

From Environmental to Sustainability Communication: Lessons learnt from the German Craft Sector

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Abstract

In Germany, environmental communication is a topic for the chambers of crafts and its members for more than 20 years. During the 1990s, the Federal Association of Chambers of Crafts (ZDH) builds up ten environmental centers all over Germany for improving environmental knowledge of SMEs. Furthermore, 89 special programmes and 280 projects for the crafts were supported by several donor organisations like the German Environmental Foundation (DBU) until December 2004.

This paper presents some results of our cross-sectoral evaluation study which had been finished last year. The focus is set on the development from environmental to sustainability communication within the craft sector, showing both chances and risks accompanied by this change. Moreover, our findings on the quality of communication management and our conclusions for steering communication processes with SMEs will be discussed. The guiding question is: what are the lessons learnt from environmental communication in the German craft sector and how can the acceptance and support for sustainability issues of SMEs be improved?

Biographical Information

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, a change from environmental issues to sustainable development occurred at least in the impression of environmental activists and public administrators. The number of sponsored programs for sustainability increased significantly and more and more projects are initiated, claiming to support the Rio-process. This is at least true for the most developed countries in Western Europe, but there also some encouraging signs from other parts in the World, especially from Africa and Asia.

While putting the focus on Europe – and especially on Germany as one of the ‘forerunner states’ of the environmental movement – a decline of the environmental topic both in public opinion and in civil society organisations must be stated. Environment had been one of the most discussed topics in politics for more than two decades, but during the last decade, it loses its attraction. Many activists complain about this and they try to use sustainability as a substitute. In trying to do so, they are confronted with the problem to communicate sustainability. Compared to environmental issues, it seems to be more difficult to attract people for this topic and some experts suggest clarifying the concept first.

This paper presents another opportunity by discussing the targets of communication processes in general and of sustainability communication in detail. The example used to demonstrate the prospects of consultation instead of mass communication is the German craft sector and the huge variety of sponsorship programs to support environmental (and sustainability) communication here.

The first chapter offers some insights into the development of public sustainability discourses and suggests a general information transfer model for analysing and evaluating sustainability communication.

The second chapter describes different types of organised information transfer. The key arguments here support the idea of consultancy instead of mass communication or education for achieving visible progress in the diffusion of sustainability – at least in business and in the craft sector particularly.

The third chapter introduces the key elements of sustainable development as a concept that should be communicated. It is argued that the most important messages to be transferred are management rules and the addressees are primarily decision-makers. In opposite to the environmental topic, public attraction and popularisation of sustainability is not the most pressing task.

Finally, the fourth chapter offers some results from several studies on environmental communication in the craft sector, showing the problems and perspectives of using consultancy as a tool for information transfer in this sector. Moreover, the shift from environmental to sustainability communication and its impacts on the transfer process are discussed here.

For sure, the German experiences can not be generalised and simply transferred to other countries. Hence, they can be used as a portfolio for own activities and the results from our scientific studies should be discussed carefully for improving sustainability communication.

2. Sustainability Communication in Germany – and how to assess it

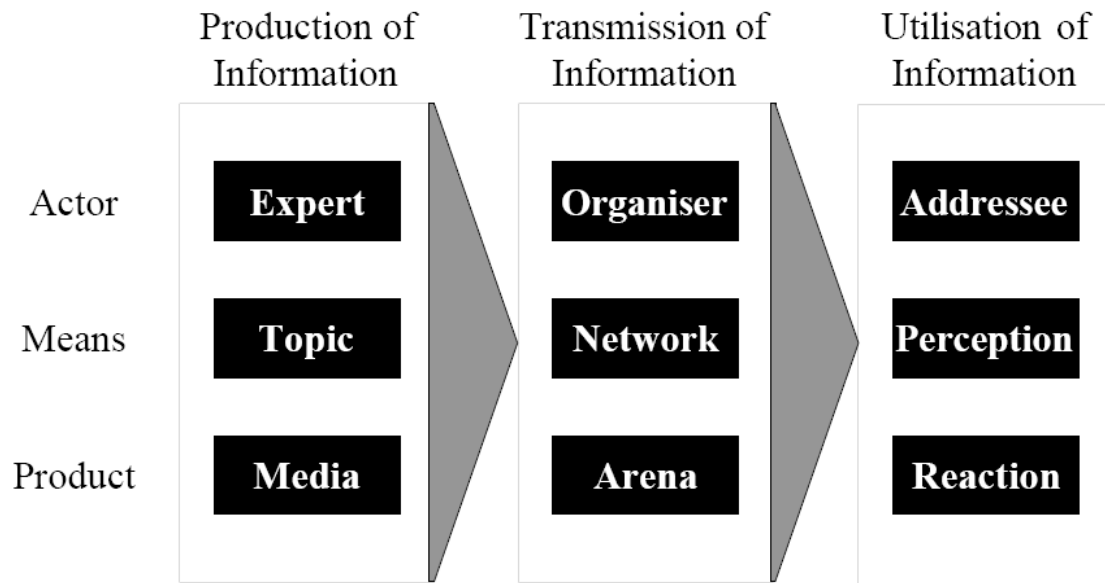
By scanning the literature on social communication processes, four key elements can be identified: the *initiator* as the source and transmitter of messages, the *message* as the carrier of meanings, the *medium* as communication channel, and, finally, the *recipient* of information and encoder of meanings (cf. Schützeichel 2004). The *communication process* itself is usually divided into three different stages: encoding, transmission, and decoding (cf. Pool & Schramm 1973; Knapp 1997). This elementary model of communication refers to the purest form of communication: the interaction of two persons. It implies the ability of the recipient to answer, making the *information transfer* from A to B an *information exchange*. Some authors even want to reserve the term 'communication' for such kind of information exchange.

In modern societies, the importance of another specific form of information transfer increases. Significant element of this transfer called *mass communication* is the organised production of information for a huge number of unknown and not personally contactable recipients. Moreover, a *functional differentiation* between initiator and transmitter of information occurred as a result of the difficult and costly transfer task. According to this, a direct response of all recipients is not possible or, at least, not expectable. Even if an immediately answer is technically practicable (as, for example, in the internet), the pure number of responses will lead to an 'information overflow' both for the transmitter (e.g. the internet provider) as well as for the initiator who has to proceed the achieved messages.

The functional differentiation of information transmitters in mass communication processes has lead to a huge amount of organisations and companies specialised on *information transfer management*: TV and radio broadcasters, telecommunication providers, publishing companies for books, journals and newspapers, post offices and other kinds of mailing services – just to mention some of the most important ones. While the literature on mass communication (cf. Grossberg et al 2006; Curran & Gurevitch 2005; Kaase & Schulz 1989) generally focuses on these transmitter organisations and its societal functions, the information transfer process and the viewpoint of the initiator is rarely mentioned. One reason for this is related with another differentiation process: in many cases, the initiator makes use of *professional experts* for editing and processing messages and meanings in the way the transmitter need it for the transfer process. By using existing information transfer systems like TV, radio or newspaper and professionals like marketing experts, journalists or news agencies, the initiator is no more involved in the information transfer process. For example: if a company wants to inform people about new products, it engages some marketing experts to produce a commercial in the requested way of the television transmitter who is supposed to broadcast it during its regular program. The company never gets in direct contact with the recipients and they seldom get any direct response from them.

