



Closing Session **21st October 2016**

Speakers:

- Prof. Roberto Castaldi (CesUE)
- Suzanna Matvejevic (European Committee of the Regions)
- Charl lie Jourdan (OLD-CONTINENT Agency)
- Marianne Nilsson (Region V rmland, Sweden)
- Boro Milovic (Europolitan Trends), Quirine Winkler (City Embassies)
- Hanne Bastiaensen (Antwerp City)
- Markku Markkula (President of the European Committee of the Regions)

Moderator: Stephen Boucher (CEO of ConsoGlobe.com and Policy Designer at Inventio, Belgium)

Stephen Boucher introduced the session by reminding the participants that this was not the end of an event, but rather the beginning of a journey, a theme that was touched upon by many of the speakers. He then invited the leaders of the ideas labs to reflect upon the discussions they had had and to share with the audience the main ideas or conclusions that resulted.

Professor Roberto Castaldi spoke about the European Awareness Day (EAD), an innovative way of communicating with citizens about the EU. The concept of the event is based on the interconnection of music and rational debate, and its aim is to bring in the EU closer to citizens, thereby countering Europhobia and the re-emergence of nationalism. The project began in 2013 with a European Awareness Day organised in Tuscany and broadcast on regional TV, and within two years the EAD events had been brought to Milan, Rome and Naples and were also being broadcast nationally. The project has also been tested in Paris, Madrid and Lisbon.

The event is typically divided into two parts, a musical performance followed by a debate. The musical performance presents the main points of EU integration, aiming to make people 'warm up' to the European issues and encourage them to participate in the discussion that follows. It takes the form of a love story, embodying the European project as a romance between European citizens. The musical is very flexible - the main language of the show is English, but each of the major events is accompanied by a well-known European song, which is sung in its native language. The performance is then followed by a rational debate focusing on current EU issues and attempting to offer solutions from a wide range of perspectives.

The initiators of the EAD project aim to reach all European countries by 2019. The plan is also to expand the language range from English, French and Italian to include others, with Polish, Spanish and Portuguese already in the pipeline. Prof. Castaldi invited audience to help introduce the project in other countries, especially those which are becoming increasingly Eurosceptic, as it is there that new means of communication are most needed. In the discussion, the ideas lab participants highlighted that in the current context, where strong anti-elite feelings combine with Euroscepticism to create a difficult communication environment, the musical approach is a flexible tool for initiating dialogue with citizens. They also emphasised the importance of involving local people in the project, as the EU *is* local people.

Summarising the discussion in the ideas lab called 'What Unites Us?', **Suzanna Matvejevic** noted that the younger generation takes their 'European-ness' for granted – for them, it is a given rather than an option. However, this does not automatically imply a positive association, and efforts must be made to foster and encourage a positive perception of European-ness. When we try to promote a European identity, it is important to ask what it is composed of, and what are the positive European values we can communicate to the world.

Participants of the lab identified culture, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and solidarity as defining concepts. Languages were also highlighted as an element that is often viewed as divisive, but in fact this very diversity should be viewed as something that can enrich and actively unite us as a European community. A number of key challenges relating to public communication by and about Europe were also noted. It is crucial to recognise that communication is a two-way process, and to listen to the voices of citizens as well as trying to make them hear us. There is also a widespread wish for 'real' communication from the European institutions, which are often perceived as being somewhat distant, technical or biased. Communication should be seen not as pure transmission, but as conversation. Finally, participants emphasised the importance of sharing non-success stories, as a means of learning from issues faced by others and avoiding repetition of mistakes.

Charl lie Jourdan presented the mission of public-com.eu, a new free online training tool for public communication professionals, which is currently under development. Public-com.eu aims to provide a comprehensive one-stop-shop with all the practical information communications professionals really need, in a simple and user-friendly format. It is designed to train people at every level of the communications chain, from interns to directors. The content is structured into five steps: account; strategy; conception; production; and distribution. Participants of the lab were invited to join the brainstorming on this training tool and thus contribute to its future development.

During the brainstorming session, the ideas lab participants emphasised the need for a community to build up around the platform, to exchange ideas and share best practice solutions for problems that arise. In terms of content, a number of suggestions were offered including blog articles, LinkedIn tip lists, MOOCs, quick fixes and templates. When asked to think of key words and phrases that should define the platform, participants produced a list of eleven: feeling, interactive, dynamic, colourful, practical, creative, positive thinking, always there, intuitive, information and coordination.

Marianne Nilsson shared the idea of an equal communication handbook, developed by her team in V rmland, Sweden. This handbook aims to raise awareness of gender inclusivity in communication, and gives structured tips and guidance on how to communicate in a more egalitarian way by avoiding negative, gender-based stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes can often limit our thinking and expression, and that is why it is important to choose words and pictures consciously with inclusivity in mind. This is also relevant to our portrayal of workplaces and the roles pictures give to men and women.

