

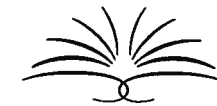
Social Movement to Address Climate Change

LOCAL STEPS FOR GLOBAL ACTION

EDITED BY

Danielle Endres, Leah Sprain, and Tarla Rai Peterson

Politics, Institutions, and Public Policy in America series
Series editors: Scott A. Frisch and Sean Q. Kelly



**C A M B R I A
P R E S S**

AMHERST, NEW YORK

INTRODUCTION

A NATIONAL DAY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Leah Sprain, Danielle Endres, and Tarla Rai Peterson

We have all the parts of a movement except the movement itself.

—Bill McKibben

in the online magazine *Grist* on January 7, 2007

This observation was one result of his walk with students and citizens across the state of Vermont, raising awareness about global warming. They wondered what it would take to organize a national effort to curb climate change. Step It Up 2007 (SIU) was one answer. McKibben offered it as a way to “do something” other than change out lightbulbs: be part of “the first nationwide do-it-yourself mass protest.” Individuals and local groups were invited to sign up on a Web site to host local actions that called for political action on climate change at iconic natural places. Just assemble your friends, hoist a banner calling for 80 percent carbon cuts by 2050, and take a picture.

In the three months between McKibben's first musings and the National Day of Action on April 14, 2007, the national organizers used a Web site to organize local actions. Word-of-mouth and media coverage led people to the Web site, where they could join the national effort. For example, on April 9, 2007, "no-impact man" mentioned SIU on *The Colbert Report*; several days later, the SIU Webmaster reported that their site had never received more traffic (Step It Up 2007). On the Web site, individuals could read about the campaign and sign up to host a local action. Information for these actions would then be posted, and site visitors could sign up to attend an action in their community. To support local actions, the national organizers posted materials—banner templates, action ideas, media guides—that could be used to plan events and develop new resources. After a local organizer asked for help about how to attract media attention, the national organizers wrote a sample press release, e-mailed a copy to the local organizer who requested help, and then posted a copy on the Web site for everyone to use. Later, the team added a function that enabled local organizers to send a mass e-mail to all of the participants who signed up to attend a particular action. The Web site was the center of SIU; it made the call for action, offered people a way to join "the movement," and provided support for local organizers. By April 13, 2007, over 1,400 actions were scheduled to take place across the fifty states. Though the events varied in size, complexity, and location, one message linked all the rallies: "Step it up, Congress! Enact immediate cuts in carbon emissions, and pledge an 80 percent reduction by 2050."

In the early morning hours of April 14, thirty Middlebury College students in Vermont created a photograph of the phrase "Step It Up" using flashlights in the dark. This image was uploaded to the national index site, where it became the anchor for a dynamic digital slideshow of images from actions. Photographs displayed bike riders in Portland, Oregon; people bundled in coats at a morning rally at Mendenhall Glacier in Alaska; an aerial of people spelling "Step It Up" and "we hear your call" in Inuit in Park City, Utah; and scuba divers displaying posters underwater off Key West, Florida. In the following days, over 850

action reports describing local events and sharing photos were uploaded to the national site.

CONSIDERING SIU: A CASE OF MOVEMENT BUILDING

The Web site provides one account of SIU, one way to see and experience the national day of action. Rather than relying on the Web site alone to tell the story of SIU, the contributing authors to this book attended local actions as participant researchers. We heard speeches about the importance of action on climate change—the power of individual action, the promise of legislation, the potential of collective action. We asked participants questions about why they came to SIU actions, what they thought SIU was, and what the next steps should be. We interviewed organizers to gain insight into how actions were organized and what they were attempting to accomplish. We wrote our observations about what we saw at local actions and what we sensed was missing from them.

We did all of these things because we believed that SIU was an intriguing moment in the national discussion about climate change. We attended SIU actions because we wanted to be part of a potentially historic effort to address one of the most pressing environmental problems of the twenty-first century. SIU represented an overt attempt to spark a movement, to push for political action, to organize people across the nation, to demand that politicians step it up. It attempted to do all these things with a Web site and three months' time. We wanted to understand SIU. We wanted to see how it worked, whom it attracted, whether it succeeded and why. We approached SIU as researchers because we thought that it could provide insight into efforts to build social movements on climate change and other social issues. Taking the opportunity to study a movement from the beginning, we sought to learn about the implications of using new media technologies to organize a decentralized movement.