For analytical reasons, these processes of organised information transfers can be put in a generalised model (figure 1) with the following key elements (see also Meyer 2000: 93ff.; Meyer 2002):

Figure 1: Model of organized Information transfer



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- The transmitter of information organises the information transfer and decides about the communication procedure (who is going to say what to whom through which media at which time);
- The control of transfer for the organiser is limited on the production and transmitting process. Under certain circumstances he or she might be able to pass the information to all members of the target group, but neither the concrete constitution of the communication arena nor the individual perception and reaction to this information within the target control can be determined. As far as the transmitter is not the initiator of the information transfer, he or she is even not responsible for the message and its meaning. In many cases the initiator is an actor outside the information transfer process;
- According to the stages of the general communication model, three different phases of the organised information transfer can be distinguished: information production, information transmission and information utilisation. In each of these phases, different actors use different means for different results. The result of information production is some kind of media (e.g. printed material, video tapes, digitalized photos), which uses the specific knowledge of the information producer on the selected topic with respect to the demands of the organiser of the information transfer. Within the second phase, this media is distributed through the available networks of the transmission organiser. By using these means, a 'communication arena' is build, giving access to a deliberated and in many parts also non-deliberated selection of people (due to the self-selection processes of information users). Finally, if addressees recognise information, they have to judge about its importance and adequate reactions. Even on the individual level this is a very complicated process and difficult to understand (cf. on this topic the scientific literature of cognitive social psychologists e.g. Hastie et al. 1980; Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky 1982).

- Although different phases of an organised information transfer can be analytically distinguished, they are inseparably connected and linked as a unit in a historical 'life course' (for life-course theory see Kohli 1978; Mayer 1987). Therefore, a successful transmission is only possible if the specific tasks in each of the three phases are fulfilled.

Regarding the global communication of sustainability, one can describe the historical information transfer process as followed:

Beginning in the early 1980s, the most respected experts (*information producer*) on development issues (*information topic*) had been invited to several different meetings all over the world (*information media*) by the World Commission on environment and development (*information initiator*). The Commission wrote down the quintessence of these meetings in a report, which had been published and spread all around the book market (*information network*). Depending on the Publishers distribution policy (*information transmitter*), these books reached a part of all book stores in the world for offering themselves on book shelves to people who might be interested in buying them (*information arena*). Some of these 'Brundlandt-reports' are sold to activists (*information addressee*) who read this books (*information perception*) and finally discussed its topic with friends and partners (*information reaction*).

During the past twenty-five years, more and more people recognised this report as an important manifesto of sustainable development and the idea spread around the whole world – using an unknown diversity of information channels and additional information transfer processes. While the *global discourse on sustainability* evolved itself as a chaotic, non-steered and endogenous driven process, the original initiator can be clearly identified: without the initiatives of the *United Nations*, nobody would talk about the idea of sustainable development. Communication on sustainability is therefore *top-down initiated*, but surely *not top-down organised* or *rational managed* towards a commonly agreed target.

By evaluating this global communication process, we have to state first, that the huge majority of mankind did not yet recognise the 'Brundtland-report' or achieve some knowledge on the idea of sustainability. In Germany (a country with a well-developed mass communication infrastructure), results from representative surveys on the public awareness of sustainability are available since the 1990s. These results show a slight increase up to 20 to 25% of the German population reporting knowledge on 'sustainable development' (cf. Kuckartz & Rheingans-Heintze 2004; Grunenberg & Kuchartz 2003; Kuckartz & Grunenberg 2002, Kuckartz 2000; Preisendörfer 1999, 1996). Hence, other studies revealed this self-reporting being not valid and probably only 50% of self-reported knowledge fits to the principles published in the 'Brundtland-report' (de Haan, Kuckartz & Rheingans-Heintze 2000: 150ff.).

Nobody knows how many people in Germany have really read the 'Brundtland-report', but by taking the number of sold copies into account, it is quite clear that number must be significantly below the 8 Million Germans who may know about the concept of sustainable development. Therefore, the pure result of the top-down information transfer initiated by the World Commission may be judged as very poor, even in developed countries like Germany or the Scandinavian states which had been strongly involved in the activities of the World Commission. And even if we add the huge amount of activities from other state and non-state actors to promote the idea of sustainability

during the last twenty years, the viewable result is sobering – the percentage of global population being aware of the concept may be clearly below ten percent.

In Germany, the reasons for these poor results had been discussed in some expert forums organised by UBA, the Federal Environmental Agency (cf. Karmanski u.a. 2002; UBA 2002; Lass & Reusswig 2002, 2000). The experts criticised the term ‘sustainability’ for being too general and too abstract, giving almost no opportunity for promoting it as a ‘vision of good life’ with clear-cut advices how to act (see also Brand 2000). In summary, the Federal Environmental Expert Council (Rat von Sachverständigen für Umweltfragen) came to the same result, blaming the missing ‘semantic attraction’ of the German word for ‘sustainability’ as one of the most important reasons why the concept can not be popularized through mass communication. One can also add the complaints in almost any publication on ‘sustainability’ about the missing clarification and preciseness of the concept, making it difficult to avoid misunderstandings in communication processes (cf. Hopwood et al 2005). In terms of the above presented model of organized information transfer, the transfer of ‘sustainability’ is supposed to be hindered by the topic and its immanent characteristics. The experts recommend solving this problem first by finding a communally shared and easy understandable definition of ‘sustainability’.

Three general aspects may be used for challenging this way of argumentation here. Firstly, scientists should use empirical data to proof their hypothesis and, in fact, no evidence can be found that communication of ‘sustainability’ failed because of its inherent features. In contrary, the openness of definition and the diplomatic language used in UN-publications seems to be an important support for communicating the concept globally. The hypothesis may be formulated: the less precisely defined a topic is the more people can adapt it to their own philosophy of life. This may explain the success of communicating ‘sustainability’ within the global political system of the UN. Hence, empirical research on this issue is still missing and no scientist should draw conclusions for directing communication processes from such a weak knowledge base.

Secondly, marketing experts may add that the way how to communicate a topic is strongly depending on the media used. In mass communication, each message must be adapted to the capability of the transmission system and to the expectations of the users of this specific transmission system. This adaptation is the task of media expert and even the worst formulated concept can be transferred to all kind of transmission systems. Moreover, even the best defined message must be simplified, visualized, actualized etc. before it can be communicated within specific transfer channels. There is no generalized ‘style’ of editing a message for all kind of media. Communicating ‘sustainability’ may be difficult and a challenge for marketing experts, but it is not impossible due to inherent characteristics of the message.

Thirdly, communicating ‘sustainability’ can be compared with environmental communication and the experiences we made in this field for more than thirty years now. In doing so, we have to state that the concept of ‘environment’ is by no means ‘clearer formulated’, ‘better defined’ or ‘easier understandable’ than ‘sustainability’ (cf. Beck 1996:120ff.). By following the ‘career’ of environmental issues in mass media from its early beginnings in the 1970s, several different phases of development can be differentiated. At least in Germany, these phases are strongly connected to ‘media-attractive’ events, in most cases hazardous accidents: Seveso 1976, Bhopal 1984,

Tschernobyl 1986, Brent Spar 1995 just to mention the most important ones (cf. Meyer 1988, Brand u.a. 1997). While all mass media organizations (TV, radio, newspapers) used these events for a huge amount of reports and analyses, environmental issues dominated the medias at least for some days, sometimes even for weeks and months (especially Tschernobyl). Moreover, the media reports highlighted the risks associated with such kind of accidents for all people living in Germany, an issue that clearly attracted everybody's attention. The rise of public environmental awareness, which finally made environment a 'valence issue' in German policy, is mainly a history of media-reported disasters.

