Social Movement to Address Climate Change: Local Steps for Global Action

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Description

Climate change is one of the most significant environmental issues of our time. As is the case for the environmental movement in general, social activism is a crucial venue in which to advocate for policies to slow global warming and mitigate the effects of climate change. Recently, several campaigns have emerged within a global effort to create a climate change social movement. Step It Up is one such campaign.

Long-time activist Bill McKibben and a group of Middlebury College students organized the Step It Up (SIU) National Day of Climate Action (April 14, 2007) as a way to “do something” other than change light bulbs, to be part of “the first nationwide do-it-yourself mass protest.” Over 1,000 individuals and local groups hosted local SIU actions that shared a common message: “Step it up, Congress! Enact immediate cuts in carbon emissions, and pledge an 80% reduction by 2050.” The result was a loosely organized, open-source, and multifaceted campaign of local actions in a movement for climate change.

The Step It Up campaign serves as an excellent case study in movement building in the 21st century. With a mix of traditional organizing tactics and savvy use of new media technologies, the SIU campaign attempted to train new activists, support local leaders, invite creativity, and coordinate the campaign primarily through the Internet.
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Description (continued)

This campaign stands as an example of how social movements must emerge out of and interact with the contemporary political and economic pastiche. The analysis in this book yields answers to the question of what it takes to build a movement in the 21st century not only in the specific context of climate change and environmentalism but also more generally for other social movements and campaigns of any topic.

This edited volume is the culmination of a national research project on the Step It Up campaign that examines the strategic aspects of constructing social movements and campaigns. Chapter authors attended seventeen local SIU actions in eight states. Using participant observation, interviewing, and rhetorical analysis, the chapters in this volume contribute to our understanding of rhetorical framing, modes of organizing, and practices of citizenship for contemporary social movements. This unique approach to studying a campaign as it happened yields important insights for both scholars and social movement practitioners.

The chapters in this book suggest the strategic potential and of a loosely coordinated network of agents, opportunities, and practices at multiple, local sites of decision to engage in critically important ways with the larger political sphere. In addition to the heuristic value of our analyses, the chapters comment on the basic incompleteness or what-is-not-yet-done quality of the SIU campaign. The book reveals what local, grassroots, Web-based initiatives like SIU are capable of accomplishing and how this potential was limited in the particular case of Step It Up. Second, the chapters in this book highlight the challenge of assessing ‘effect’ in social movements. As our analyses show, it is difficult to determine cause and effect relationships as well as measures of ‘success’ within contexts of large scale and complexity. Rather than attempt to make one argument about the effect of the SIU campaign, we instead focus on the strategic potential of the campaign. Finally, this volume discloses a variety of specific strategies for local movements and campaigns to have influence in a larger national or international political sphere.

Social Movement to Address Climate Change is an important book for all social movement, environmental communication, and climate change collections.

About the Editors

Danielle Endres is an assistant professor of communication at the University of Utah. Danielle’s research and teaching interests lie in the intersection of rhetoric, environmental communication, social movements, and Native American cultures. She is currently working on several projects including a book on the rhetoric of nuclear waste siting decisions, documenting oral histories of nuclearism in the American West, and tracing the intersections between environmental justice and energy policy in the United States. Dr. Endres received her PhD in communication from the University of Washington, her MA in communication from San Diego State University, and her BA in history from the University of Oregon.

Leah Sprain is an assistant professor of communication at Colorado State University where she also works with the Center for Public Deliberation. Her research and teaching draw on cultural communication perspectives to study deliberation, environmental activism, conflict, and social movements. She has extended ethnographic fieldwork in Nicaragua and the United States. Her work can be found in the International Journal of Public Participation, Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture, and the Handbook of Communication Ethics. Dr. Sprain received her PhD and MA in communication from the University of Washington and her BA in environmental studies and BFA in communication from Pacific Lutheran University.

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