This book focuses on SIU's effort to create a national movement for climate-change action through over one thousand events that took place across the fifty states. Drawing on this case, we explore the question, what does it take to build a social movement in the twenty-first century?

Although SIU focuses on generating a movement about climate change, our analysis speaks to the broader effort to spark political action. As we chronicle and analyze SIU as an exemplar of how one contemporary campaign emerged out of and interacted with today's political and economic pastiche, we aim to offer academically rigorous yet accessible advice to activists, movement builders, and citizens interested in constructing future social movements. For this reason, each chapter concludes with concrete suggestions for people engaged in advocacy and movement building. The next section sketches the three theoretical threads that characterize movement building: rhetorical strategies, modes of organizing, and practices of citizenship. Finally, we preview the essays in this book by discussing how they relate to these threads.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Shortly after McKibben announced the SIU campaign on *Grist*, we initiated a collaborative national research project on SIU. As local organizers were developing their actions, we were planning how to best study SIU. Mirroring the attempt to start a movement through coordinated local actions, we sought out researchers across the country to attend and observe local SIU actions. In the end, we had eight research teams examine seventeen local actions in California, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Washington state.

Through several conference calls, research teams across the country developed a common approach to studying local actions. Members of the research teams would attend local actions, take field notes of their observations, record speeches, take photographs, and conduct interviews with people at the events. The interviews included several shared questions' across the sites, and individual research teams were encouraged to ask additional questions based on their research interests. Several teams gathered additional information, such as collecting paper handouts from informational booths or conducting brief surveys. In addition to gathering materials from local actions, we examined the national Web site, making electronic caches of the site, including the organizer discussion

board and the blog. Using LexisNexis, we gathered local and national mainstream-media coverage of SIU. Research teams also looked for nontraditional media coverage of their local events, such as coverage in podcasts, blogs, and online networking sites. Finally, we interacted with local and national organizers, including interviewing local organizers before and after the events, attending organizing meetings before the events, and attending a postevent meeting with a congressman. We also held conference calls with several of the national organizers after the day of action to learn their assessment of SIU and the ideas that informed their leadership of the national event. Finally, we talked to McKibben directly about SIU and its place in the ongoing climate movement.

All of the above materials were available to chapter authors through a shared database. Some chapters focus on a particular geographical area (e.g., Texas in chapter 1 and Salt Lake City in chapter 4) and use all of the available materials pertaining to their site. Other chapters analyze multiple locations (e.g., chapter 10 on identity construction and chapter 11 on new social movements), drawing on particular types of data (e.g., speeches and interviews). In the chapters, quotations from interviews or speeches are identified by location and the type of speaker (e.g., the mayor of Austin), but individuals are not named to protect confidentiality. Unless otherwise cited, all of the materials come from our database of interviews, field notes, and speech transcripts.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This book centers on a fundamental question: what does it take to build a movement in the twenty-first century? We examine SIU as a case to answer this question, considering how SIU provides a guide for what to do and what not to do. The following chapters are grounded in our empirical observations of what happened at SIU. Many chapters begin with observations from local actions, quotations from interviews, claims made by national organizers, or photographs from events. However, this book does not aim to simply describe and catalogue SIU. Instead, we seek to use SIU as a touch-point for understanding the processes of movement

building—whether the topic is climate change, environmental destruction, equal rights, worker treatment, immigration policy, race relations, or welfare reform. Given this motive, we considered SIU from a theoretical foundation that helped guide us to focus on key aspects of SIU that would help us better understand it and explain movement building. Our theoretical foundation consisted of three threads—rhetorical strategies, modes of organizing, and practices of citizenship—that together, we argue, are fundamental to movement building in the twenty-first century. Each of the chapters in this book draws on one or more of these threads.

We are not alone in examining movements through the lens of rhetorical strategies, modes of organizing, and the practices of citizenship. In particular, there are well-established academic traditions of examining social movement rhetoric and the organizational dynamics of movements. This book draws on these traditions in communication, sociology, and political science. Each chapter explains relevant theories and research in an accessible way, and then uses them to help make sense of SIU and movements. By highlighting these three threads, we are attempting to pay attention to phenomena that are particularly important to contemporary movements. To explain what these perspectives bring into focus, we briefly outline each piece of our foundation.