But this is only one facet in the history of 'environmental communication' in Germany. By leaving the sector of mass media, one has also to recognize the important integrative function of environmental issues for the formation of a new social movement in the early 1970s (cf. Guggenberger 1980; Leonhard 1986; Roth & Rucht 1987; Klandermans 1989; Joppke 1993; Kriesi u.a. 1995; Roose 2003). As a result of modernization blockades and the growing generation conflict in the western hemisphere at the end of the 1960s, student protests occurred in Germany (as in France, the USA and some other western states) with the goal to establish a non-parliamentarian political opposition against the governing great coalition. While this movement quickly lost its influence after its peak in 1968, the confrontation between state and youth moved towards the nuclear power issue and long-lasting battles at the locations of several planned nuclear power stations or nuclear waste deposits (e.g. Whyl since 1973, Kalkar since 1973, Brockdorf since 1977, Gorleben since 1979, Wackersdorf since 1982). For to organize the protest against nuclear power, several new groups, clubs and associations were founded, building up the 'nucleus' of the forming environmental movement. Moreover, this movement not only succeeded in institutionalize itself in several new organizations (e.g. BBU founded 1972, BUND founded 1975, Robin Wood founded 1982), but was also able to integrate other movements (e.g. Women's Lib, Third World Groups) into a new political force and finally a new 'Green' party. In many other European states and the USA and Canada, more or less the same development can be found – and the environmental issue had always been the focus of this political process.

Regarding the 1990s and the more recent development of environmental communication, one has to mention a clear decline of its importance. In Germany, the unification of both German states can be seen as a 'turning point'. While the mass media strongly debated environmental issues as a serious problem in East Germany immediately before unification, the topic lost its attraction very quickly due to the impressive visible progression during the first years. The state invested about 30 billion Euros for environmental protection and redevelopment, but assumable the hugest progress occurred according to the decline of the East German industry (cf. Stockmann, Meyer u.a. 2001: 65ff.; Hirche 1998). Despite the remarkable positive contribution of environmental technologies for the East German labour market (cf. Blien et al 2000), more and more people (and especially the local media) blamed environmental protection for being a 'job killer' (cf. SRU 1994: 178). As a result, environmental issues lost more and more attraction and attention in East Germany (cf. Zschiesche 2003). Moreover, the decline of the environmental issue was not limited to the Eastern part of Germany and since 1993 a steadily loss of public awareness can be shown by using different indicators and different representative surveys (cf. Kuckartz & Grunenberg 2002; Schupp & Wagner 1998; de Haan & Kuckartz 1996: 64f.).

The development of the environmental movement in Germany during these time period can be described as ‘ongoing societal assimilation’ (Huber 2001: 271ff.) with reduced dynamics of movement. Simply said - the environmental movement stagnates in Germany for more than a decade now. Therefore, many activists see the concept of ‘sustainability’ as a new option to revitalise environmental ideas – despite the poor progress in popularising it. The popular concept of environment seems to have reached the limit of its mobilisation forces.

By comparing both public discourses, some differences are obvious (figure 2): while sustainability communication is initiated ‘top-down’ by the United Nations, environmental communication evolved itself ‘bottom-up’ as a result of social movements outside the political system. Although both nation states and civil societies are included, environmental communication was merely supported by civil society and sustainability communication by nation states. Mass media, as transmitter of information to a broad public, have been definitely more engaged in environmental than sustainability issues. The ‘TAZ’, for example, as the main mouthpiece of the new social movements in Germany uses the term environment more than four times as often as sustainability and sustainable development. Although the number of articles containing sustainability has been steadily grown from ten in 1986 to more than one hundred and twenty in 2002 (the year of the Johannesburg conference), it is still far below the amount of articles using the terms environment or ecology (cf. Meyer 2007).

Figure 2: Comparison of Environmental and Sustainability Communication

Environmental Communication	Criteria	Sustainability Communication
“Bottom-Up”	Initiative	“Top-Down”
Social Movements	Main Actors	United Nations
Civil Society	Main Supporters	Nation States
High involvement	Role of Mass Media	Low involvement
Emotional	Mood	Rational
Individual Risks	Main Topic	Collective Perspectives
Disasters and Threats	Issues	International Activities
Mass Mobilisation	Popularity	Elite Mobilisation

Moreover, the media reports on sustainability are extremely different to those on environmental issues especially in the 1980s (not only in the TAZ). As mentioned above, the popularisation of environment was strongly associated with disasters and the media mainly reported about the individual risks for citizens in a more or less emotionalising way. The sustainability issue is primarily discussed in relation to international activities and the main conferences (like Johannesburg) in a more rational way, highlighting the strategic perspective on managing the global future. In general, mass media is less important for sustainability communication than other transmitters in specific expert fields. We will discuss this issue in the next chapter.

3. Forms of Organised Information Transfers – Mass Communication, Education and Consultancy

In every day's conversation, nobody would deny that the most important aspect of communication is the 'message' being transferred from A to B. By listening to talking people, we try to understand what they want to tell us. Communication has no end in itself – only successful decoding of the transferred 'meaning' is making sense out of any information transfer. While there are several ways to clarify 'understanding' in personal conversation, this is a serious problem in organised information transfers to a unknown mass of people. The response of the recipient, even the feed-back of non-verbal reaction, helps us to modify the transfer mode as soon as we recognise misunderstandings of our message. This 'steering reaction' is getting increasingly difficult with a rising number of people we are talking to. Due to personal dispositions or other influences, the capability to understand varies between people and it is impossible to adapt the modes of delivery to all of them. Moreover, if one tries to reach each of the listeners, he or she has to orientate the transfer by the lowest possible level of understanding – and he or she will surely bore people with higher intellectual capacities and loose their attention (and vice versa). If one sends messages to a group of people, the aim is maximising the number of people understanding the message.

There are two ways in doing so: *homogenisation* of the recipient group or *simplification* of the message. While there are no options for homogenisation of recipients in mass communication (besides self-selection processes, e.g. switching the TV channel), the usual way for mass media organisations is to keep the message simple, visible and adaptable to our own living situations. The complexity of content is reduced to the minimal – mass media did not teach us how nuclear power stations work in detail, but it made us understand and feel the dangers and threats of an accident. In general, environmental issues were successfully transferred in this way at least during the first decades of societal discourse.

Responsible for such kind of transfer are transmission organisations, the mass media. They are experts in transferring information to masses and they know a lot about preparing messages in a way they can be understood by a maximum of people. Of course, the initiators of information transfer (e.g. a local environmental group) are interested in getting the attention of mass media (and, in a second step, the attention of huge amount of people). They make use out of these media mechanisms for increasing the number of supporters, the amount of donation, the strength of political pressure on government etc. Some organisations (e.g. Greenpeace) are even specialised on producing 'mass media suited' events. Without any doubt, this is a powerful way to earn *mass attraction* and to make both the organisation and its objectives *popular*.

