

COMMUNICATION
AND PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION IN
ENVIRONMENTAL
DECISION MAKING

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CHAPTER 1

THE TRINITY OF VOICE: THE ROLE OF PRACTICAL THEORY IN PLANNING AND EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

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Effectiveness in the communication processes by which a community makes its environmental decisions, especially contentious or potentially contentious decisions, is a key component of community sustainability, but it is not an easy component to achieve. This chapter suggests that we consider expanding Schutz's (1958) FIRO theory of inclusion, affection, and control needs of small group members to multi-stakeholder environmental policy decision-making processes such as public hearings, advisory groups, and task forces as well as to newer, emerging processes. The discussion introduces the practical theory of the Trinity of Voice (TOV)—access, standing, and influence—and discusses its usefulness as an effective benchmark against which to plan or evaluate participatory processes regarding contentious environmental issues. Discussion also addresses how the TOV can play an additional transformative role in building community capacity (Dukes, 1996). Finally, plenty of questions call to be answered, and I suggest several trajectories for future attention.

Because environmental decision making typically triggers competing demands for (1) specific, scientific/technical expertise; (2) ultimate