

Theoretical Approach to the Collaborative Environmental Activities: Household Waste Disposal towards Environmentally Friendly Daily Life

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Abstract

What brings us the proenvironmental behavior? What lies behind people's behavior in daily life? This paper is intended to analyze and discuss how the environment-oriented norm is developed and transmitted in daily life focusing on household waste disposal. Waste management companies in Finland have unique environmental policies which are intended to instill the environmentally friendly awareness into local residents by collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication. For the purpose of obtaining the qualitative data, the participant observation was conducted in Finland. Following the results, this paper suggests the significance of the collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication in order to transmit the environment-oriented norm.

Keywords: proenvironmental behavior; social construction; waste disposal; environmental communication; human science; collaborative activities;

1 Introduction

What brings us the proenvironmental behavior? What lies behind people's behavior in daily life? Much of the research related to the proenvironmental behavior discusses the determinants and effectiveness of people's proenvironmental behavior. Ferguson, Branscombe, and Reynolds (2011), for example, examined the effects of intergroup comparison on willingness to perform sustainable behavior, conducted a one-way ANOVA and mediation analyses, and showed that the intergroup comparison could be employed to promote motivation to perform sustainable behavior. Clark, Kotchen, and Moore (2003) conducted a survey of participants and non-participants in a premium-priced, green electricity program and analyzed the participants' specific motives for participating. William and Kelly (2003) performed a social survey in England and analyzed the public's perception of a local authority recycling scheme. Previous research like these is insightful. Little, however, has discussed the proenvironmental behavior from the social constructionist perspective.

This paper stresses that the proenvironmental behavior should also be discussed from the perspective of human sciences which embraces social constructionism as its meta-theory (Gergen, 1999). Social reality is a reality of communicative relationships (Coulter, 1979). From this perspective, this paper considers the environment-oriented norm and the proenvironmental behavior regarding household waste disposal. Less garbage, reuse and recycling are required for the environmentally friendly daily life as the proenvironmental behavior. In our daily life, however, we cannot live without producing garbage. Any person throws something away in everyday life. In this context, this paper focuses on household waste disposal as the proenvironmental behavior in daily life.

This paper analyzes the proenvironmental behavior based on the case studies conducted in Finland in which waste management companies and the local residents have created the robust and mutual relationship through the collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication (Koda, 2012).

The next section provides the theoretical background of this research and the definition of communication. The third section shows the case studies conducted in Finland in order to introduce the collaborative environmental activities based on the robust and mutual relationship between the waste management companies and the local residents. Following the results of the case studies conducted in Finland, the fourth section provides the theoretical analysis of environment-oriented norm. The last section is dedicated to the conclusion of this research.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Group Dynamics

Group dynamics newly advocated by Sugiman (2006a) stresses collaborative practice by researchers and people, maintaining social constructionism as its meta-theory. This new group dynamics greatly differs from traditional group dynamics created by Kurt Lewin (1947a, 1947b) in that it emphasizes the nature of a collectivity while the latter, the traditional group dynamics, underlines the psychological process of individuals. Sugiman (1998) defines group dynamics as “a field of study in which the dynamic nature of human collectivities or groups is investigated by examining the collectivities as wholes on the one hand, and the dynamics bilateral relations between the collectivity and the lives, or the psychological states, of individuals who belong to these collectivities on the other”, focusing on the collective stream which is the dynamic state of the collectivity (Sugiman, 2006b).

The collectivity exists in the stream of the invisible changing norm. At the same time, the changing people and environment unfold in a visible manner before people in the collectivity. In this context, the theory for sense-making and the theory for decision-making in order to analyze and consider the collective stream theoretically are needed (Sugiman, 2006b).

Since this paper is intended to analyze and discuss how the environment-oriented norm is developed and transmitted and what brings us the proenvironmental behavior, it focuses on the theory for sense-making, namely, the theory of body.

