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# GUIDANCE ON COMMUNICATION ON IAS

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# INTRODUCTION

*"Communication is not simply the transmission of messages;
rather, it is the mutual exchange of understanding and shared meaning
leading to cooperation and better practices" (IOSH, 2015)*

Communicating environmental issues - or social issues in general - is historically a task that involves many problematic and risky aspects. This is due to several factors, which condition the success of each communication campaign, and which are not only related to the behavior or sensitivity of the final audience.

Excluding dissemination and communication campaigns on specific topics carried out by private entities or non-governmental organizations, environmental communication is the prerogative of public administrations and related bodies. This involves first the need for a careful planning of the advertising campaigns and the choice of the supplier, also in realization of the fact that the budgets available very often are clearly inferior to what would be necessary for an adequate dissemination of the topic to the end user.

It is indeed true that today it is very common to observe waste in communication, especially from public administrations. Waste in environmental communication is mainly due to two factors: those who promote the communication initiative are not always up to date on currently effective marketing models and often cannot identify a winning message for communication because it is "too experienced" in the sector.

Even today, many of the communication campaigns (environmental or otherwise) carried out by government agencies suffer from a non-updating of the marketing principles applied to the current reality. Communication is made as it was 20 years ago, using very expensive and now less penetrating means and media, without taking into account the fact that not only are there cheaper and leaner systems to reach a greater number of citizens, but that the citizens themselves are a target that - thanks to the internet - has evolved considerably, from the point of view of what is expected of a communication or awareness campaign.

Mass society, which - up until the 1990s - assimilated standardized messages and employed its critical conscience to adapt them to its needs, no longer exists. Now the target has evolved digitally through the freedom of access to content that the Internet guarantees and requires tailored content on its own tastes and needs, of high quality and that guarantee the user a good degree of involvement.

Furthermore, communication on environmental issues, especially that which involves not only spreading awareness of the problem but also inviting the citizen to action, sometimes suffers the penalty of being organized by technicians who are experts in the problem itself. This factor, which at first glance may seem of little importance, if not positive, has often proved to be an obstacle. A researcher will surely know the subject exhaustively and in all its facets, and precisely by virtue of this knowledge he will tend to infill the public with numerous notions that are not immediately necessary to introduce the subject, dispersing the attention of the target and making the topic difficult to understand.

The communication on the topic of Invasive Alien Species is not exempt from these pitfalls and is also subject to several potentially harmful aspects. In addition to the need to reach an audience now educated to personalized and media messages of the highest technical level, one inevitably finds himself clashing with a whole segment of the public that believes that nature must take its course and that the species once introduced must be safeguarded, not fully understanding the repercussions of this at the level of the local ecosystem and devaluing the responsibility of the human being in the very start of the problem.

In this document, guidelines will be provided for an effective implementation of communication campaigns, together with a set of tools to be taken into consideration when planning - also economically - the dissemination of a topic to the "general" population or to a specialized public.

It is however considered vital to remember that it is worthwhile always turning to communication and content creation professionals as valuable allies in communication campaigns, directing spending and budget towards the creation of content tailored to the public.

## THE "COMMUNICATION PLAN"

The communication plan - as it is widely understood - is a design document that is composed of objectives, times, budgets and result indicators. Inside the communication campaign targets are analyzed, the desired objectives, the use of different media and the effectiveness of the process.

Very often, a continuous strategy vision is missing, within this document. Considering a communication plan as a purely planning tool means focusing attention on its components in a preventive manner, to then activate the planned actions and detect their effectiveness.

However, this model does not often provide an assessment of the efficiency of communication in all its phases, which instead is a critical action to carry out the different objectives of the plan itself.

Communication on invasive alien species, and environmental communication in general, cannot fail to develop strategic assessment plans for each phase of the design and implementation of the communication plan.

For example, analyzing many of the calls for tenders that are aimed at the design and implementation of communication campaigns on this issue, it is immediately evident that this principle is largely undervalued: the supplier is often asked to present a media and usage plan of the means of communication in the phase of elaboration of the commercial offer, when this type of planning cannot exempt itself from being based on a preventive search of the level of awareness of the final public. This is because, as was said in the introduction, the setting of public communication is still tied to dissemination criteria towards the citizen that are largely outdated and no longer applicable to the modern context.