But there are also limits for this way of transferring information to masses and they are associated with the *quality of the message*. Some people believed – and some even believe it today – that mass media reports are able to produce environmental awareness which will lead to environmental concerned action. There are several reasons why the results of mass media campaigns regarding this aim are poor:

1. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is simplified – general attitudes do not determine action, there are numerous intervening variables (e.g.

other opposing attitudes and values, a lack of opportunities or missing perception of them, combating interests of other people etc.) which have to be taken into account. The scientifically well documented ‘attitude-behaviour-split’ (cf. Bell 1998: 246f.) can be clearly found for environmental issues because the diffuse concept of ‘environment’ is not easily transferable in advices for ‘good behaviour’. Moreover, the complexity of environmental friendly decision-making is difficult to simplify for mass communication.

2. Mass communication is not a good tool for initiating learning processes because of its short term orientation. Teaching is easier, if there is a homogenous learning group regarding expectations, motivations, knowledge etc. As mentioned above, the composition of recipient groups in mass communication depends merely on self-selection effects. Additionally, the decision to ‘participate’ is not stable and can be changed immediately. While teaching needs time, repeating and adaptation to group knowledge, the risks of leaving the group are extremely high in mass communication – and the ability for teaching by using mass communication tools is poor.
3. The message must be very general to attract the interest of a great number of people. Therefore, it is difficult to transfer specific messages through means of mass communication. Advices for action must be very concrete and specific, taking the circumstances and opportunities of situations into account. As soon as such particular advices (or even examples) are used in mass communication, a lot of people will loose interest.

While mass communication is adequate for getting people’s attention and support, *environmental education* seems to be the tool for teaching and rising awareness. The problem is to compose a homogenous learning group, which seems to be solvable by making environmental issues a part of school or vocational training curricula. In Germany, a huge variety of programs and projects for supporting environmental education had been run during the last thirty years (cf. Mertineit & Exner 2003; Beer et al 2002; Bolscho & Michelsen 1999). One common element of environmental education is the target to teach: the recipients should store the transferred information and improve their *knowledge* on this specific topic. Without any doubt, there is a lot of progress of environmental knowledge in Germany – and it is not limited to a small group of experts. Moreover, there seems to be some evidence for the contribution of environmental education supporting this development. But regarding changes of individual behaviour, the results are poor (cf. Lehmann 1999). Some of the reasons can be attributed to the information transfer by education and again they are strongly connected with the *quality of the message*:

1. The relationship between knowledge and action is weak, again a great number of intervening variables (mostly associated with the concrete problem and the situation where it occurs) can be found. There is also a gap between ‘knowledge’ and ‘problem solving’ which might be more difficult to close in a complex and interrelated system like the ‘environment’. Even a given high standard of knowledge on environmental systems does not necessarily mean that it can be easily transferred into concrete action.
2. Learning processes are long term orientated as mentioned above. It needs time to store information and to improve knowledge step by step. In most cases,

learning is a lifelong process, having not a visual ending. Even the wisest expert is able to learn more about his or her special topic. Therefore, individuals have to decide about the amount of knowledge they want to store on a specific topic and about the weighting of knowledge on one topic against another. Environment is a cross-sectional issue with some importance in nearly all occupations and activities – but this importance has to be recognised among other important topics.

3. For improving knowledge, generalised information must be transferred and stored. People need to understand abstract theories, hypothesis, relationships etc. and how to use them in a concrete situation for problem solving. Improving knowledge means generalisation of experiences, using knowledge means specification of information. 'Environment' is an extensive area of knowledge and it is difficult to develop problem solving capacities for all kinds' problems and situations, especially because of the limited teaching time for this subject.

While mass communication needs *simplification* of the message to transfer it, education uses *generalisation* for this task. In mass media, generalisation is not possible because it is a homogenous standard of knowledge of the recipients can not be guaranteed. Hence, generalisation is also some kind of simplification because it reduces the singularity of each situation and attributes causal effects to a 'standard situation'. For problem solving, the generalised knowledge learned in education must be transferred to a concrete situation by the recipient itself. This is the difference to consultancy where specialists are offering their support by translating knowledge into solution.

In regular, consultancy is not such an information transfer situation as mentioned above, bringing information from few to many people. Especially in social counselling (e.g. marriage guidance, educational guidance, debt counselling, psycho therapy etc.), the consultancy is primarily a personal interaction of counsellor and client. Even in management consultancy such kinds of dialogs dominate, although the variety of communication situations is bigger. However, consultancy can not be reduced to personal dialogs. For example, there is also a lot of written material which is given to the clients before and after the conversation for preparing the session, reminding important advices or for giving them a first orientation. Such kind of written material differs significantly from teaching material used for training the consultants. The reason is quite obvious: it is not the aim of consultancy to produce knowledge, it is the aim to *solve problems* or, more precisely, to enable clients for solving their problems themselves.

Moreover, there is no restriction in media use for consultancy. Even mass media can be used – in Germany, for instance, there is a TV spot called 'seven sense' which advises car drivers how to react in specific traffic situations. An organised information transfer from few to many can be used for consultancy if there is a commonly shared problem (e.g. braking on an icy lane) and a general solution which is able to solve this problem in all situations (e.g. anti-lock braking). If one wants to use mass media, printed material, training courses, internet presentations etc. for consultancy, he or she has to *generalise and simplify* both problems and solutions of their clients. They have to *develop types* of specific situations, related problems and useable solutions which can be easily transferred by recipients to their personal needs.

This is the clear cut difference to the use of information transfer in mass communication or education. While consultancy is oriented at the *problems* of recipients and their *need* to solve them, education is directed towards knowledge production and mass communication towards attraction. Whether there is a need of the clients to know or to be attracted by the message is sometimes not in the focus of an information transfer: the school curricula does not mention the will of the pupils but refers to an adult concept of 'what everybody needs to know'; the broadcasting organisations and their editors-in-chief decide about the importance of messages that 'people have to know' and they may not care if the people wants to know it or not. In contrary, a need-ignoring consultancy is senseless. To give people advices is just a waste of time if the recipients do not perceive them to meet their own needs. Even if there is a straightforward solution for a problem, the people must recognise it as important for themselves. Like in school or in a TV-show, there may be some opportunities to force the people to receive the message – but we would not call this 'consultancy'.

In consultancy, the initiator of information transfer should be the recipient, at least indirectly. His or her problems and needs to solve them are the kick-off for a consultation process. The consulter is not more as an expert that produces information, a servant for his or her client. Even if the consulter uses media to pass this information to a group of clients, the motivation is to solve the problem of a specific client. Neither a teacher nor a journalist is a 'consulter'. Of course, they are both depending on the reaction of their clients, but they are not following their orders and instructions. The initiator of information transfer is a third party which has its own interests in transferring information. In this case, the recipients about the relevance of the transferred message as soon as they have received and decoded it. For consultancy, the relevance of the message is clarified ex-ante.

There are also similarities between all three described types of organised information transfer and, in fact, there are no fixed borders between them. They all use a concept of 'what people should know' which is developed by an initiator, they may use the same media (books, brochures, video, TV spots etc.), the same transmitter and networks, and they may even focus on the same clients. The difference is exclusively linked to the message and its meaning for the recipients. Therefore, we will have a look on sustainability as a specific topic and its implied message for to decide which kind of information transfer should be used.