Rhetorical Strategies

A focus on rhetorical strategies in social movements is a concern with how the tactical use of words, symbols, and images contributes to efforts for social change (Morris and Browne 2006). Rhetorical tactics can be used instrumentally to achieve certain goals and can be constitutive of new ways of thinking, adhering, and acting in relation to climate change or other pressing social issues. Rhetorical theory can highlight inventive resources—materials for crafting new, compelling, jarring, or controversial messages and arguments—such as metaphors, values, condensation symbols, myths, and images that uniquely draw people together, agitate for change, or transform public opinion. This perspective offers

insight into how future movement builders might craft messages that fit particular audiences and situations. In addition to a focus on inventing messages, rhetorical theory can also be used for criticism and evaluation. Rhetoricians draw on theory to criticize the rhetorical choices of a particular speaker or movement.

The chapters in this book use various forms of rhetorical criticism to consider the specific dynamics of texts (i.e., speeches, images, protest chants) in order to explain how they succeed or fail to meet certain objectives. This type of criticism results in both further sophistication and understanding of the rhetoric of social movements and insight into how advocates might best approach similar communication situations.

Modes of Organizing

Within social-movement research, many theorists attend to how people and resources are organized. Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott (2006) explained the reason for this: “resources must be mobilized and momentum maintained for movements to be successful, and both tasks require instrumental activities and coordination of effort: in short, organization” (5). Given these practical objectives, organizational theory considers the structuring of movements—from the relationships between organizers, community groups, and participations to the institutionalization of movement groups into established organizations—and how different structures shape movement outcomes. A movement’s principles of organization (e.g., a democratically controlled movement where all members have equal voice in decision making) can lead to common dilemmas or benefits. An organizational perspective can also be used to evaluate the success of a movement to achieve its most practical goal: organizing people and resources to create symbolic and material change.

We focus on the methods and principles of organizing SIU, tracking SIU from idea to day of action to potential organization. Analyzing modes of organizing directs our attention to different levels of movement—from local actions and their organizers to the national leaders to the affiliated

organizations and groups to the social networks of participants—and the relationships between them. Such analyses should enable us to explore specific elements and processes that characterize the institutional changes that accompany social movements. They also offer a window on impression-management strategies that both establishment and social-movement leaders use to maintain and/or gain legitimacy. As with rhetorical analysis, organizational analysis offers guidance for more effective advocacy among would-be agents of change.

Practices of Citizenship

Traditionally, political participation has been associated with activities like voting and, to a lesser extent, petition signing, letter writing, and political campaigning (Verba and Nie 1972). In the twenty-first century, the ways in which citizens can participate in governance has expanded to include participation in public forums, online deliberation, and new practices of political organizing, such as face-to-face meet-ups organized online (like SIU). At the same time, Lance Bennett (1998) and others have argued that people are moving away from expecting the government to solve problems and toward solving social problems through civic associations and lifestyle choices, a move he calls “lifestyle politics” since people are making political choices through lifestyle decisions such as group membership. Although some celebrate these changes as indicating that opportunities for citizens to act politically are increasingly open, others caution that they also contribute to powerful exclusionary forces (Peterson et al. 2006). Building a movement requires playful struggle with notions of how individuals can act as citizens in relation to the movement.

Our analysis of citizenship practices considers how SIU navigated the shoals of contemporary politics by using electronic media to create new roles for citizens and by providing safe venues where citizens could try out new identities. At the same time, by focusing on communication as a political act, we suggest ways advocates for change can more effectively marshal their resources by treating communication as a political act, as a practice that contributes directly to a successful movement.

VOLUME OVERVIEW

The book is divided into three sections corresponding to the three theoretical threads described above. Each of the chapters draws primarily on one of the theoretical perspectives to highlight the dynamics of SIU and offer practical suggestions for movement building based on this analysis. Between the sections, we have included texts that capture moments from SIU, including interviews with organizers and speeches from local actions. Together, the analytical chapters and the narrative interludes between the sections provide a multilayered description of SIU that results in both theoretical and practical insights into movement building.