The ex-ante evaluation of public awareness of the problem is a very important tool that should not only serve to compare data with the "post" communication evaluation but must be used to effectively plan all the subsequent steps of the communication plan.

This would allow not only to maximize the result, but also to direct the budgets for the communication campaign - very often of modest size - on actions more targeted to the dissemination of the message.

Furthermore, the strategy must also be aimed at identifying the key moments in the planning and application of the communication plan in which to launch the impact assessment tools. In a communication campaign that activates call to action and citizen science actions, for example, a good communication indicator is the active participation of the public in the various activities proposed. In the case of poor participation, the communication plan will have to provide for revisions and corrective actions to undertake new roads.

There are four main phases in the process from awareness to action that can be considered in the process of monitoring the campaign efficacy.
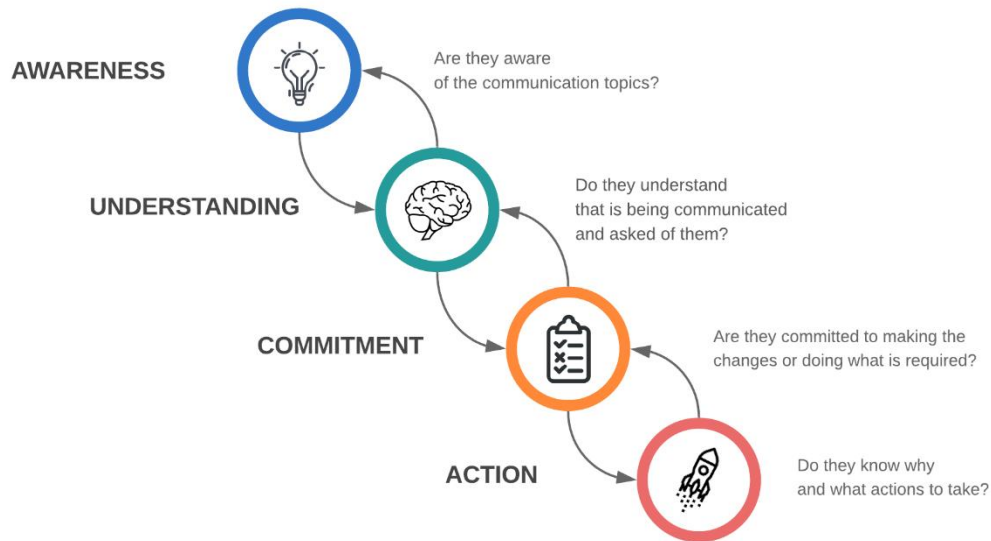
*Communication phases checklists – based on (Beane, s.d.)*

This schematic is usually used into companies' communications flow, but it effectively describes the four main stages we aim to achieve when communicating about Invasive Alien Species:

- AWARENESS: be familiar with the existence of the problem and with its causes

- UNDERSTANDING: be aware of the problem and the its outcomes and embrace it as a common issue

- COMMITMENT: understand the problem is a common issue and commit to act

- ACTION: act through the given behavioral guidelines

Those are all two-ways communication stages in which the continuous monitoring of the public reaction can ensure a more effective result.

In the case of the Invasive Alien Species, the difficult task of informing, raising awareness, but also of stimulating a reaction in the citizen that determines an active change of mentality and habits, arises before the communicator. From this point of view, the effectiveness of a communication campaign could be measured by examining trends in the sale of pets or ornamental plants, for example.

In summary, the communication plan is a very important project document, which must also be strategic and dynamic. It must be modified during the work according to the feedback of the target of the actions and contemplate corrective action plans if they prove to be ineffective. The central principle on which to base is that of a "strategy", rather than a "plan", which allows to analyze the citizen's response and use it in real time to implement increasingly effective versions of the dissemination actions.

## COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The pivot point of an effective communication is finding clear and understandable objectives which will guide the process of design and the choice of the needed tools.

In first instance, it's important to highlight that **communication is not the goal** but the mean we use to reach our goal, that could be raising awareness, motivate to action, engage targets to debate and to help spread the message.

Especially when the campaign is part of a bigger project or comes from a public administration or organization, it's not unusual that communication is designed as the final goal. This is a common mistake.

Often in those environments decision makers are not so updated or used to combine the results of an action to the need to disseminate them.