4. What is Sustainable Development – and what should be communicated

As already mentioned the concept of sustainable development is far away from being a homogenous guide for action. It is not precisely defined and outlined in a way that everybody will agree with its statements. By claiming universality for all actors and in all circumstances on the world, its limitations in exactness seem to be a logical consequence. Nevertheless, some common elements and generally shared aspects of sustainable development can be highlighted.

According to the 'Brundtland-Report' of the World Commission on Environment and Development published in 1987, sustainable development should be defined as a development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission 1987: 8). Following this most cited definition, sustainable development should be the continuous *integration of needs* between different generations of human beings on a *time dimension* and all human activities should contribute to this by building up *capacities for steering* such kind of social processes. With regard to communication processes, the messages transferred are supposed to be some kind of *management rules* and the addressees should be decision-makers who are involved in *governance*. Furthermore, emphasising the *need-orientation* of sustainability relates its communication to the needs of the recipients and connects it in some way to the consultancy-model of information transfer.

This aspect is even more important if another undeniable cornerstone of sustainable development comes into the focus. By following the statement of the World Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992 and the Agenda 21, its final resolution, one should 'think globally and act locally'. This implies communication procedures for transferring social responsibility and commonly shared goals *top-down* to guide local action and for aggregating experiences and impacts of single activities *bottom-up* to prepare decisions and 'good governance'. Especially the last aspect highlights the task of all human activities to contribute for *vertical social integration* on a *territorial scale*. The main tool for this integration is *vertical communication* which again refers to the consultancy-model. Only this kind of information is able to link directly messages to action and to guarantee governance in its most general sense. Additionally, two groups of addresses for transferring information on sustainable development can be distinguished: decision-makers and executives. The messages to be transferred to decision-makers are the needs of people depending on their decisions. In addition, the transfer to executives aims on goal-oriented action. Simply said, these are typical *intra-organisational communication processes* which especially occur in business and must be handled by the management.

Finally, sustainable development needs to be supported by different social groups with diverse interests. Most commonly in sustainable development discussion, the *horizontal social integration* of three pillars composed by ecological, economical and social goals is mentioned. By using a horizontal 'scale' instead of the 'pillars', we will be able to include also other goals and policy fields which are added by some authors. The term 'horizontal' ignores any discussion about need or target hierarchies which, for instance, founded the well-known 'weak' vs. 'strong' sustainability debate. Neither the 'three pillars' nor the 'horizontal integration' model make any statements on weighting of

goals, but both emphasise the fact, that all human activities should recognise at least ecological, economical and social aspects and have to integrate them within their *target system*. Due to the division of labour in modern societies, an ongoing differentiation and specialisation process occurred, resulting in a still increasing number of actors with more and more limited horizons of goals and objectives. Therefore, horizontal communication between different actors (in most cases organisations) is needed to adjust their interests and direct their joint action towards the commonly shared and agreed goal of sustainable development. Again, the addresses of such kind of integration are primarily decision-makers who are *delegates* of their interest group and responsible for their management.

In summarizing this general description, sustainable development can be illustrated as a utopian concept of total social integration, referring to three different dimensions (targets, territories and time) and adequate management rules to use limited resources for fair and justice global development. Accordingly, the main communication task refers to the management rules and the main group of addressees are decision-makers. There is no need for general popularity or mass mobilisation to realise the concept of sustainable development. In contrary to environmental issues, not everybody is able to contribute to the realisation of sustainable development. Mass communication to popularise sustainable development may be a nice add-in, especially to produce legitimacy, but it is not a requirement for successful implementation of management rules. Moreover, there is no general accepted and easily transferable concept of sustainable development. As a management principle, it is more an idea how one should make 'good decisions' and it needs to be adapted to different (and changing) circumstances.

Sustainable development may be a subject of teaching in school or adult training courses and there are a lot of interesting projects involved in developing such kind of curricula. Hence, for bringing sustainability into practice, education may be an important tool, but it is not sufficient. The most pressuring communication task is *to convince managers* that using principles of sustainable development will help them to improve their own management and produce better results of their own work (at least in the long run). Due to the limited time budget of the broad majority of managers, consultancy seems to be the best way to proceed. The task for 'sustainability consultancy' is the durable integration of ecological, economical and social aspects within management. Experts are needed which are well-trained in these subjects of sustainable development and experienced in the specific management tasks. Moreover, an adequate infrastructure to reach the addressed group of managers is necessary (transmission system). The media used for transferring information on sustainable development to the target group must be adequate for the recipient behaviour of the specific group. Their needs and their ways of media reception must be observed and considered during the information production process.

Obviously, it is not possible to build up one single consultancy system for all groups of managers that should be informed about the concept of sustainable development and its practical use. Both regional and sectoral specifics must be taken into account and the consultants should be 'as near as possible' to the working conditions of the addressees. Therefore, a *decentralised consultancy infrastructure* is needed for assuring the reception of information on sustainable development.

However, decentralisation includes also some problems related with the information production process. Sustainable development is an ambitious field not only with respect to its goals but also to the knowledge needed for advisors. Scientific knowledge on ecology, economy and social issues is required as well as advanced experiences in management. It is impossible for a single person to have this broad spectrum of information at a personal disposal without any support. The solution seems to be a network structure of decentralised units which are specialised on definite topics and exchange their knowledge with respect of the clients' demands.

In Germany, such a kind of network exists in the craft sector. Moreover, an infrastructure for environmental consultancy was build up in the early 1990s. The capacity of this infrastructure and its use for sustainability issues will be presented in the next chapter.

5. From Environmental to Sustainability Communication in the German Craft Sector – some results

In general, the need for accurate environmental consultation especially for small and medium sized enterprises has been seen for years in German business. The chambers of commerce, for example, have recognised environmental consultancy as an important task and their own activities in offering environmental information to member firms reach back as far as 1963 (cf. Hüwels 2000: 137ff.). An increasing number of commercial consulting enterprises helped to establish a private environmental consultation market, which is supplemented by the actual development of environmental certification (EMAS, ISO) and the rising need for specialised audit firms (cf. Environmental Data Service 1999; Heinelt et al 2000; Martinuzzi et al 1994, 1996). The driving force beyond this is, on one hand, the development of environmental law and the expanding threat of sanctions for business and, on the other hand, the opening of new market opportunities by offering environmental technologies and services which are sometimes state-subsidised and publicly supported.

The craft sector is very important for environmental protection both as a producer of environmental risks and a supplier of prevention technologies. Some parts of the craft sector are handling highly polluting processes and products (e.g. garages, laundries, painters) while others are agents of environmental protection or at least mediators for this issue (e.g. chimney-sweepers, heating engineers, plumbers). Especially in the second case, craftsmen have to be environmental experts and counsellors for consumers with specific knowledge on environmental laws, policies, technologies etc. (cf. Ax 1997; ZDH 2003). In general, enterprises in the German craft sector are rather small and they can all be classified in the group of small and medium sized enterprises (SME). As a result, the personal, financial and technical capacities are rather limited for building up specific knowledge and keeping the know-how up-to-date. Therefore, some deficits in information especially on new developments in environmental issues can be found by most craft enterprises. Moreover, merely entrepreneurs and managers in SME's from the craft sector do not accept environmental innovations, mostly as a result of prejudice or for political reasons (cf. Stockmann et al 2001: 38ff.).

