

Campaign Strategy Newsletter 105 Frontiers Issue

Frontiers in Plastics and Climate Campaigning October 2018

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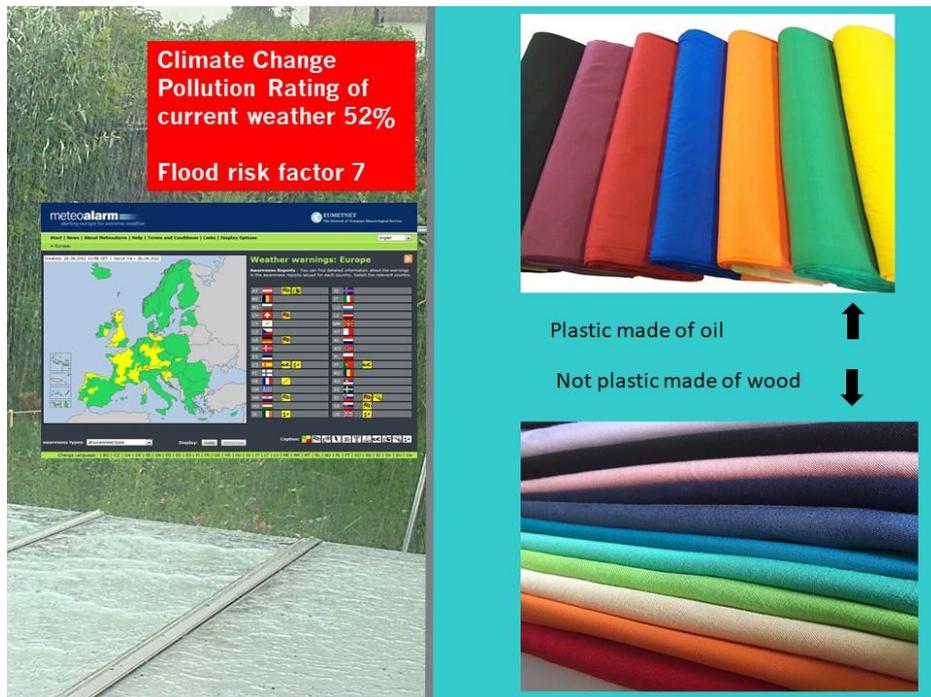
Dear Readers

Not long ago for every one of you there were seven or eight friends. You might not have met them but they too were subscribed to Campaign Strategy Newsletter. Then came compliance with new data rules and your number was almost decimated. I hope you find this (erratic) Newsletter useful or at least sometimes interesting but you'd be doing me and my morale a huge favour if you got at least one or two other people to sign up. So if you do know anyone, please ask them to join us. You never know they may be a long-lost comrade who simply forgot to reconfirm their (free) subscription.

Many thanks

Chris Rose

Campaign Frontiers



If in doubt, it's not a bad rule in campaigns, to do the obvious. At least when it comes to engagement and mobilisation close to the individual level. Campaigners steeped in 'the issue' are typically aware of so much their intended public is unaware of, that they have a default tendency to be too complicated or too esoteric. Which can lead into trying to 'explain the issue' or invent novel framings, slogans or 'clever' names for things, not starting from where the audience is.

But when it comes to campaigns to change a long-running issue, the opposite can apply. As campaigns succeed, bit by bit they normalise 'the issue' so it is no longer contested, and 'not an issue' (not debate-worthy or surprising) and thereby not news to the media and not disputed between friends and relations. It's the natural fate of most 'issues'.

This is what's happened to 'climate change' per se. As this summer saw a heatwave of epic proportions gripping the Northern Hemisphere, in the UK formerly 'climate sceptic' media platforms like *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* (the two largest reach newspapers) started treating it as real, human-made and a disastrous problem. Surveys found most people in the US, and in the UK, saw it as real and 'everyone's problem'. A July 2018 poll in the UK found over 80% felt human-caused climate change was causing extreme weather both around the world and at home.

Several climate scientists asked me why there was not *more* reaction, as climate change is so clearly taking the planet to pieces in real time, deleting glaciers, surging ice-sheets into the

sea, and breaking up mountains, to mention just a few of the big bits. But it's what most people already believed would happen, so they are watching a slow motion demolition, not something unexpected. The likes of the *'Mail* and *The Sun* are simply late accepters.

So climate campaigns need to evolve to find the new fault-lines where they can make the biggest difference. Issues within the issue. New campaigning frontiers.