In the specific issue of Invasive Alien Species, the final goal of communication, apart from raising the audience awareness, is both to **encourage a voluntary change of habits** in citizens, traders, politicians and other stakeholders in order to prevent the issue and avoid the need of drastic measures, or to **raise awareness** on the issue in order to explain why drastic measures are needed.

It is important to remember also that **awareness is not necessarily a synonym of motivation**. Once the communication target is aware of the issue, there is still the motivation step to go through. Depending on the communication objectives of the campaign, making the target aware is only the first - sometimes more difficult – step towards the final goal so we must go beyond the simple act of *information sharing* and aim for the target to start giving feedbacks.

Raising interest and understanding is preparatory to engage the targets to feedback and embrace the values of the campaign. When the audience becomes itself a mean of spreading the campaign message, this is the win situation.

Each objective in a communication campaign must be easy to understand, to monitor and to verify, it must be in line with the available budget and realistic in its development. Borrowing an acronym used since the eighties for business models (T.Doran, 1981), a communication campaign must have **S.M.A.R.T.** objectives.

- Objectives must be tailored both on the specific goals we are pursuing and on the audience we are targeting. In other words, they must be **Specific** and designed in a clearly, not ambiguous way. I.e. we should use only an action verb inside the formulation of the objective, stating that there is only one unmistakable action/information we are addressing or asking the target to adopt.

- Objectives must be **Measurable**, in order to monitor the outcomes of the communication campaign.

- They must be **Attainable** in the context the communication campaign is activated. It is often easy to underestimate the effort or the feasibility of a communication objective.

- Objectives must be **Relevant** and contribute to achieve the overall communication goal.

- They must be **Time-related** and include in their formulation when we expect the goal to be achieved,

Of course, not all the communication objectives have to fulfil all five SMART factors but keeping them in mind can help us design a more efficient communication campaign.

For example:

| Ambiguous objective | SMART objective | Behavioral factors addressed | Fulfillment indicators |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Raise awareness and raise perception of the risk** | Within the next year, we will disseminate the main concepts of IAS issue through a social network page reaching at least 10.000 new followers. | Awareness | Number of followers reached and number of interactions with the pages' contents |
| **Cooperate with organizations and environmental activists** | Within the next year, we will hold at least 24 meetings with environmental organizations or movements to discuss the best ways to prevent the IAS issue | Understanding | % of environmental organization accepting to share scientific evidence with their members |
| **Motivate a change of habits and feelings towards the issue** | Within the next six months, we will ask at least 500 pet sellers to adopt a voluntary code of conduct on Invasive Alien Species | Commitment | % of subscriptions to codes of conduct |

| **Give practical and easy to understand guidelines of behavior to follow** | Within the next year, we will ask the gardening lovers to abstain themselves from purchasing species enlisted in the EU List of Invasive Alien Species of Union concern | Action | % of decrease in purchases |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Deciding to whom the communication strategy is addressed is a key phase in the communication design process. The second and subsequent step is *knowing* the target audience, learn what it is fond of and understand its needs.

The target audience definition is critical to the effectiveness of the communication campaign. It is also **closely bound to the message** the campaign is aimed to share.

If the aim is to raise the awareness of the public about the Invasive Alien Species issue in general, an investment in reaching the maximum number of citizens will be worth. This will lead to a general widely spread awareness about the problem and could led to a spontaneous trend to deepen the topic.

If the main topic is the impact of the *silurus glanis* invasion, it may be better to focus on that part of the citizens audience that surrounds the recreational fishing world such as hobbyists and traders. In this case, **communication must be more specific** on the issue and must contain more technical specifications about how to prevent the problem itself, how to manage it and how to react to its impacts if it's possible.

Identify people or organization **trusted by the community or by specific groups** and involve them in the focus activities of the communication is very effective in building trust and a collaborative relationship with the audience.

It is also very important to merge the scientific knowledge and expertise with the first-hand experience on the field, especially when addressing the communication effort to technicians or scientists. Encouraging sharing their opinion and experience will lead to a better communication result and target will be more prone to share the new information having been involved in a constructive two-directional discussion (Elena Tricarico, 2017).

### Why we shouldn't talk to "large public"

Nowadays citizens are more prone to search and receive information about environmental topics, and more willing to assess lifechanging options and make voluntary change of habits in order to improve their health and the environmental condition if adequately motivated.

Environmental laws were not created by man and are immutable. Economic laws and behavior are crated and managed by man, so they can be theoretically and practically reformed by man himself, through a process which involves awareness and a radical change of habits.