Environmental consultancy offers some opportunities for improving the environmental performance both in business as well as in private households. If it is possible to convince craft enterprises for investing in environmental knowledge and technology, they will be able to produce a significant diffusion effect for environmental protection among consumers. As far as environmental protection technology and services are a new and growing market for the crafts, there are also some serious economic arguments in doing so. Getting in touch with the companies is not as complicated as it seems at a first glance: in Germany, all craft companies have to be a member of the regional chamber of craft (HWK). Therefore, the HWKs are assumable good transmitters for environmental information in the craft sector.

The following results on the development of environmental communication in the German craft sector is basing on three different evaluation studies which had been conducted by the Center of Evaluation (CEval) during the last decade. The last one is a cross-sectional exploration of all state and non-state activities for supporting

environmental communication (cf. Jacoby et al 2006). The project run until the end of 2005 and had been financed by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU), the most important financier of environmental projects in German business. For balancing the supported activities, 259 web pages of craft associations and chambers, public agency and administrations, foundations and private sponsors were systematically explored. The recherche especially concentrated on the public project databases of the Federal Environmental Ministry (BMU), the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA) and the shared database of the Federal Ministries for Education (BMBF) and Economy (BMWA). The research considers all programs and projects which started before October 2004 and which support environmental communication activities in the craft sector at least partly. In total we identified about 230 programs and projects. Most of them had been sponsored by the DBU (141 programs and projects).

Among them, four huge programs to build up an environmental communication infrastructure in Germany can be found. In 12 of 16 German Federal States, the Government of the Federal States and the local economy (especially the chambers of commerce and the chambers of craft) signed a contract for *Environmental Private-Public Partnerships*. In some cases, also civil-society organisations like environmental associations and initiatives had been involved. These partnerships are aiming for strengthening environmental protection at the company level by using non-regulative measures. The key issues in all partnerships are deregulation, strengthening corporate responsibility, and improving the economical and ecological quality of the region. The first of this partnership contracts was signed 1995 in Bavaria, the last one 2004 in Thüringen. Most of the partnerships are built at the turn of the century and nearly all are formulated with respect of the goals of sustainable development and the Rio declaration.

Environmental Communication and the activities of the craft sector are part of these regional contracts but none of the partnerships conduct a specific program for supporting this issue or this sector. In general, both environmental communication and the craft sector are playing a minor role in the overall activities of regional partnerships. Therefore, it is of greater importance to look at two specific programs for building up an environmental communication infrastructure in the craft sector initiated by the Federal Association of the Chambers of Craft (ZDH) and sponsored by the DBU.

The history of the first of these two programs is very special and strongly connected to the historical situation at the time of the German unification. Having the environmental reconstruction task in East Germany shortly after unification in mind (and especially the environmental problems of newly build small and medium-sized firms), the ministry of finance used the proceeds of selling a state-owned enterprise for constructing a public foundation, the DBU. Even before the institutional formation of the DBU was finished in 1991, it launched this still most expensive single program (in total approximately 26 Mio Euro, about 8 Mio Euro solely for the craft sector). The original idea and initiative for this program came from the federal organisations of both chambers of trade and commerce (DIHT and ZDH), which suggested to expand a pilot project in Bavaria (financed by BMU and UBA) to East Germany. The program contained two different parts: an institutional support for the durable implementation of an environmental consulting infrastructure within the 15 regional chambers (which had also been under construction at this time) and a so-called 'orientation consulting program' which uses this infrastructure to act as a broker for bringing together small and medium sized enterprises and commercial environmental consulting by partly financing these

consultations. The targets of this program, formulated by the chambers, were to help East German enterprises to reduce uncertainty about environmental laws and to calculate the costs for successful adaptation to these regulations. The program started in July 1991 and ended in October 1996. Moreover, CEval was engaged for an ex-post evaluation of this program in 1997 and the final report of this research project was published in 2001 (cf. Stockmann, Meyer et al 2001; see also Meyer 2002; 2002a for some results of this study in English). As a key result of this program, all 15 chambers of craft in East Germany implemented environmental consultancy by occupying one consultant and by including it into their regular offer for local companies. Additionally, private firms carried out sponsored 'environmental orientation consultations' for more than 3.000 East German craft companies.

Parallel to the beginning of the 'orientation consulting program' in East Germany, the ZDH developed a framework concept for building up a network of 'environmental centres' in the craft sector. Following the model of two successfully implemented centres in Hamburg 1985 (Zentrum für Energie-, Wasser- und Umwelttechnik der HWK Hamburg -ZEWU) and in Oberhausen 1990 (Zentrum für Umwelt und Energie der HWK Düsseldorf - UZH), the ZDH planned to build up additional centres for environmental communication to cover the craft sector in the whole Federal Republic of Germany. With support of the DBU, ten new environmental centres were implemented merely in the North- and the South-West of the Republic until 1996. Their tasks can be divided in so-called 'vertical duties' (vertikale Pflichtaufgaben) and 'horizontal specialisations' (horizontale Schwerpunktsetzungen). The 'vertical duties' are technical support, consultation and training services for craftsmen in the regional catchments areas of the centres, and the management of environmental research and model projects. Additionally, each environmental centre specialised on one topic in a horizontal division of labour. Due to these competences, they are responsible for all activities regarding this topic in Germany.

Finally, the Federal Environment Ministry (BMU) and the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA) launched a support program for environmental consultancy in federal associations in 1989. During the 1990s, more than 100 projects were financed by BMU, scientifically accompanied by UBA, and run by almost the same number of federal associations. Approximately 0.9 Mio. Euro have been invested annually. Some of the most important environmental NGO's e.g. NABU (the 'nature protection alliance') were included just as powerful economic alliances like the building trade co-operation, professional organisations like the architects co-operation or important public organisations like the German districts association or the federal cooperation of the student administrations (for a complete list of projects and organisations see Meyer, Jacoby & Stockmann 2002). Some of the supported associations (e.g. the building trade co-operation) are strongly related with the craft sector and craft companies. Some of the offered information material is useful for craft companies and in many cases they are available for them. Unfortunately none of the associations collected systematically data on the utilisation of their consultancy offer, so the involvement of the craft sector in this program can not be quantified.

The following aspects of our studies on the craft sector and these sponsorship programmes are mentioned here:

- The status of sustainability communication programmes for the craft sector within the sponsoring of environmental communication
- The ‘lessons-learnt’ of information transfer within the craft sector
- The role of the environmental consultancy infrastructure at the chambers of craft and its contribution to sustainability communication

Sustainability communication and sponsorship

By scanning state and private support programmes, the first result is that there are a lot of different activities subsumed under the category environmental communication. The only common element is the transfer of information about environmental topics. The means are consultations, trainings, education, production of information material, technical installations for public demonstrations etc. Donors are the EU, federal and federal states ministries and administrations, the DBU, some other foundations, banks, and some companies. Almost all social groups can be found among the applicants, reaching from local Non-profit organisations up to international business associations.