In recent blogs, I covered two very different developments which could provide frontiers in both climate and plastic issues. Wood v Oil: The End-Game For Fossil-Based Plastics ? is about a new large-scale industry (ligno-cellulosics) which could pose a 'renewables moment' for plastics (which aside from anything else are the market for 6 – 8% of oil production). A TV Watershed for Climate Change Campaigns is about 'climate attribution' in TV or social media weather forecasts.

'Wood versus Oil'

'Ligno-cellulosics' is a market entrant with strategic significance as a 'solution' as it is a direct competitor to plastic, and done right, is without most of the downsides. It should change political calculations about how fast we can get rid of plastic. It offers a way to create a pincer-movement, complementing demand-reduction such as consumer behaviour change and product redesign to reduce packaging on the one hand, with substitution of 'oil-based' plastic by new plant-based 'biomaterials' on the other. (Not to be confused with many other things called bio-plastics – it is still a terminological minefield).

As Göran Persson, former Prime Minister of Sweden puts it, with this technology, anything made from oil (or coal or gas) we can now make from trees (or grass, agricultural waste, bacteria or algae – not food crops). It can also help nature conservation and agricultural sustainability.

This is not an 'if but and maybe' technology but a rapidly growing multi-billion dollar industry. The question is not *if* 'cellulosic' based feedstocks will be used – they are already in use in applications from biomedical implants to concrete strengtheners, car parts and textiles – but whether it will become policy to use them to drive out fossil-plastic, and that is likely to depend on campaigns influencing political decisions. Absent such a policy, these new materials may be just added to the technical mix and even used to 'greenwash' or disguise continued use of fossil fuel plastic.

Denting Oil Consumption

Earlier this year BP said it expected curbs on single use plastics to dent demand for oil. When I sent 'Wood v Oil' to someone who worked for an oil company for some years, his response was that if a leading designer "were to pick this up for the fashion industry, it would have a significant effect on investor perceptions of the long run value of oil stocks".

A Scandal

IT'S A SCANDAL

Many news stories are driven by 'scandal'.¹³ Obviously, a scandal revolving around a terrible problem is bigger than one that's only slight, but there's more to it than this. My scandal formula is:

$$\text{Scandal} = \text{Awfulness} \times \frac{\text{What can be done}}{\text{What is being done}} \times \text{immoral profit from it}$$

'Awfulness' is often the first port of call for a news report. 'Just how bad is it?' Like most useful news story constructions, 'just how bad is it?' is a question that can be asked with an air of authority but without any knowledge of the subject matter.

Most scandals start with some sort of damage report. The 'immoral profit' factor is where the media go next, if there is the slightest hint that malpractice was involved. A favourite line of enquiry after a disaster is whether safety measures were compromised to save money. After the Potters Bar rail crash in the UK in 2002, where maintenance was meet the demands of cheese-paring managers'.¹⁴

Immoral profit is the reason, for instance, why deaths from illegal drugs are more scandalous than deaths from substances whose sale was legal. Paracetamol, for example, kills around 200 people each year in the UK through accidents or suicide. Few of those make headlines, whereas ecstasy deaths (27 in 2000¹⁵), cocaine (57) or amphetamines (19) are more likely to be reported.

Implicit in the media construction of a scandal is that it was *avoidable*. If there's no solution, if nothing can be done, then there is no scandal, only a tragedy. The world is full of problems, but there are far fewer clearly avoidable ones.

If alternatives are overlooked – or stronger still, neglected or *suppressed* – then a problem builds into a scandal. In this way, a solution-driven campaign can become highly newsworthy.

Check if:

- A solution to an accepted problem is being suppressed;
- A solution to an accepted problem is being neglected;
- If someone is doing something awful (check also for grossness – see Chapter 7);
- If an immoral profit is being made from a problem continuing;
- If an immoral profit is being made from a solution going unused; and
- If those responsible could do more.

Journalistically, scandals can be just awfulness × repression or secrecy. Newspaper proprietor Lord Northcliffe once said: 'News is what somebody, somewhere, wants to suppress; everything else is advertising.'

Above, the scandal equation from How to Win Campaigns. In the anatomy of scandal, the difference between what can be done and what is being done (avoidability) is the principal force multiplier available to campaigns.