In this context an effective information and communication campaign about the Invasive Alien Species matter can be a critical pivot for the issue prevention. In recent years, efforts from a regulatory point of view have been exceptional; despite this, a conscious behavior on the part of citizenship remains the most effective weapon to counter the problem.

As we mentioned before, mass society and mass audience are no more a critical target, since citizens are now used to have targeted and tailored messages from marketing and communication campaign. So, talking about generic public means talking about a series of groups or chains of dynamics which will involve the final audience.

The "large public" is composed of several specific subgroups, or segments, each of which needs to be activated with targeted messages. There are several prerequisites for profiling the subgroups of the general public, from behavioral factors (e.g. hunters, travelers, etc.) to demographic factors (age, cultural

level) to those linked to the interest in the environmental theme and personal involvement (environmental associations, civic movements).

As it is true that historically the introduction pathways are closely linked to the behavior of the citizen, it is also true that the citizen with his own behavior has a great power to modify with his choices other categories of targets involved in the process, such as those linked for example to trade.

### Profiled groups

The involvement of profiled groups is certainly a mean of optimizing the resources of the communication plan and allows to amplify the effectiveness of this. Different target audiences will hardly visit the same websites or use the same media: the choice of targets will therefore be a process of great importance also for the design of the media plan and the type of content needed for the communication campaign.

Furthermore, dedicating targeted communication actions to the different targets will allow us to have valuable allies in the field, from the point of view of supporting species monitoring and dissemination to an exponential number of publics, through the dissemination of the message by the original target itself.

This is why the identification of specific groups relative to their communication objectives is one of the most important actions within the planning and should be carried out with the support of professionals from the analysis of the public and communication, who should work in teams with researchers and experts in the field of Invasive Alien Species.

There are several identifiable groups, such as environmentalist associations or movements, hobbyists, operators of protected areas and botanical gardens, but also demographic groups such as children, teenagers and adult travelers. A special mention goes to the school, which should and could be a very important vector of awareness for the new generations.

The population subgroups we identify as target audience are called "segments". Each segment must be composed by a distinct and (relatively) homogeneous subgroup of the population, with capabilities of decision making, which shares some common characteristics and which we expect to behave in a similar way.

Each segment should be designed thinking about how its components will respond to a media campaign, what are their responses to marketing strategies, how they are likely or not to follow a call to action. Depending on these parameters, we will have the ability to design the media and activities more suitable for the communication campaign.

We should keep in mind that as it is true that the communication content must be of excellent quality, it is also true that an excellent content not tailored to a specific audience will not be effective in the disclosure process and call to action. Producing the right kind of communication is a direct consequence of defining the target audience.

### How to define the target audience

The correct identification of the target audience usually follows different design steps in order to provide an effective, measurable and homogeneous population segment. The results of this analysis should then be crossed with the demographic component, which will make it easier to identify language and effective means of communication to achieve our goals.

There are also several software tools that can help us get in touch with the defined target audience, especially regarding the types of media that they prefer for the exchange of information content.

**Step 1: what are the campaign objectives?**

Correctly identifying the public of the communication campaign means identifying the part of the population that, made aware, can be of greater benefit and impact for the success of the campaign objectives. It is therefore a choice closely related to our final targets. It should also be remembered that, depending on our targets, choosing a limited audience could have more beneficial effects on the objectives of the campaign than to broaden the audience "open field".

**Step 2: is your audience made of decision makers?**

The analysis of the audience segment for our communication campaign must include the identification of the presence of decision makers into our segment.

The decision maker is the key figure that must identify our audience segment. It has the power to make a choice and therefore influence the achievement of the communication objectives. It is essential that the identified segment of the public is formed by this type of person in relation to the subject we are communicating.

**Step 3: what does the target audience care about?**

Once the audience segment has been identified, it is important to set the communication campaign in such a way as to meet the needs or recall important topics for our target. The way we disclose information and how we ask for concrete help is just as important as the subject of communication itself. Identifying topics that are dear to our audience will allow us to open a more direct and already positive communication channel oriented towards their attention and interests.

When creating the contents of a communication campaign, we are naturally tempted to emphasize the aspects that we consider most important and the messages we believe are central to our goals. However, it is impossible to pursue a goal of effectiveness for our communication if we do not take into consideration what our audience likes and what it holds. Our message will have to be part of the sphere of their interests and adapt to the means of communication that we will choose, also implementing communication methods and language.