During the discussion that followed, ideas lab participants noted that although they found the examples relevant, this relevance can nonetheless vary across cultures. It was pointed out that communicators have a lot of power to change these stereotypes by making conscious choices to avoid them. Finally, given that a structured approach to gender equality in communication is lacking in many places, it was generally agreed that it would be useful to provide this guide in other languages, provided that in each language version was appropriately adapted.

Boro Milovic called on us to 'smash the wall of institutional communication' by using social media ambassadors and influencers in communicating public policies. Mr Milovic emphasised the importance of interacting with people on a personal level, and new digital channels like Instagram, Snapchat and Periscope should also be explored. The fact that these are very visual, mobile and popular means that they have a lot of potential, although Facebook is considered too over-crowded to be very useful. He shared his experience with Instagram, where 27,000 people already follow the Europolitan Trends project. The project focuses specifically on regions and cities as well as Europe as a whole, showing European funding through street-level images. One example is to show an image of a building that has been renovated thanks to EU funding. In this way, people learn things about the EU that they would not usually be aware of, and often local people comment that they had not realised EU funds were being used in this way.

In the discussion during the ideas lab, participants noted that Instagram may not always be relevant, especially for more concrete projects that do not really produce visual results. However, the idea of using social media influencers as policy ambassadors was widely appreciated, as it was felt that they would be able to reach a wider audience outside the 'Brussels bubble'. One of the scenarios discussed was having a celebrity take over social media in the name of an institution, adding a personal touch and using this soft approach to communicate EU policies. However, greater incentives would probably be needed and a cautious attitude is appropriate, as it is difficult to control content coming from outside sources. Other key points raised were the importance of repetition on various social media channels, the importance of storytelling as a means of garnering attention, mapping people who could be potential ambassadors and providing them with incentives, and ultimately taking a multi-modal approach to communication.

Quirine Winkler shared her experience with building platforms both on and offline to enable bottom-up initiatives. City Makers and City Embassies are pioneers of exploring, shaping and defining these new ways of working. They are the active citizens that enhance the liveability of their cities and create communities in their own neighbourhoods, for example by setting up cooperatives, starting communal gardens, and organising self-sustaining energy facilities. The projects are collaborative by nature and based on participative decision-making. They often work on a small scale, but their work makes a much larger impact. The emphasis is in co-creation of cities with a multiplicity of stakeholders and the importance of creating an environment in which experimentation is fostered and supported. The communication platform called 'New Europe - Cities in Transition', aims to help these scattered City Makers to connect, inspire, collaborate, exchange know-how, expand their network and communicate various key points to the Ministers responsible for the Urban Agenda of the EU. In the final point, Ms Winkler invited the audience to join this initiative and to bring it to other countries.

The last ideas lab leader **Hanne Bastiaensen** highlighted Europe's role in facilitating the sharing of best practice, but also in inspiring people to try new projects and helping to find solutions when problems arise. The ideas lab led by Ms Bastiaensen explored what happens when citizens have the power to decide how to spend the city budget. This idea has been put into practice in Antwerp, where citizens are empowered to make real decisions about spending municipal money (10% of the budget). This new

initiative aims to encourage citizen participation in the decision-making processes and promote engagement with political issues. It also functions as a pathway to mutual understanding, where the process itself is as important as the outcome. Communication is key to keeping the project alive. Involvement in developing and implementing a project gives citizens a sense of ownership of the work of the municipality. Moreover, a citizen-selected project is more visible to the community and local media, thus making more people aware of the initiative and encouraging them to actively participate.

The discussion of the ideas lab participants reflected on which types of projects citizens would be likely to prioritise, and also whether this bottom-up approach will ultimately result in wiser spending. It also explored how initiatives of this type might best be promoted and communicated, in order to encourage participation by those other than 'the usual suspects'.

The floor was then opened to the audience, who raised questions and made comments on free trade agreements, Euroscepticism and citizens' dialogues, as well as challenging EuroPCom itself to be fully participatory next year and to take place in an entirely open space.

Finally **Markku Markkula**, President of the European Committee of the Regions, was invited to close the conference – although he was quick to point out that it was not an end, but in fact a beginning. He emphasised the need for local communication and the role that the 700+ Committee of the Regions members could play in bringing Europe's message to people who would not normally hear it. He challenged participants to be open to new ideas themselves – how will *you* react differently after this? How can *you* contribute on this journey? In this respect, President Markkula highlighted several upcoming CoR events, including the citizens' dialogue in Dubrovnik and the Science Meets Regions event, and emphasised the importance of reflecting as well as listening. Innovation, interaction and collaboration are key. In the final remarks, President Markkula shared his hope that the exchanges during the EuroPCom conference and the concrete suggestions coming from the workshops and ideas labs would help us to sharpen our tools to face the many communication challenges ahead of us.

Stephen Boucher then closed the session by thanking the speakers, organisers and participants, and leaving the audience with a manifesto of honesty and citizen empowerment.