regardless of political ideology, to support a united Europe. The House Parliament Project, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is a good case of this, as it brings something that should be more mainstreamed than it most likely is, i.e. the idea and concept of the European Union, into closer connection with European Union citizens in that it asks them to foster discussions on current topics affecting the EU. These topics and decisions that the European Parliament decides upon can have very real consequences on citizens’ everyday lives.

This form of mainstreaming and dialogue could potentially also be extended to topics related to sustainable development and the SDGs for those governments that are actively doing something as a way to engage citizens and get them meeting and discussing on their own about these issues, which increases knowledge and awareness for them, and, as an added benefit, could also make citizens feel as if the government is listening and cares about what they think, as the House Parliaments receive general feedback from European parliamentarians on topics that were discussed.

## 5) Resources

As with many aspects related to sustainable development, **resources are always a primary need to doing anything; communication is no different.** For civil servants working on sustainable development related topics and the SDGs, who made up the bulk of participants at the Workshop, those resources were time, more people, and **more expertise when it comes to communication, as many civil servants are not communication experts.**

The art of being able to have this need met is very difficult, as budgets need to be approved and those oftentimes responsible for approving the budgets do not necessarily have sustainable development or the SDGs in mind when planning. One possible solution, therefore, would be to try and educate or communicate with politicians on the importance of increasing budgets specifically for the communication of sustainable development to different societal actors, as well as how supporting the SDGs is in the interest of the government’s program.

As can be seen from the literature on communication for sustainable development, from the practical examples that have been discussed, as well as the main insights from the 16<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop on communicating the SDGs, there are fundamental commonalities that make up a successful communication campaign regardless of the topic. Adhering to these fundamental commonalities of effective communication success factors, should increase the likelihood of target audiences to take up whatever objective a communicator is trying to convey. By incorporating these aspects into communication strategies, initiatives, and activities, policymakers stand a better chance of more societal actors taking an interest in sustainable development and the SDGs.