We will then have to connect what we want to communicate with how our audience is used to receiving information or activation requests, to achieve an optimal balance between what to say and how to say it.

**Step 4: who does the target audience follow?**

Another interesting topic that we should consider immediately after choosing our audience segment is whether our target audience follows a recognizable movement or figure. In other words, mediating from media languages, if it refers to an influencer. The influencers we refer to in communication design are not necessarily prominent social media people. They can be scientific advisers, but also prominent people of a restricted community or action group. Ensuring the collaboration of these reference points could make the difference in how the target audience will respond to our requests. It could also be a person very close to our audience, as part of their working or family nucleus who already is aware of the IAS issue and implements an aware behavior, and that could influence their decision.

It should in any case be borne in mind that the type of message we want to convey is in itself very positive and aimed at safeguarding biodiversity: keeping the message in a positive way will help us recruit leading figures in the communication community who will most willingly accept collaborate in the dissemination of our arguments.

**Step 5: are we somehow directly or indirectly connected with the target audience?**

Another aspect of great interest related to the identified segment of the public, which can help to refine the design of the communication and to redirect the choice is the presence or absence of direct connections with the public. Also, in this case, direct connections can be understood as different things; the connection can be human or related to interests and habits. For example, we may have direct connections with national associations of professionals or hobbyists.

**Step 6: are there any barriers we must be aware of?**

Just as in the analysis and design of the target audience we must consider the potential and the ways of connecting to our audience, we must also consider, especially in the case of call to action, of any barriers or impediments that these might encounter. Every aspect of communication requires the analysis of critical issues, and this is not to be underestimated because we are asking our public for a change of habits or the start of concrete actions. We must therefore put our audience in a position to experience

what we ask of them. Identifying potential barriers will allow us to act to overcome them and implement strategies that will allow our audience to adopt the behaviors we are asking for.

**Step 7: what are the best means of communication we can implement for our chosen segment?**

Once the choice of our target audience is refined, we will have to proceed to the analysis of the most effective means of communication to achieve the best possible result.

The choice of the means of communication is obviously also influenced by the budget available and the type of information to be conveyed, but in any case, a careful analysis of the media of refusal of the entire target will make it possible to maximize the results of the allocated budget, again according to the thesis that does not count the "quantity" but the pervasiveness of the selected means of communication.

Printing one million flyers for kids will be less and less efficient than, for example, forging a collaboration with a YouTube channel or a social media manager for dissemination on social networks.

Choosing the means of communication is therefore a very important activity that we can support with some software tools. For example, using web traffic analysis systems, keywords search systems and other tools that we can borrow from online and offline marketing techniques.

One of the most effective tools to verify the public's search for our topic is *Google Suggest*. This tool is a free feature of the Google search engine that each of us uses every day without, perhaps, appreciating its power and potential. By starting to write a word in the search box of the engine, in fact, Google automatically suggests to us what other users have looked for in relation to that word. As you continue to write words or phrases, the search is refined more and more.

 The only care to keep is relative to the use of the web browser of one's account. The search engine in fact, if used in online mode, i.e. having logged in with your account to google services, it will use an algorithm that will mix in the results and the frequency with which other users have searched for similar terms, suggesting the most sought after, you know the frequency of your research. To ensure a more reliable result from a statistical point of view, it is better to use the service by disconnecting your account or even better by using an "incognito" navigation feature.

### A target audience analysis example

| Step 1: Objectives | *Within the next six months, we will ask at least 500 pet sellers to adopt a voluntary code of conduct on Invasive Alien Species* |
|---|---|
| Step 2: decision makers | Segment 1: Pet retailers |
| Step 3: what audience cares about | Build a relationship of trust with their buyers |
| Step 4: audiences' influencers | Buyers |
| Step 5: connections | Pet retailers' associations |
| Step 6: barriers | Segment 1 could not be prone to adhere to the code of conduct if not motivated by an aware customers behavior |
| Step 7: means of communication | Communication via direct contact through pet retailers associations (conferences, fairs) Communication via specialized online forums Campaign website, addressed to both retailers and customers Communication via social networks |

In this brief analysis to adequately motivate pet traders it will also be necessary to act on their direct influencers, their customers. It will therefore be necessary to identify a second segment of the population that will have to be made aware of the problem.