Rhetorical Strategies

The four chapters on rhetorical strategies each approach rhetoric from a different perspective. Chapters 1 and 2 consider the rhetorical resources available to advocates who want to craft messages that bring people together into a movement. Chapter 1, “How Identity and Myth May Impact a Movement,” uses events in Texas to explore how a strong sense of place and community ethos can be used to draw people together. The chapter offers strategies for how movement builders can invoke identity and myth to plan events and appeal to potential participants. Chapter 2, “Calling All Artists: Moving Climate Change From My Space to My Place” focuses on another rhetorical resource available to movement builders: creating participatory art experiences that constitute the local and personal implications of climate change. Using three illustrations of green art—environmentally themed cultural activism that is political, activist-oriented, and community-based—from SIU, this chapter argues that the coconstruction of green art can uniquely explain and connect participants to abstract environmental crises such as climate change due to their participatory, experiential nature.

Whereas these chapters explore rhetorical resources available to advocates, the next two chapters analyze the rhetorical choices made at local SIU sites. Reflections from these analyses can enable activists to make informed choices about how to manage common rhetorical challenges.

Chapter 3, “Demonstrative Protest Rhetoric and the Boston Step It Up Campaign,” analyzes a Boston event to see whether and how the physical presence of people at the event sent a political message about climate change. Unfortunately, Prelli argues, SIU did not make a new movement visible to outside publics or politicians. Given this conclusion, he offers strategies that would more effectively use demonstrative rhetoric to draw media attention and build support for a movement. Chapter 4, “Step What Up? Rhetorical Framing and Dialectical Tensions in Salt Lake City’s Step It Up Events,” considers the tensions and disconnects between organizers and participants at rallies; for example, the chapter identifies a disconnect between organizers who advertised a “concert” and some participants who sought a “protest.” Noting these tensions, the authors suggest how different rhetorical framing could help manage these tensions and more effectively draw diverse publics to future events.

Modes of Organizing

Each of the chapters in this section focuses on a distinct aspect of organizing. In chapter 5, “Organizing Step It Up 2007: Social Movement Organizations as Collective Resistance,” the authors consider the dynamics between national and local SIU organizers. By encouraging local organizers to take control over their actions, SIU avoided some common problems that established environmental organizations face. Yet, the lack of control created new dilemmas typical of loosely organized movements such as SIU. Reminding readers of the goals behind collective resistance, the authors suggest key themes that organizers must consider in structuring their efforts—even when advocates do not want to replicate traditional organizations.

Chapter 6, “Toward Just Climate-Change Coalitions: Challenges and Possibilities in the Step It Up 2007 Campaign,” builds on the discussion of the national-local dynamics to advocate that national organizers need to explicitly build coalitions with climate-justice groups nationally and create strategies for establishing connections with existing local organizations beyond an open invitation on the Internet. This advocacy stems from the authors’ observations that climate-justice organizations,

environmental-justice values, and underrepresented populations were missing from SIU actions across the country. The authors suggest that collaborations with faith-based organizations might offer a social network that could be mobilized to advocate for justice in the climate movement.

Finally, chapter 7, “A Social Movements Success Story? Assessing a Self-Identified Movement for Climate Action,” applies an organizational lens to the same question explored in chapter 3 and comes to a somewhat different conclusion. The authors tackle the question of whether efforts to accomplish the ultimate organizational challenge—building a movement—were successful. They use a theoretical framework of the persuasive functions of movements developed by Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2007) to characterize SIU, situate SIU in ongoing efforts to address climate change, and discuss what types of mobilization will be necessary to address climate change.

Practices of Citizenship

In the final section, each of the chapters highlights a new way to practice citizenship in the twenty-first century. Examining the movement “cookbook” that national organizers offered potential grassroots organizers, chapter 8, “New Media, New Movement?” moves beyond the previous chapters on organizing to focus on how new media technologies, in particular, enabled and constrained action. Shifting from how local actions facilitate citizen action, this chapter considers the potential for relying on new media technologies to organize and practice activism. The analysis demonstrates that new media enabled a shift to local power that opened up the ways that individuals could participate in climate action.

Chapter 9, “Step It Up and Image Politics in the Pacific Northwest” applies the theory of image events—spectacles designed to gain media attention and disseminate visual messages (DeLuca 1999)—to examine actions in the Pacific Northwest. Citing research that creating image events to get media attention is an effective means of changing dominant discourse, this chapter offers practical lessons on how organizers might use image events effectively through the possibilities and challenges exemplified by SIU actions.