2.2 Theory of Body

Theory of body advocated by Osawa gives us the insight into the development and the transmission of a norm. Meaning and norm are inextricably linked, that is to say, two sides of the same coin. Meaning has two properties: generality and priority (Osawa, 1994) and it is essentially a social phenomenon (Osawa, 1990a). Meaning for a being is “something” when something appears as something that transcends itself, and identifying a being with meaning equals to giving the distinction to the space in which the being exists (Osawa, 1990b). Meaning is the identity of an object of valid action and norm is an operation to distinguish an infinite set of valid actions from an infinite set of invalid actions (Osawa, 1990b, 1994).

Osawa (1990) defines a body not only as a subject for intentionality but also as a being at which intentionality emerges and to which intentionality is attributed.

In Osawa’s theory of body, an interchanging body, a third body and inter-bodily chain are important. An interchanging body can be described as the dynamic stream that makes intentionality emerge here and there in the space (Osawa, 1990b). Sugiman’s explanation of an interchanging body in Osawa’s theory of body gives us the clear image as follows:

A body can become another body, “body X”. This body can perceive the world at the place of another body, “body Y”. It can return to its original body, “body X”, and perceive the world from there. For an interchanging body, self and other differ from each other relative to where the world appears at a particular point of time.

(Sugiman, 2006b, 2008)

What should be mentioned about an interchanging body is that it can also occur in the relation with non-human beings.

An inter-bodily chain is a situation in which two or more bodies repeatedly interchange frequently and intensely and it is essential for the development of a norm in that specific bodies in an inter-bodily chain produce communal experience which is to be the basis of a norm and meaning (Osawa, 1990b). A third body emerges as a result of an inter-bodily chain and it imposes a norm on specific bodies (Osawa, 1990b). The development of a norm parallels the emergence of this special body, namely, a third body. The set of specific bodies that attribute to the third body is defined as the sphere of influence (Osawa, 1990b). Sugiman comprehensibly explains the sphere of influence in Osawa’s theory of body as follows:

“A norm is developed as the voice of a third body. The area where a third body’s voice can be heard is called sphere of influence. Only specific bodies that have constructed an inter-bodily chain are included in the sphere of influence of a third body that has been produced by the chain.”

(Sugiman, 2008)

Transmission of a norm can occur unilaterally with the vehicle that can be a body, a physical thing, or language which enlarge the sphere of influence.

2.3 Communication

Communication is defined as “what produces something communal, provides a basis of meaning and enables our life world to be less ambivalent in the end (Sugiman, 2008).” It is noteworthy that this has much difference from the concept of communication represented by Shannon's model in which communication is, in short, a process of transmission of messages (Shannon, 1948).

Following the definition of communication above, this paper considers environmental communication as communication that provides people with the basis of the meaning of the practice of the proenvironmental behavior and activities.

3 Case studies in Finland

3.1 Waste management companies and local residents in Finland

Finland is one of the most successful countries in household waste minimization per capita (Koda, 2012; OECD, 2008). Waste management companies in Finland have unique environmental policies which are intended to instill the environmentally friendly awareness into local residents by environmental communication. Environmental communication provided by regional waste management companies in Finland highly values a close relationship with local residents.

Many of the waste management companies in Finland have at least one special center for local residents called "eco-center" at which anyone can learn about the environmental issues for free and, in most cases, anyone can buy recycled or used items. In addition, pupils in Finland have to visit the eco-center to learn the history of the waste and this is strongly suggested by the Finnish curriculum. They have to visit the eco-center several times between lower-grade and higher-grade.

For the purpose of obtaining interviews from the officers of waste management companies and visiting and observing the sites where environmental communication was actually being put into practice, I visited two waste management companies in Turku and Tampere in Finland.

Turun Seudun Jätehuolto Oy (TSJ) is located in Turku, Finland. It is owned jointly by the regional municipalities and its customers include 317,000 residents and businesses located within its operational area.

Pirkanmaan Jätehuolto Oy (PJ) is located in Tampere, Finland. It is owned jointly by the regional municipalities and its customers include 416,000 residents and businesses located within its operational area.