There are nearly no support programmes which are totally specialised on the craft sector. If environmental communication is sponsored for business, the focus is regularly set on small and medium-sized enterprises (including nearly all craft companies). As mentioned above, the majority of environmental communication projects in business are (partly) financed by the DBU. Regarding sustainability as an issue of environmental communication, this result is different. While the DBU concentrates the integration of sustainability issues in vocational training, sustainable economies for SME are in the focus of the other donors. The majority of projects not supported by the DBU are related to this topic.

Some of them are integrative projects (like, for instance, the adaptation and implementation of environmental management systems) which try to link at least environmental and economic issues. If the ‘social pillar’ is mentioned, the measures focus on health and safety regulations. The most recent trend leads to product chains and product cycle management with its focus both on mass communication (to popularise the products) and on network communication (to coordinate action of participating companies, consumer organisations and state administration). None of these projects is specifically directed towards the craft sector, although craft companies are applicable and some of them are engaged in such programmes and projects.

Moreover, the concept of sustainable development is mentioned nearly in all new sponsorship programmes, in most cases just to supplement or to replace the term ‘environment’. Especially if business is addressed, sustainability issues are recognised as being important. However, the measures used in those sustainability communication projects do not differ from the former environmental communication projects and the specifics of the concept are not mentioned. In contrary to the integrative projects, they still set the priorities on environmental issues.

To summarize our findings on the development of communication sponsorship, a clear tendency towards sustainability issues must be stated. Unfortunately, this is in some cases not more than an ‘abuse’ of the term sustainability. Hence, more and more integrative projects can be found which offer at least an opportunity for craftsmen to join them. With the exception of the above mentioned programmes, no specific sponsorship for sustainability communication in the craft sector can be found.

Information transfer in the craft sector – the lessons' learnt

Two different aspects are mentioned here – the subjective judgement of different actor groups on sustainability and the practice of information transfer process in the craft sector. Regarding the perception of sustainability as an important topic for the craft sector, a great distinction between members of craft organisations and craft companies must be made. Our survey results show that the huge majority of craftsmen do not know what sustainability is or why it should be important for them. Therefore, there is still a strong need for communicating sustainability especially as management rules for SME in general and craft companies in particular. In contrary, environmental issues are well-known and its importance for their own business is perceived as growing by the majority of craftsmen. Simply said - for craftsmen the environmental topic is not finished and the sustainability topic has not yet started.

While not having comparable representative data on activists within the craft sector, our huge number of semi-structured interviews (more than one hundred in total) with members from the chamber of crafts, guilds, business associations, public administration, and some non-profit organisations offers the commonly shared perception that environmental issues are totally 'out' and environmental information are increasingly difficult to transfer to craft companies. These differences in perception of environment and sustainability can be easily explained by the different positions within the information transfer process.

From the perspective of 'transmitters' who are transferring environmental information for years, the perception of increasing difficulties to reach NEW people may be definitely true. The environmental interested craftsmen are reached years ago – and they have already done a lot. Some of them may have solved all recognised environmental problems within their company and due to the increasing difficulties (and expenses) for doing more they may loose interest on environmental topics. Those craftsmen who are not at all interested in environmental topics have been already contacted and they may react more and more aggressive on new contact trials. According to self-selection effects, an increasing number of the formerly 'in between' companies may now classify themselves to one of these two extreme groups. In sum, the difficulties for transmitters to reach interested addressees may increase continually.

Hence, this does not mean automatically that the environmental topic loses its importance in the perspective of the 'addressees'. In the beginning, only a small group of craftsmen was interested in environmental topics and nearly none has done anything for environmental protection. During the diffusion process, the number of interested and particular the number of environmental active companies grow rapidly. Although the growth rate may be lowered now, the absolute number is probably still increasing. The problems of environmental communication in the craft sector need not to be linked with a decrease of its attraction by the 'addresses'. It maybe a result of ongoing and repeated communication processes and the fact of reaching saturation point of diffusion.

As far as most of the activists expected to reach all (or at least a majority) of companies, they are disappointed with the now reached borderline. Such unrealistic expectations occur especially if professional needs analyses are missing and no monitoring and evaluation tools for impact assessment are implemented. Unfortunately this is common practise for environmental communication in craft sector, although many of the actors know about such kind of tools for professional project management.

By using the model of organised information transfer, the following key findings of communication management can be emphasised with respect to the change from environmental to sustainability communication:

- *Information production:* Stimulated by the sustainability debate, more and more projects integrating economic and environmental aspects (sometimes also social affairs e.g. fair trade of ecological products) are developed. The experts engaged for information production are largely the same. No serious reduction of quality occurred, because the experts trained themselves in new topics. However, while knowledge demands increase, the number of people involved in information production stagnates or even decreases. Therefore, more difficulties to keep a satisfying quality level have to be stated. Compared to environmental projects, the finally produced media within sustainability projects differ not very much – especially internet platforms and homepages are new forms of information offer and this does not depend on the topics. At present, sustainability is more an addition to the environmental topic and has not been recognised as a new specific issue with specific demands. No professional analyses for preparing and adapting the measures and the information production process to the needs and knowledge of addressees have been conducted.
- *Information transmission:* Some federal associations are motivated by the sustainability debate and by the new chances supposed to be offered by sustainable development. Therefore, the number of transmitters increased and some actors who never engaged themselves in environmental issues entered the scene. Nearly none of the actors implemented a professional monitoring and evaluation system for assessing the impacts of information transfers. The few exceptions are limited to training courses and other measures of adult education. Due to this lack of information, it can hardly be decided, whether the switch from environment to sustainability has lead to enlarged communication arenas. While sustainability's contributions to information transmission are the inclusion of new actors (and therefore new networks) and the rising number of co-operation projects, especially projects including both business and environmental organisations, a slight enlargement of arenas can be considered. More important is the better acceptance of sustainability by some of the transmitting organisations (especially the chambers and associations), which offers now new opportunities for information transmission. Sustainability is at least a 'door-opener' for communication activities and environmental topics gain some profit from this development.
- *Information utilisation:* Certainly, some impacts of the sustainability debate on the interests of small and medium sized firms can be recognised. However, according to the expectations of environmental activists, these impacts are very weak: nearly no firm seems to be motivated by the new topic to participate in the program – most firms did not even recognise the sustainable development topic! The impact of the sustainability debate on information utilisation processes among small and medium sized firms seems to be very poor – although no one collected data needed for a systematic evaluation of the impacts at addressee level. However, the still visible lack of knowledge about sustainability among those companies who had been consulted by employers of the chambers may be used as a hint on the poorness of effects.

The role of the communication infrastructure in craft sector

Without any doubt, the infrastructure for environmental consultancy in the German craft sector is of great value for communicating sustainability. During the last decade, the chambers of craft (supported by the DBU) build up 12 environmental communication centres and one environmental consultant in each chamber, covering nowadays the whole Federal republic of Germany. Moreover, other organisations like business associations or non-profit organisations offer consultancy in form of personal advice or information material for craftsmen. Hardly any request for environmental consultancy can be found which will be not covered by this infrastructure.