Whereas the previous chapter focused on participation through image events, chapter 10, “‘Smells Like Folk Life’: Participants’ Identity Construction at Step It Up,” demonstrates how participants are themselves shaped through their participation in advocacy and public events. Specifically, participant identities are renegotiated to fit the activities they are involved with, including advocacy and activism. The chapter concludes by discussing how this shift for individuals can be a potential resource for campaigns.

Next, chapter 11, “Environmentalism 2.0: New Forms of Social Activism,” argues that SIU represents a new system of activism in which organizational tactics and rhetoric differ from establishment environmentalism. This new system of activism makes the roles of participants differ too. In environmentalism 2.0, individuals are offered an open invitation to contribute to the movement, whereby their participation creates a constantly evolving and changing organization. After describing the new system of advocacy, the authors discuss the practical and critical implications of these changes.

Finally, chapter 12, “An Ecologist’s Response to the SIU Campaign: The Role of Natural Sciences in Environmental Movements,” examines the roles of natural science and scientists in SIU as the basis for discussing the challenges scientists face in participating in campaigns and movements. Explaining why the philosophy of natural science does not automatically lend itself to activism, the author suggests how advocates and activists might approach scientists with requests for data and their interpretation of data, which can contribute to advocacy efforts and enable scientists to act on their values.

Drawing on theory from rhetoric, organizational studies, and political science, these chapters tell the story of SIU from multiple levels and perspectives. But they do more than capture a past event; they use SIU as grist for discussion about what it takes to build a movement. Together, they provide a set of strategies for advocates and activists interested in building a movement in the twenty-first century. This volume builds on the efforts of SIU to create a movement to curb climate change and other environmental crises.

ENDNOTE

1. The shared interview protocol included the following questions: Why did you come today? How did you first hear about Step It Up? What is Step It Up? What do you think is the most important message? What do you think should happen next?

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Lance. 1998. The uncivic culture: Communication, identity, and the rise of lifestyle politics. *Political Science and Politics* 31:740–761.
- DeLuca, Kevin M. 1999. *Image politics: The new rhetoric of environmental activism*. New York: Guilford.
- McAdam, Doug, and W. Richard Scott. 2006. Organizations and movements. In *Social movements and organizational theory*, ed. Gerald F. Davis, Doug McAdam, W. Richard Scott, and Mayer N. Zald, 4–40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McKibben, Bill. 2007. Step It Up: Introducing a brand-new, mass-protest climate movement for 2007. *Grist: Environmental News and Commentary*. <http://www.grist.org/comments/dispatches/2007/01/08/mckibben/index.html> (accessed September 6, 2008).
- Morris, Charles E. III, and Stephen Howard Browne. 2006. Introd. in *Readings on the rhetoric of social protest*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne, 1–3. State College, PA: Strata Publishing.
- Peterson, Tarla Rai, M. Nils Peterson, Markus J. Peterson, Stacey A. Allison, and David Gore. 2006. To play the fool: Can environmental conservation and democracy survive social capital? *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:116–140.
- Step It Up. 2007. No-impact man features Step It Up on *The Colbert Report*. Step It Up 2007 blog. <http://april.stepitup2007.org/article.php?list=class&class=20&offset=80> (accessed September 6, 2008).
- Stewart, Charles J., Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton. 2007. *Persuasion and social movements*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland.
- Verba, Sidney, and Norman Nie. 1972. *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. New York: Harper and Row.

CHAPTER INTERLUDE

SPEECH BY MAYOR BERNERO
OF LANSING, MICHIGAN

Transcribed by Micheal Vickery

JESSICA POCIASK, STEP IT UP (SIU) ORGANIZER: All right, well, I'm going to introduce Virg Bernero. This is the mayor of Lansing. He's going to come out today and talk about his Go Green, Go Lansing initiative.

One of the things that he's doing right now is he actually has just signed the Mayor Climate Protection Act. This is a component of the Kyoto treaty. This is very, very important because we have this gentleman, who is in an automotive-ruled state capital, he is shaking things up. He is taking the initiative. And I think he is a leader that is stepping up and outside the normal bounds of what we can expect, but he is setting an example for many people to follow. So I just want to give him a round of applause when he comes up here to speak.

VIRG BERNERO, MAYOR OF LANSING, MICHIGAN: Thank you, thank you, and you're too kind. What I really want to say is congratulations to