Collaborative Environmental Activities

According to the interviews with the waste advisors of TSJ and PJ, it was found that both waste management companies accentuated the significance of creating and maintaining the robust and mutual relationship with local residents (Koda, 2012). Each waste management company has slightly different principle. TSJ, for example, sets up a hotline for residents in Turku to communicate with them and a waste advisor receive phone calls from local residents in business hours. Residents in Turku can obtain the best answer out of the waste advisor over anything related to the waste management: the way to dispose of garbage, how to recycle things, what kind of things can be recycled and so forth. TSJ commits to strenuous efforts to spur public knowledge in recycling in multiple ways such as the visits to small groups including home visits upon request.

Based upon the belief that the earlier children get the positive information on environmental activities and proenvironmental behavior, the more positive and robust their attitude toward them becomes and the more spontaneously they put them into practice, PJ puts high priority on instilling positive attitude toward environmental activities and proenvironmental behavior into local residents through various original goods such as video games, CDs, calendars and so on. In addition, PJ strongly recommends the residents to call the landfills “eco-center”. PJ owns the two biggest landfills in Finland, located on the fringe of Tampere. PJ believes that the word “eco-center” gives residents a more positive image toward the landfills and these landfills are not only a landfill but also a center that anyone can visit and learn environmental issues. Both of these two management companies stated that it is the most urgent and crucial to build up the robust and mutual relationship with the local residents and create the positive attitude toward proenvironmental behavior and environmental activities.

As part of the collaborative environmental activities, both waste management companies have implemented numerous efforts. In addition to their efforts above, PJ, for instance, has arranged photo contests for the “waste calendar” which PJ distributes every year. TSJ focuses on the exhibitions at eco-center featuring photos and things which show residents in chronological order how the waste has been dealt with and recycled. It should be noted that most of these environmental activities are conducted with the local residents.

According to the waste advisors, they successfully created and maintained the close and robust relationship with local residents by the collaborative environmental activities based on the environmental communication.

3.2 Participant observation conducted in Finland

In order to investigate the environmental communication from the residents' side, the participant observation was conducted in two households in Tampere and Joensuu in Finland.

I spent all day long together with the collaborators, video-taped or recorded their behavior, conversations and activities under their permission, and kept logs as much as possible. In both case, in-depth interview was conducted. This paper introduces each case study briefly.

Case 1

The collaborator in Tampere was a Finnish single male student in late twenties living in an apartment alone. Before starting the participant observation, he described himself as a person that was not environment-oriented. However, through the observation, it was observed that he separated garbage in a correct way according to the manuals distributed by the waste management company and he often considered which one of his things he would or should bring to the eco-center. Garbage separation and sorting things out are something that should be done at the same time for him. One day, while he was sorting it out, he remarked as follows:

“I have never thought that garbage separation and things like that are bothersome. When I lived with my family, you know, before entering to the university, I was doing the same. Nothing special.”

Case 2

The collaborators in Joensuu were members of a family of two: a Finnish female woman in late sixties and her nephew who was a single student in mid-twenties. They were environment-oriented and they tried to spend days in an environmentally friendly way. They stated they often went to a recycling center to get things in cheaper price and they had been making an effort to increase the life of things. Here are excerpts from the remarks by the female collaborator.

“Since I was little, I have done this. I didn’t know why I had to do this, but I have just done this. It’s, like, as if Japanese people don’t eat anything before saying something when eating, you know. I just cannot throw the garbage away without separating it.”

“In our case, we have a so-called “recycling center” in Joensuu. Well, I guess other cities have the similar things, too, anyway, and we often bring our things that we won’t use anymore to this center and also buy things there. It’s a big center and, yeah, we often go there to look for something cheap and nice.”

In-depth Interviews

In addition to the participant observation in two households above, in-depth interviews with Finnish local residents in Joensuu were conducted. Twenty-three Finnish residents in Joensuu who volunteered to be interviewed were ranged in age from 15 to 72 years old. Eleven of them were male and the rest were female.