There are some obviously visible advantages of this infrastructure for communicating environmental issues:

- The decentralised structure guarantees a close contact between transmitter and addressee
- The chambers of craft are highly respected as experienced consultants by craftsmen and craft companies due to their reputation in other topics
- The environmental topic is accepted by a majority of companies because the consultancy helps them to deal with state regulations and to open up new markets
- The environmental communication centres developed specific competences and they are able to adapt their knowledge rapidly to new demands
- Moreover, the centres are able to transfer new political developments into concrete means and information material
- Our results on the orientation consultancy program show that the advices are highly recommended and most companies realised the proposals of environmental consultants

In general, all environmental communication centres work properly and they are accepted by their target groups. From an economical point of view, some of them are even able to earn profits from their consultancy offers (especially with EMAS and ISO-certifications).

But there are also some problems for nearly all centres:

- The chambers are – like the whole craft sector – under economical pressure and they have to reduce their voluntary services (like environmental consultancy). While environmental issues lose their public reputation, the environmental centres and the environmental consultants have to justify themselves. In general, the result is an enlargement of their area of competence (e.g. health and security issues). In other words: the integration of ecological, economical and social issues is not only a result of the new sustainability topic but also a result of economical development and therefore an institutional necessity.
- Overtaking other duties by stable resources means reduction of work for environmental issues. At least some of the staff is not very happy with this development. The sustainability issue is (mis-)used by the direction of chambers to justify these truly economical decisions. However, most centres and nearly all

consulters did not develop a strategy to handle the sustainable issue adequately. Their behaviour is more or less a reaction on top-down-decisions.

- The data on impacts of consultancy work is poor and neither the centres nor the consulters are able to legitimate themselves on a systematic data from monitoring and evaluation systems. No strategies are developed to reach those companies who are not much interested on environmental topics. An endogenous diffusion process is hindered by missing communication structures between firms, caused by the competition situation. Therefore, environmental consultancy deepens the “ecological niche” and changing the subject to sustainable development will not solve this problem but might even intensify it.

In comparison with the institutionalisation of environmental consultancy within the chamber structures, the environmental communication centres are a clear step forward. They are more independent and their environmental orientation can not be easily changed. They are able to aggregate knowledge and to distribute it through their own network. And they established themselves as an own visible part of craft organisation, giving them a specific political position.

The information transfer by using consultancy proofed itself being very effective. Environmental consultancy is able to develop appropriate client-oriented solutions for environmental problems and to reach a high degree of applications. Therefore, recognisable ecological effects can be achieved, which at least impress the applicants. As a result, environmental consultancy has the potential to fulfil the expectations on improving the durable impact of ecological communication.

This great success in the past makes it difficult to achieve comparable progress nowadays. The dynamics of reaching more and more people have been significantly slowed down and the environmental topic seems to reach a saturation point – not only in the craft sector. Getting beyond this point needs a more professional impact assessment and improvement in project management. Only few signs can be found for a development in this direction. Changing the topic from environment to sustainability seems to be the easier way to proceed.

There are at least three causes for the shift from environment to sustainability. Firstly, the transmitters see sustainability as a chance for bringing environmental issues to new target groups. Generally speaking, this expectation is at least partly fulfilled. However, while carrying the ‘new wine’ sustainability in ‘old bottles’ of transfer systems, this effect is merely limited. If sustainability communication should open doors to new addressees, a more systematic investigation of target groups is needed - and an adaptation of sustainability issues to their needs.

Secondly, economic pressure is used to pass new tasks to the environmental communication infrastructure and sustainability is utilised as a political argument for forcing this expansion of duties. Savings are the aim of this institutional change, not promotion of sustainability. The positive effect for the environmental communication infrastructure is that these new duties stabilise its existence and strengthen their position within the craft organisations. Negative effects can be found due to the reduced capacities and the blurring of the environmental profile. In some cases, health and security topics overwhelm the environmental issues and push them in the background. The new opportunities of using sustainability as a specific new topic and to widen the horizons of communication work are rarely recognised under such conditions.

Finally, sustainability is highly accepted by donor organisations and especially state organisations launch more and more sponsorship programmes to support sustainable development. While environmental project in the craft sector are depending on public support (and so do the environmental centres at least in some parts), the activists have to follow where the money is. This effect is surely not limited to the craft sector and may be even more important for non-profit organisations which are highly depending on sponsorship money. Nevertheless, sustainability as a topic for communication processes is 'top-down'-initiated and there is nearly no pressure or development 'bottom-up'. In the case of crafts, the companies do not even know what sustainability is (as the huge majority of the German population) and they do not see any advantage for themselves as a result of sustainability discussion. Sustainability is often used as a 'buzz-word' to justify the economic priority about ecological and social issues.

Especially the final point leads to the conclusion that the German craft sector is far away from being an 'engine' for sustainable development. Corporate social responsibility is poor as it almost is in SMEs. The private craft sector is neither in environmental nor in sustainability issues a pusher towards progress. In contrary, the forces to keep the status quo are stronger and a lot of blockades can be found. Hence, the well-developed environmental communication infrastructure can be used to promote sustainability in the craft sector. For doing so, a more systematic development of the concept sustainability is strongly recommended. The initiative for doing will probably come from outside the craft system and the state seems to be the most important actor. Only by using sponsorship programmes, environmental communication in the craft sector is able to be directed towards sustainability issues.

6. Conclusions

The possibilities to pass information on environmental issues to craft companies are brilliant in Germany. With support of the DBU, an impressive communication infrastructure has been implemented during the 1990s. Especially the environmental communication centres and their consultation and training offers are able to build up specific knowledge and to distribute it within their networks. Without any doubt, this communication infrastructure can be used for sustainability issues – and this has already happened with an increasing importance in the first decade of the new millennium.

The deficits of communication in German craft sector are related to the deficits on assessing the impacts of communication measures. No systematic monitoring and evaluation system is implemented and the number of available facts on information treatment by addressees is poor. Therefore, a continually process of quality development is yet not possible. Especially for sustainability issues this aspect of transfer quality should become more into the focus of the work of environmental consultancy. The concept of sustainable development and its communication is associated with some prejudice about its communicability and yet nearly no data on this issue is available. This is not a particular problem of the craft sector but it may be more important here because the transfer of management rules for sustainable development can cause huge impacts on business and consumer behaviour.

This argument is leading to the key question what kind of information should be transferred according to the concept of sustainable development. The answer given in this paper is – management rules. In contrary to the environmental discourse which affected everybody, sustainability targets more on decision makers and their responsibility for human development. Making sustainable development popular is not the main task for its realisation. Instead, several different groups of decision makers should be addressed and craftsmen are a specific and interesting group here.

The important role of craftsmen is related to their two folded role concerning environmental issues. On one hand, they are polluters – and in some branches even heavy polluters – with limited budgets and knowledge. Therefore, environmental laws and its execution may cause a threat for the economic existence of these small and medium-sized companies. On the other hand, craftsmen are offering environmental services and technologies for consumers. In some areas they are the first person in touch with private households and as experts they are able to advice solutions for environmental problems. There is no reason why a shift from environment to sustainability should change these important roles.

Finally, Germany is of course a well-developed and rich country. As a consequence, it is not easy to transfer German solutions to other countries. Moreover, the German craft sector is very special and has its own traditions and specifics. To build up a decentralised consultation infrastructure is not possible without support from the sector's organisations and activists. Financing decentralised environmental or sustainability consultation is only feasible if an infrastructure like the German chamber system still exists and sponsors like the DBU are willing to invest a lot of additional money to the sector. However, if we want to improve the quality of communicating sustainability in business, we need to think about such kind of solutions.

7. Literatur

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