A possible strategy for communication in this case, assuming that an unlimited budget is not available, could be to give traders the tools to be able to share with their customers the choice to adhere

to the codes of conduct, effectively transforming the trader into an ally in sharing the problem of invasive alien species to a wider audience.

The contents of information communication in this case will be aimed both at spreading awareness of the problem and at applauding those merchants who voluntarily adhere to the codes of conduct.

A basic media plan could therefore contain:

- Communication campaign website, with in-depth content aimed at merchants and their customers;

- Summary material to be provided to traders as a tool for disseminating to their customers;

- Campaign social network page, which links to the contents of the website and make a network with the social pages of the merchant associations;

- Emotional video spot on the problem of invasive alien species with reference to pets and how the difference can be made with the help of your retailer;

- Gadgets and "certificate" of membership to show in your sales outlet.

## GUIDELINES FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

### Communication style

Often communication campaigns about this topic are part of larger scientific projects or programs and the work group coordinating these projects is formed by scientists and researchers. It is possible that they will focus the campaign messages on technical topics which could be too much difficult to catch for the large public. It is recommended to think about involving in the work groups a communication experienced professional, who could tailor the message for the campaign target group and help highlight the project topics in a form understandable by non-technical audience.

It depends only on the selected target audience to choose a different kind of communication style.

### Audience attention span

An essential topic we must deal with while designing the communication campaign is the matter of the audience attention span. While it's generally true that due mainly to the social media the average attention span of generic public is shrinking, it is also true that attention is task-dependent, and each individual can focus on one task for a longer amount of time **if he feels this task as important**.

Communication contents must be tailored on the audience segment and be produced with **high quality engaging content**. Each message we disseminate must be brief and focused but must also contain all the necessary information for the final user to understand what we're expecting from him.

So, an effective strategy – especially in social media – could be a three-steps content deepening as:

1. Face the key message with a brief and effective content (short video, summoning logo, etc.)

2. Make the audience aware of the importance of the subject

3. Prepare different levels of in-depth analysis to guide the audience through a process of understanding and awareness.
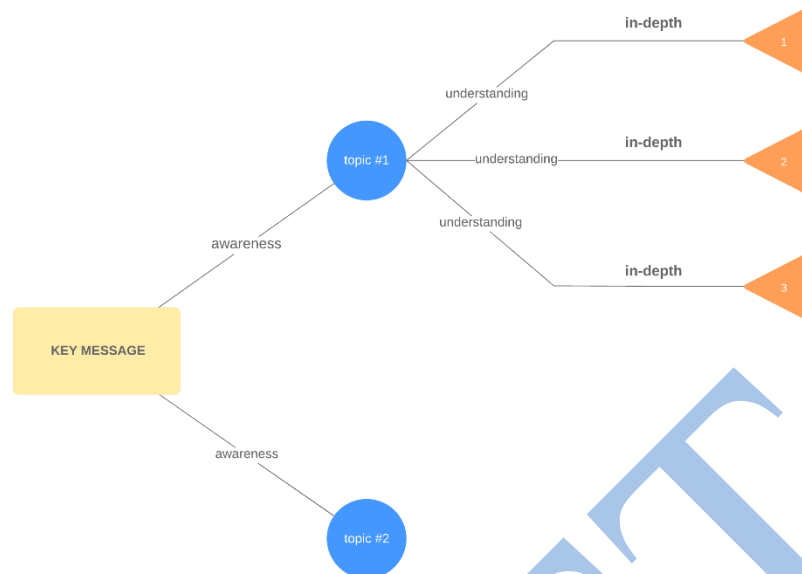
## Keywords

Especially when communicating through new media, defining project keywords is a way to focus the attention on the project main topics. It also provides efficient guidelines for the development of the communication design; they are valuable in the creative process of the logo and the copy design for the entire campaign.

Some examples:

- responsibility

- voluntary/unaware behaviors

- effects: environment, health, economy

- prevention

- monitoring

- impact

- management

- biodiversity

## Key messages

Key messages are structure statements we use frequently during a campaign to address the main topics of each communication objective.

What do you want to communicate? What is the final purpose of the campaign?

It is important to develop and highlight key messages of our communication campaign. Key messages must both meet our communication objectives and the communication needs of each of the target audience we selected.