Each interview mainly focused on the proenvironmental behavior and activities that they thought they had done, how they had conducted the waste disposal and what they thought the environmentally friendly daily life should be. Some excerpts from the interviews are as follows:

[Female, 52 years old]

“When I forget how to separate the waste, all I have to is to visit the waste management company or call it to ask about how to do that.”

“Environmentally friendly daily life... for me, it should not be something in which someone forces me to do something in an environmentally friendly way. For me, it should be something that appears as something environmentally friendly in my daily activities.

I am living an environmentally friendly daily life now, don't you think? I don't know so much about CO₂ or environmental issues, but I know what I'm doing and what I should do. My parents, well, actually, especially my mom, told me how to spend a day."

[Male, 19 years old]

"I am kind of fed up with hearing environmental issues, but still, I am doing environmentally friendly things such as correct garbage separation for recycling etc, etc. I don't know why. I can't help but do it. It's good for the environment, anyway. Right?"

"As I said, I am fed up with hearing environmental stuff. 60 years or 70 years later, I will be dead, right? I don't think environmental problems are big issues for me, but I am doing environmentally friendly things. I am doing it not because it's good for the environment but because it's kind of a habit for me, and I feel uncomfortable if I don't do it. I guess if you can produce a society where you feel uncomfortable if you don't do environmentally friendly activities or stuff like that, then you can call it an environmentally friendly daily life, right? I think that's cool."

[Female, 72 years old]

"In my opinion, we have a long history of recycling and reusing things, which reduces garbage. I am 72 years old now and I remember my parents and my grandparents had done the same things as I do now."

"I suppose history is a big factor for our daily life, I mean, well, Finland has such a tough history, which makes us patient? enduring?, you know what I mean, patient, yes, patient people. I don't know how to express my opinion well, but the waste disposal is deeply connected to our living, I suppose. Our history makes us live this way. You know the word, "sisu"? It means our spirit. It means patience, having guts. I know you, Japanese people, have something similar to sisu. Sisu is like that. We, Finnish, all have sisu and I feel sisu doesn't allow us to live in non-environmentally friendly way."

All the interviewees said that they had been repeatedly told how to separate garbage since they were little. Moreover, all of those who were under 40 years old said that they had an understanding of the environmental issues through the educational visits to the waste management company when they were younger.

It seems to be highly probable that the proenvironmental behavior and environmental activities are something very familiar to them (Koda, 2012). In addition, it is reasonable to suppose that they are included in some norm which leads them to what they are doing.

4 Environment-oriented norm

Each of waste management company in Finland and the local residents in its operational area have the close and robust relationship created by the collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication (Koda, 2012).

Let us analyze and discuss the transmission of the environment-oriented norm from the standpoint of the body of theory.

As a result of an inter-bodily chain, waste management companies have a third body (third body W) which appears as something environment-oriented. Consequently, environment-oriented norm is developed as the voice of a third body W. As a result of an inter-bodily chain, residents have a third body (third body L) which appears as something developed historically and culturally. Consequently, a specific norm is developed as the voice of a third body L.

Continuous and consistent approaches by waste management companies by collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication have contributed to the enlargement of the sphere of influence in which the voice of the third body W can be heard. It is reasonable to suppose that the environment-oriented norm has been transmitted from a sphere of the waste management companies to the one of the local residents. In this way, the sphere of the local residents is included in the one of the waste management companies. The sphere of the local residents becomes a part of the sphere of the waste management companies while the third body W now becomes the one that can provide the norm for a wider sphere, and at the same time the contents of the norm becomes general enough to apply it to bodies in the sphere of the local residents as well as the sphere of the waste management companies. Figure 1 was described based on the figure of unilateral transmission of norm in Osawa's theory represented graphically by Sugiman (2008). Figure 1 shows the transmission of the environment-oriented norm as described above.

In the case of the waste management companies and the local residents in Finland, the vehicle that transmits environment-oriented norm from the sphere of the waste management companies to the one of the local residents is considered to be waste advisors of each waste management company. Waste advisors provide the local residents with much information as requested, and moreover, they conduct collaborative environmental activities even at the residents' houses, which contributes to the unilateral transmission of the environment-oriented norm.

