

Louise Phillips, Anabela Carvalho, and Julie Doyle (Eds.), **Citizen Voices: Performing Public Participation in Science and Environment Communication**. Bristol, UK: Intellect Ltd., 2012, 231 pp., \$35.50 (paperback).

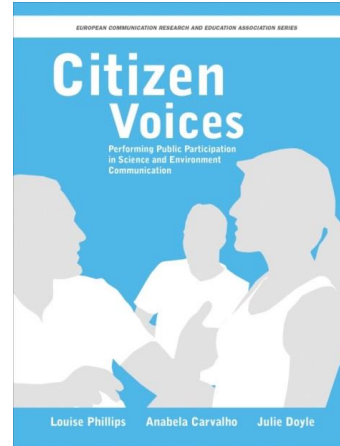
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**Citizen Voices**, the title of this book, accurately captures what the authors discuss in each chapter. This edited scholarly book is a worthy read not just for those in the field of environment and science communication. There are at least four groups of people who would find this book useful: students, practitioners in the field, experts, and journalists.

Students interested in environment and science communication will find this book a great reference resource. One of the main themes echoed dominantly throughout is climate change. The authors delve into this complex topic taking particular care to explain how communication is constructed by experts, government, and the media. Understanding the contextual meaning of phrases used in any book is important, and from the introduction to the last chapter the authors dedicate time to explaining even words and phrases used in everyday conversations. This helps to contextualize the discussion in each chapter. *Public engagement*, *participation*, *collective decision making*, and *dialogue* are just a few of the words put into context and explained in detail. A student who picks up this book would do well to emulate this writing approach.

For those in the field of environment and science communication, the book offers space for reflection on the things that a practitioner may have been doing incorrectly and how best to approach public participation processes. Environment and science communication should be sufficiently underpinned by a philosophy that takes into account the citizens. Yet, in the African continent this is still a developing field, which makes a book like this beneficial for African practitioners. *Citizen Voices* also has a wealth of examples that illustrate approaches that have worked and those that have failed due to the complexity of involving ordinary people in environment and science issues. With the help of this book, participatory strategies for environment and science communication could cease to be a cut-and-paste from mainstream communication programs.

*Citizen Voices* offers scientists and environmentalists a reflective moment to review how they have been engaging the public. For example, experts might ask themselves what their goal is in relation to public engagement. Is their aim to enhance the quality of decisions by seeking comprehensive input or has it been to generally complicate issues for laypeople? As the book argues, quality decisions arise from concerted and properly understood participation. Put simpler, decisions are strongly dependent on the nature of the foregoing process.



Journalists could also find themselves reviewing how they have been exercising choices in the coverage of environment and science news. For example, what images do they broadcast, whose voices do they highlight, and what role—and in what capacity—do journalists themselves participate in environmental campaigns? These questions are sufficiently covered in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of the book.

*Citizen Voices* is divided into two parts, with a total of 10 chapters each, addressing public participation and engagement in the environment and science field. The concept of dialogue undergirds the arguments made in each chapter. The book begins with a summary of the chapters, and the editors lift key issues examined in each of the subsequent chapters.

Part one has five chapters—chapters 2 through 6. In chapter 2, which opens part one of the book, Plesner challenges the belief that there is a conveyor-belt approach to communication, an approach that begins with the media and ends with the public. Using a qualitative research approach, Plesner argues that communication is “never a unidirectional transmission process but is marked by negotiation” (p.40) between different actors. In chapter 2, there is explicit focus on the role of the media, a discussion that is carried forward in chapter 3 wherein Sjölander and Jönsson tackle public participation in environment news using Sweden as a case study. The two authors analyze how the media frames the public, noting that public participation differs between online news and print news. For example, in newspapers citizens are represented as “an anonymous collective” with journalists using such terms as “public opinion” (p. 64).

In chapter 4, Antonov deals with how individual journalists handle campaigns organized by citizens against government policies. He sketches a duality in the role journalists play, showing that while journalists challenge activists they also actively plan and support campaigns in both their personal and professional capacities. The last two chapters of part one continue with the focus on how the media constructs the public and citizens and the roles each play in the public participation process.. This discussion concludes with chapter 6 concentrating exclusively on the online media.

In the chapters that follow, which form part two of the book, discussion shifts away from the media and concentrates on formal public engagement coordinated by government or research agencies. For example, Phillips in chapter 7 breaks down how “scientific citizens” participated in the consultation process leading up to the UN Climate Change Conference in 2009. She looks at how deliberations were managed with the goal of influencing global climate change decisions. In chapter 8, Horsbøl and Lassen continue with the climate change theme and analyze tensions in the “top-down and bottom-up approaches” (p. 165) in public engagements, paying special attention to discourse used.

The final two chapters are slightly different from the other chapters. For example, in chapter 10, Lehtonen and Bamberg tackle citizen involvement in issues that relate to information, communication, and technology. Their analysis is based on a case study conducted in Finland that brought together state employees and the public. In their research, the authors “identified three dimensions of knowledge communication through which ICTs can facilitate knowledge communication between residents and government” (pp. 212–213). They further explain how these dimensions benefit the participatory process.

Throughout the book, the authors use different research methods such as case studies, surveys, experiments, and interviews to analyze and theorize about communication in the field of science and environment. Through the cases examined and the research methods used, the book achieves its aim of illustrating the “multiple meanings ascribed to practices of participation in science and environment communication and to its actors” (p. 6). The authors do not only focus on those instances in which public participation is going well. Rather, they also cite examples of dialogue and representation that could be improved. For instance, the book highlights the common fallacy of representing citizens as passive individuals who are not actively involved in debates about the environment and science issue that impact their lives. In fact, the high point of this book is how the authors carefully articulate in each chapter how “mutual learning” occurs among all the different players such as experts, citizens, the government, and journalists (p. 4).

However, there is one low point. The book’s attention to public participation and the role of the media and of experts in the field of environment and science also works against it. Readers are likely to find some of the chapters redundant. Although the chapters employ different methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, they sound repetitive. One useful strategy for the reader would be to select those chapters that are most relevant. This is not the type of book that would be read from cover to cover. Nonetheless, this book is an essential addition to the body of knowledge in this field. Further, *Citizen Voices* is most satisfying in the way it interrogates, contextualizes, and challenges the all-too-familiar concepts of public participation and dialogue in a field generally considered complex.