



EuroPCom 2015
Session 10 report
21.10.2015

How to make EU news local news? (bis)

This session too was about selling EU news, but with a shift in focus towards how to communicate the EU energy and resources strategy. Chaired by **Andrew Gardner**, European Committee of the Regions press officer, this workshop focused on how officials could communicate EU projects to local journalists so that citizens were given a clear picture of the decisions and the effects they would have on their daily lives.

The first speaker, **Daria Santucci**, a communication officer specialised in strategic communication from the European Commission's Directorate General for Energy, offered the first insights into how to make EU news local news. Communication on energy was a matter of priorities and guiding principles. It was important to:

- "be factual" and give concrete and tangible information to the public by using statistics, numbers and data they could understand and rely on;
- "be meaningful" and make sure the communication contained a clear message;
- "be visual": get the perfect picture, perfect graph or a better way to explain your 1 000 words in an image;
- "be answerable" and let the public come back to you. Feedback was one of the strongest resources to tie the public to you. Two-way, symmetric communication was a must when it came to really engaging with the public;
- "be connected" and fill the gap in social media. All possible media and every available platform should be used to share the message;
- "be engaged" and make citizens your allies. Society should be called upon to get involved and become a key actor.

Hanna Möllers, an award winning TV journalist currently working for "*buten un binnen*", the local public TV station in Bremen, talked about the Energy cities and the Energy Union Proposal addressed to citizens. The key messages were very much oriented towards creating a huge energy market. The Energy Union was an opportunity to create a new sustainable society, and citizens must participate in it. Cities and citizens shouldn't just be seen as consumers, they also needed to be seen as players and to be involved in the project. The Covenant of Mayors was a great initiative from the EU institutions for European society.

Ms Möllers also made it clear that EU officers needed to rely more on local ambassadors, as the Covenant of Majors was currently doing. EU energy policy needed to be translated into something citizens could see as an opportunity, e.g. the Energy Union could help society by generating jobs. The EU and the Energy Union project needed more story-telling, more narrative was needed in order to reinforce the message of the EU as a world leader. There



was a need to rely on best practices at local level and build up a "champions" game plan. The EU needed to make its citizens proud.

Alix Bolle followed media and EU policy developments at Energy Cities, the European Association of Local Authorities in Energy Transition. She was also the Communications Manager of the EU Covenant of Majors initiative, which brought together over 6 000 local authorities committed to reducing CO₂ emissions on their territory. **Ms Bolle** pointed out the main problem for many national/regional/local journalists: they didn't understand the EU machinery. It was actually complicated, as it involved many players and the working process was not as simple as it appeared.

Ms Bolle explained that the right moment to communicate on a specific EU subject was when it was linked to European or international news. It was necessary to communicate about the Energy Union when, for example, a gas crisis was happening. It was important to seize the opportunity to push the information and create demand for it while the issue was in the headlines. Following this same example, the Covenant of Majors got a lot of attention in the media when it was proved that gas imports from Russia could be reduced by saving CO₂ in Poland. Information but also feedback and a response were needed from the public.

During a round of questions from the audience, the speakers gave some advice on how to make EU news local news. Among the suggestions was the need to take care of local governance before tackling a new communication campaign and to use ambassadors, as they were key for an optimal communications approach. Ambassadors and representatives needed to be trusted, as even from a message-driven point of view it could sometimes be risky, as the message could slightly change when not directly communicated by us. Also it was made clear that good communicators needed to avoid jargon when addressing the public.

To conclude the workshops, three key tools were identified to promote and make EU news go local: available communications tools (including social networks and platforms), local ambassadors (EDICs, representatives) and local journalists with knowledge of the specific field. The main issue was the relevance of the information itself: it needed to concern people, be relevant for society and the public being addressed. Putting faces to news was essential to enable people to identify them more easily and quickly. Well known representatives were the key to correctly focused transmission and trusted informatio