The results of the case studies support this analysis. Waste management companies try to build up the robust and mutual relationship with the local residents. In order to achieve this, they do almost anything for free for the residents (of course, they do this because it is their duty) and this encourages residents to have more relationship with waste management companies, and then, gradually, the environment-oriented norm is transmitted from the sphere of waste management companies to the one of local residents.

5 Conclusion

This paper analyzed and discussed how environment-oriented norm is developed and transmitted, and what brings us the proenvironmental behavior focusing on the household waste disposal.

The case studies conducted in Finland indicate that the collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication play an important role in the transmission of environment-oriented norm. This paper suggests the significance of the collaborative environmental activities based on environmental communication in order to transmit the environment-oriented norm. This does also offer some insight into the significance of the collaborative activities by people and those who intend to promote environmental action in terms of other environmental issues.

It is those who live in daily life that buy and use any environmentally friendly products. It is those who live in daily life that put into practice environmental policies. We should never forget these facts.

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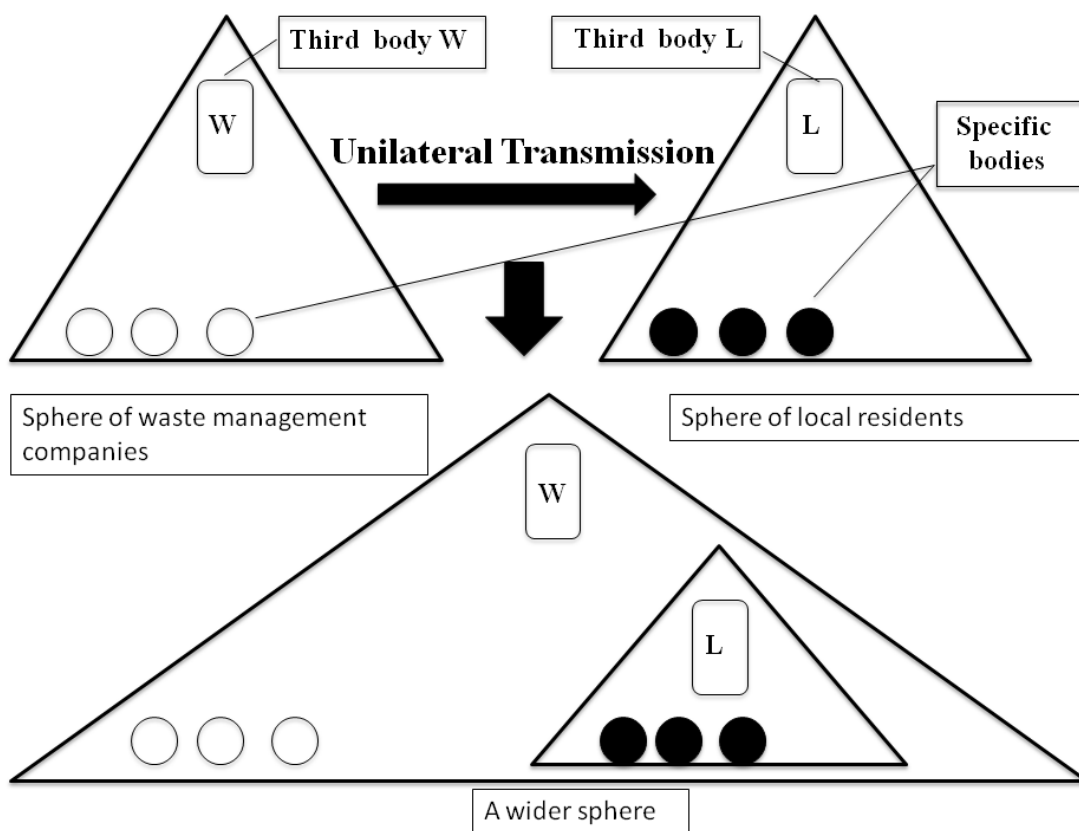


Figure 1. Transmission of environment-oriented norm