

Preface

Since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987 at the latest, there have been intensive discussions about the vision of ‘sustainability’ together with the related concept of ‘sustainable development’ in many different areas of society as well as in the scientific community. The degree of knowledge in the general population however is not very profound. At the same time it is argued that the concept of sustainable development can only be realised if there is broad support for its implementation in the general public. In order for this to happen it is necessary for much larger segments of society to become interested in this process and to become involved in this process. The pathway to the sustainable development of our society will only be taken when it becomes clear why the concept of sustainable development is a strategy for the survival of the human race.

Against this background there has been a growing awareness in recent years of the necessity of sustainability communication. This discipline has set itself the goal not only of providing a clear and persuasive understanding of sustainable development and of campaigning for its acceptance, but above all of involving people in the process of sustainable development and motivating them to actively take part in it. The scientific discourse accompanying this development is concerned with a number of different fields in sustainability communication and attempts to provide a theoretical foundation as well as a conceptual orientation for a communicatively based process shaping sustainable development.

This Handbook is meant as a contribution to that process, strengthening the theoretical grounding of sustainability communication and by using selected examples from such issues in sustainability as climate change or biodiversity showing which role sustainability communication can play in these fields. This involves learning to identify different levels and fields of sustainability communication but also in learning to recognise its limits. Sustainability communication cannot replace the decisions taken in politics and by individuals about possible courses of action, but it can accompany and support these processes. The Handbook should be seen as a compendium showing the spectrum of sustainability communication in all of its many facets, without however claiming to offer a complete review.

As is often the case, the writing and publication of this book involved many discussions, at times controversial, not only between the two editors but also with the authors. We have the distinct impression however that this volume has not only not suffered as a result, but it has on the contrary become better. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved for their cooperation, suggestions and criticism. We would also like to thank Paul Lauer for his patience and help in editing the language of the contributions. Even though everyone who took part in the writing of this Handbook was at pains to work carefully and precisely, there may still be errors in this publication. These are of course the sole responsibility of the editors.

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