



## EuroPCom 2017 Closing Session

**10 November 2017**

The closing session at the end of the conference gathered together the results of the ideas labs, presented by the lab leaders. These will be discussed with the audience and ideas lab facilitators. The debate also aimed to discuss how we can identify effective ways to engage citizens in the European project and in public affairs more generally, and establish active channels for two-way communication through listening, conversation and implementation of any feedback received.

**Speakers:** Jenny Koutsomarkou (Partnership Officer, URBACT, France), Katja Rosenbohm (Head of Communication, EEA, Denmark), Gema Román (Director of the Consumer Communication Department, ATREVIA, Spain), Friso Wiersum (Communication Project Officer, European Cultural Foundation, The Netherlands)

**Closing remarks:** Ian Barber (Director of Communications, European Committee of the Regions)

**Moderator:** Stephen Boucher (author of "The Little Manual of Political Creativity")

**Stephen Boucher** opened the session by pointing out the importance of citizen engagement for large communication projects. He then introduced the audience to the Sli.do poll, and asked the participants to share one or two words on their key findings/takeaway from EuroPCom 2017. Mr Boucher also highlighted the importance of ideas labs in developing new ideas, and invited the leaders of the labs to reflect upon the discussions they had had and share the main outcomes.

**Jenny Koutsomarkou** started by describing the project on which her ideas lab was built – URBACT's Interactive Cities. Interactive Cities is a project aimed at exploring how digital, social media and user generated content can improve urban management in European cities. She went on to point out the importance of social media in fostering urban governance and bringing local authorities and citizens together.

During this ideas lab, representatives of four cities came together to describe the projects they have implemented in terms of digital governance, and the lab produced two main findings: first, cities should be about more than digital in order to engage citizens. To transmit a positive message about the EU and its work, cities should have a combination of online tools and offline support. The second message coming out of this lab was the need to find local ambassadors – either citizens or visiting tourists. This concept would allow cities to promote themselves at local and international level by using the multiplier effect of other voices. Therefore, according to the findings of the lab, urban development can be improved by combining dematerialized tools such as social media with human perspectives on the ground.

Next, **Gema Román** addressed the 10 good practices one should know when communicating with young people about the European Union. During her ideas lab, 50 participants discussed the issue with actual young people who were used as contrast agents and shared insights and experiences, and together drew up a set of good practices. With the support of a video detailing those good practices, she stated that communication should focus on results and their usability, use more visual and digital content which triggers emotions, and should forget about political correctness. The lab also concluded that the EU should communicate with immediacy, integrity and authenticity, but also should engage in two-way





communication. As well as communicating facts, the EU should also be able to reach citizens directly and ask them about their expectations and their thoughts.

Summarising the ideas lab entitled "From audience to partner: exploring innovative engagement approaches to boosting policy effectiveness", **Katja Rosenbohm** once again emphasised the need for two-way communication, and the fact that institutions should review the language they use when transmitting messages. In that regard, her lab featured two stories: a climate neutral citizens' initiative from the city of Leuven; and a global campaign managed by the Danish Board of Technology on climate change.

Participants then discussed whether participatory campaigns can only be successful at the local level, and how those projects can be upscaled to the national, European and international level. Another message related to communities – even though the EU functions as a public institution, it should be able to develop external networks of communicators, as ambassadors, in order to disseminate its messages. Finally, the projects undertaken should have real results and impact citizens' lives. Ms Rosenbohm concluded her intervention by stating that, beyond being the transmitters of messages, public institutions should act as facilitators of social debate.

Finally, **Friso Wiersum** started by describing an incubator project the European Cultural Foundation is designing called Ideas Camp. He then set out the main message of his ideas lab, which focused on how to reach people outside of our echo chambers. He insisted on the need for ambassadors as a new key to communication. Later, Mr Wiersum stated that EU communication as a whole should rely on trust and personally engage in new communication tools. He continued by saying that, in order to reach new echo chambers, stories should not always end where they are expected to end, and that institutions should be able to research negative messages in order to understand what went wrong. Finally, Mr Wiersum concluded by saying that communicators should not only listen to other messages, but should also be daring, as democracy lives in imagination.

**Mr Boucher** then displayed the results of the Sli.do poll on the key takeaways from EuroPCom 2017, with results such as: "trust", "listening" or "emotions", and invited the participants to reflect on this outcome.

Can you share with us in one or two words your key finding/takeaway of EuroPCom 2017?

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The floor was then opened up for debate, and participants highlighted the need to engage the staff of the EU institutions as a whole when communicating about Europe, and not only communication experts.

Finally, **Ian Barber** was invited to share closing remarks on the whole EuroPCom 2017 conference. Mr Barber started by thanking the audience for their engagement with the conference, as well as the Ideas Lab leaders for their insights in developing future EU communication strategies. In this regard, he stressed that the conference was a learning event, not only for the participants, but also for the EU institutions, the European Committee of the Regions and its members.