Key messages must be simply understandable by the target audience, concise in the expression, precise in their contents, scientifically solid and reliable. They don't have to be overload with irrelevant material or too much details. In each campaign is also preferable to carry not more than 2, 3 key messages, to avoid a too large spread of the audience attention. It's better to build the campaign key messages on the campaign keywords (it is useful also to create social media hashtags based on them).

Communication will have to be focused on this limited amount of key message, which will be tailored on the final aim of the campaign. It is preferable to face those topics which generally cause confusion and misunderstandings among the audience (i.e. There is only a small percentage of alien species which is recognized as invasive).

Some examples (red highlights the communication keywords):

- Invasive Alien Species are a major driver of biodiversity loss

- Apart from negative impact on ecosystems, IAS invasion also has impacts on economics and on human health

- Prevent the IAS invasion is a responsibility of all citizens and must be faced through an active process of behavior and habits change.

- The main source of IAS invasion is man, through both voluntary and involuntary behaviors *(species which invade ecosystems following other factors such as climate changes are not included in the Invasive Alien Species definition)*

- Prevention is the key action to oppose the IAS invasion and to avoid drastic solutions. The best solution at the problem is change our behavior and attitude towards the issue.

- The impact of an invasion is not immediate (*that's the main reason often citizens tend to underestimate the issue*)

- Aware citizens can contribute by recognizing and reporting the presence of invasive alien species since monitoring is an important step towards the solution of the issue

- Implement management on certain invasive alien species could led to the safety of a greater number of indigenous ones.

### Issues

There are several problems related to the communication of the problem of invasive alien species, most of which are related to the perception that the public has of the impacts of the introduction of the species.

For example:

- the IAS issue is a complex topic to communicate and to be fully understood by citizens

- it's not always easy to face the issue of IAS communication using non-negative words or attitude

- communication on IAS issue requires different levels of deepening depending on the target audience

- since the full topic is very hard to understand for common citizens, it is better to choose an aspect of the issue and focus the attention on it

- often the audience is misled in its knowledge of the issue by information coming from not reliable sources (especially in Social Networks)

- speaking of invasive alien species, especially of eradication of living species, can have different outcomes in audience, since it could tend to first react following its gut feelings instead of a rational thinking

- the budget available for the campaign **is often inadequate** compared to the communication needs

- The dimension and dangerousness of an invasion is not always easy to forecast and assess. Communication must deal with the uncertainty of this side of the IAS issue and the possible distrust of citizens and target groups due to the lack of certain data or information. The best way to face this issue is to maintain transparency and welcome dialogue with the communication target, managing the discussion from a scientific point of view (Elena Tricarico, 2017).

These issues must be taken into consideration when designing an effective communication strategy that is compatible with the available budget.

### Advantages

Despite the above-mentioned issues, there are some advantages in debating the Invasive Alien Species issue. Those advantages are both from the communication and the audience point of view:

**Communication point of view**

From the communicators' point of view, we can undertake the communication process for the problem of Invasive Alien Species relying on a scientific community already in possession of data and evidence resulting from long years of research.

**Audience point of view**

Environmental communication in this historical moment is very much followed by the population, thanks to the appearance of various environmental movements, also and above all in the demographic range of the young and the very young.

It is precisely this segment of the population that consumes information and communication content the most, thanks to online media. The positive energy and the desire to put themselves on the line can be a turning point in the disclosure of the problem of invasive alien species, above all because in this case the population can make the difference, exercising their decision-making power to change the course of the events through their daily choices.

Although the impacts of invasions are sometimes difficult to understand because they can be detected in the long term, the fact that they can have an impact on the environment and on human health and the economy can be a good lever to raise awareness of that portion of citizenship less attentive to environmental problems.

### Raising awareness

Engagement in a communication campaign brings learning through the processes of attraction, experience and inclusion and it proved itself to be effective when dealing with topics concerning common good concepts.

To raise awareness, we try to engage people developing a two-way interactive communication style instead of a cold, more formal, one-way one. This means that people are effectively included into the process of communication, they are interactive and asked to participate in the activities, in order to acknowledge the problem, change their habits and behaviors and spread the message to their peers.

When informed about the issue, people tend to underestimate the problem. We must both work helping them fully understand the issue and the related short and long-term effects and encouraging them to adopt rights behaviors.

Prevention is our desired tool to deal with the IAS issue and people are the most important part of the prevention processes, which isn't static, but is an ongoing dynamic process which needs a change of habits.

