



Does Good Communication of EU Funding Help Improve Europe's Image?

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Speakers: Jacek Jaworski (Department of Coordination of Information & Promotion at the Polish Ministry of Regional Development), Sandra Fiene (Press Officer at the European Commission Representation in Bonn, Germany), Jonas Norholm Larsen (Communications Manager at the South Denmark European Office), and Giuseppe Chiellino (Journalist at Il Sole 24 Ore, Italy) and.

Moderator: Peter Fischer (European Commission, DG for Regional and Urban Policy)

This workshop focused on how good communication of European funds influences citizens' attitudes towards the EU. Communicating is a process in which every messaging actor (from politicians to journalists) plays a key role in spreading the message. It is necessary to go beyond the legal obligation to acknowledge the EU as the source of funding. Creating information systems, simple language, story-telling and info-point networks are all crucial to finding the right local angle for the particular audience, and thereby creating visibility and improving citizens' knowledge about how EU funding impacts on everyday life.

Jacek Jaworski was the first speaker and made a number of key points. He noted that EU support to its regions is often perceived as abstract. To counter this trend, the language used in official documents should be clearer and easier to understand. It is important to communicate to the public how everyone benefits from EU funds, even indirectly, and for this purpose using real people and real impact is considered more effective than publishing numbers and indicators. The best way to reach multipliers is by organising open days, workshops and cultural events (such as the European Funds Open Days project Mr Jaworski was involved in, which won the 2016 European Public Communication Award). Finally, communication directed towards net contributor countries could portray how the money they contribute returns to them indirectly. The efforts should be led by the Commission as it is considered impartial and therefore a trustworthy source of information.

The second speaker was **Sandra Fiene**, who emphasised that storytelling and reaching multipliers is fundamental to getting a message across, although she stressed that reaching out to journalists and opinion leaders is not an easy task. Modern journalism and new media add further pressure to the process because a story has to be sold in order to be published. Thus the best way to reach them is with interesting and impactful stories that present the facts from a regional perspective, always in a short, human and differentiated form that shows why the particular EU project in question is good for society. In this regard, Ms Fiene recommended a press release introducing a human side to a story and distributed to the appropriate audience as the best 'value for money'.

Confirming that targeting the audience well is of paramount importance, **Jonas Norholm Larsen** gave the third intervention. He pointed out that in order for a message to spread, it must be tailor

made – 'one size fits all' no longer works. Every message must be adapted to its audience and their needs. This means that local faces should be the main characters in a story selling how funds can be used by all, create jobs and build the future. He also noted the importance of a proactive approach to media, and that taking a phone call from a journalist should not be a scary task. Communicating the benefits to media and citizens should be part of every project, and collaborating with local media can bring EU policies and priorities into everyday life. Citizens also tend to have more trust in their local and regional sources.

The fourth contributor, **Giuseppe Chiellino**, pointed out that the communication chain is not complete if journalists, who along with opinion leaders are one of the main multipliers of the message, are not interested in what institutions or organisations have to say about EU funding. He suggested that if the message is filtered out, this means it was not clear, passionate or interesting enough. Once this barrier has been broken down, the journalist will be more willing to get to know the faces behind the story and the changes they have seen in their everyday lives.

Peter Fischer then pointed out that storytelling and use of simple language are common priorities for institutions, stakeholders and journalists alike in the endeavor of successful communication. Audience contributions highlighted that mentioning media as the primary multiplier loses one side of the spectrum, as nowadays different platforms must be considered in order to circulate the message to a wider audience. In this respect, Mr Larsen stressed that journalists and newspapers should never be disregarded, especially as local media often have loyal readers that can then pass a message by word of mouth.

Mr Fischer then closed the workshop by noting that every available platform must be considered in communicating a message, because each has its own loyal audience. Furthermore, he emphasized that the EU institutions provide a huge range of tools (Eurobarometer, EDICs, info points, etc.) to properly target audiences and enable the creation of personalised messages about Europe. If the EU shows its human side, multipliers will not overlook the information that is currently being filtered, and thus bring the EU closer to the citizens and their daily needs.