### Communication toolbox

There are several aspects we need to take into consideration during the design process of a communication campaign. The factor involved are relative to language, audience interaction and engagement, chosen media, and those factors are greatly influenced by the preexisting or lack of knowledge about the IAS issue.

**Language**

One of the issues in communication for the IAS issue is that even in the scientific community there is not always a consistency in technical and disseminating terms and in the basic definitions. Maintain a uniform, scientifically correct although easy to understand language will help spreading knowledge and give the audience some fixed references around the topic (Elena Tricarico, 2017).

It is also clear in environmental and social communication that the use of storytelling helps to spread the communication message and make them more appealing and understandable by the public.

**Media**

In last years, the Internet is without doubt the media which has worked the most in the environmental communication, becoming one of the main communications means in this field.

Through the Web it is possible to reach a wide range of audience, but this is not the only positive feature Internet makes available. Environmental communication can benefit from the web green social tissue, made of blogs, focus group, forums, social networks, many of which are born spontaneously and relate to each other.

Given the nature of the web and the interactive possibilities it allows, a communication campaign based on the cloud will benefit from the two-directional discussion, engaging the audience to participate to the discussion and to intervene directly in the solution of the problem.

Web is effective, not only for the quality of contents it is possible to spread, but also because it is a great mean of sharing and it is possible to exploit the already existing and ever growing environmentally-friend network to convey the message worldwide.

Strategic pivot for every social and commercial marketing campaign, the network has made it possible to highlight the meaningful connections that now allow us to talk about the environmental communication system and not just individual applications on the topic. Having said this, environmental communication has benefited from the creation of a spontaneous network of sites, blogs and portals dedicated to environmental issues that are working as stable references in the environmental communication system.

Running a communication campaign over the internet is also very much cheaper comparing to the classic above the line campaigns, and nowadays it can be way more effective.

**Social Media**

Social media are one of the (still) cheapest and strongest mean we can use to reach our audience, but it is important to keep in mind that Social Media communication is a two-directional tool. Communicating through social media we're expected to **share the information with the audience and maintain a constant contact** with them, exchange stories and experiences, ask questions and advices, inspire thoughts and call to action.

This is particularly true with multimedia based and large audiences' social networks such as **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **Youtube**. We should **establish a relationship** with our followers in order to keep them curious and engage them in a meaningful way.

There are some factors we should keep in mind when approaching a new social media channel, in order to manage it in an effective and professional way:

- Share contents **is only the first step** towards creating a solid community. We are supposed to share only meaningful contents, clear in their meanings and centered on the communication topic, using always the same style and encouraging comments and feedbacks;

- We must approach the creation and management of a social media channel having in mind clearly **what are our objectives** and **our strategy.** Are we trying to spread awareness? Are we planning a call-to-action?

- Our communication style must be **always the same**. The language type must be friendlier if our audience is based on a larger generic number of followers;

- Since Environmental matters move our guts feelings, we must expect some **negative reaction** to our posts. Negative feedbacks must be managed just like positive ones, with calm language and clear explanations, encouraging followers to deepen the topic together and to avoid sterile negative instances.

- Our social media channels must be fed with an **appropriate frequency**. We must implement an editorial plan containing what kind of information we want to share (news? A weekly feature dedicated to a species. Etc.) and the publishing schedule. The schedule must be plausible and feasible, according the available time and budget. It's better to delay the frequency between new content but maintain it constant, to give the audience a fixed appointment.

- People's attention is caught first by images rather than a title, when scrolling a web/SN content. Especially on social media we are supposed to use **graphics, illustrations and photograph to summarize the content of the news or focus**. Contents must be designed to follow a **unique graphics line**, which will be immediately recognizable by followers.

- It's important to choose wisely **keywords, hashtags and categories** for our posts. It is usual to invent a new hashtag for the campaign, which must be followed by a series of hashtag which will help us to better define our target audience. Studying hashtags and tags into a social media post is not of secondary importance.

- It's important to have a **constant and productive relationship with our public**. If social media are the center of our media strategy, it's better to consider hiring a **professional social media manager** who can give immediate and real time feedback to our followers.

- **Monitoring** the follower reactions to our posts is as important as writing new content. Statistics help us to focus the attention to these topics which have had more user interactions to that we can address our communication effort following our audiences needs and interests.

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