In campaign terms the existence of a 'solution' is essential to convert a tragedy (eg more climate change, more plastic pollution) into a scandal. David Attenborough's 'Blue Planet' drove home the tragic consequences of conventional plastic (awfulness – see below) but the solution side of its narrative was left hanging in the undefined territory of 'all of us' being

‘more responsible’. What’s more the long-accepted ‘tools’ for tackling plastic are chimerical, such as ‘more recycling’. The existence of the renewables industry made it politically possible to conceive of policies to end the use of fossil fuels. Ligno-cellulosics have potential to do the same for plastic. [Read more here](#), including why I think George Monbiot had it wrong on substitution

Real Time Climate Attribution Changes The Picture

‘Climate attribution’ simply means identifying the contribution made by climate change to changing the weather. In June, Oxford-based German scientist Friederike Otto succeeded in attributing the role of climate change in the Great Northern Heatwave while it was still going on. She and colleagues announced at [‘World Weather Attribution’](#), that the heatwave had been made twice as likely to occur, thanks to human-made climate change.

The campaign potential of this is multiple because it makes climate change into pollution of the weather. It closes the conceptual gaps between ‘weather’ and ‘climate’, between the long-term and the short-term, and between ‘local’ and ‘global’. For many people this is the difference between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, or actual and theoretical. Or something I experience and feel, and can attest to being real directly through my senses, and something written about in a book or talked about in the media but which is not to do with me, not in my life. By the same token it is the difference between an unarguable reality (weather) and something which is, or was, contested and argued about by competing experts (climate change). All these differences have been apparent as factors allowing people to ignore the implications of climate science findings, ever since the issue burst upon the scene in the 1980s.

I Don’t Believe What I’m Seeing

For decades, communications studies found that more people said they had ‘noticed the climate changing’ than said they ‘believed in climate change’, especially in countries where it had become a polarised political issue. ‘Weather’ was an experienced reality used to assess whether they had ‘noticed’ something, whereas ‘climate change’ was a political litmus test: “am I one of those people?” Moreover some people who said they had ‘noticed the climate changing’ also said they did not ‘believe in climate change’!

For a long time, climate scientists regularly announced that while they were fairly sure, then very sure and then certain that pollution from human-made pollution was causing climate change, ‘it was not possible to attribute any one event to climate change’. That became a mantra picked up governments, media and NGOs, and in the public domain often decoded as ‘it’s not affecting the weather, it’s not here yet’.

In recent years 'attribution science' advanced and it *did* become possible but not until well after the fact of individual extreme events, like storms, heavy rainfall, sudden 'freezes', heatwaves or drought. For instance, climate change was pronounced by the UK Met Office to be a driver of a prolonged 2011 East African drought but not until 2013, by which time it was no longer 'news', and the immediate effects were no longer being felt.

That diagnostic delay disappeared in June when with better analytical tools and rapid data collection, Otto made her announcement. Then in September American scientists did the same for Hurricane Florence, working out the 'climate factor' while it was still in process. Although US reports seem to have overlooked Otto and wrongly announced this as a 'groundbreaking' American 'first', it changed the paradigm.

From Unresolved Dispute to Undisputed Reality

Throwing the 'no single event' mantra out of the window, has important consequences for the news media: it converts the news framing of climate change from an unresolved dispute to an undisputed reality.

No coincidence perhaps, that in September, the BBC news boss Fran Unsworth finally sent a memo to staff telling them "you do not need to include outright deniers of climate change in BBC coverage, in the same way you would not have someone denying that Manchester United won 2-0 last Saturday. The referee has spoken".

Climate-campaigning politician Rupert Reed may well also have helped tip the BBC over the line. In July he was asked to debate a denier but refused, deciding there was no real debate to be had. His tweeted response to the BBC got over 40,000 retweets and was seen by more than 5 million people. He followed up with a letter with dozens of others (including me) saying likewise, published in *The Guardian*, and was contacted privately by many BBC journalists applauding what he had done.

Practical Implications

The blog A TV Watershed for Climate Change Campaigns proposes that climate scientists now need to supply the media with a handy 'climate change index' to relate polluted temperatures or weather, to an unpolluted weather baseline. Otherwise each event analysis becomes a science story, only no longer 'news'. Research science is always provisional never definitive but this is about applied science, or as Otto pithily put it, "you don't need to peer review the weather forecast".

Importantly, as the blog describes, the German weather agency plans to include climate attribution in its broadcast weather forecasts from next year, bringing that reality into every proverbial 'living room'. Campaigners should make sure others follow suit.

But it also has far wider potentials. Linking the climate-pollution factor to responsibility for damages and loss of life or livelihoods for example, while the events are still in play. Climate attribution in weather reporting is a 'salience promoter' for climate change.



Super Typhoon Mangkhut heading for the Philippines

Super Typhoon Mangkhut is expected to make landfall early on Saturday on Luzon island in the Philippines, threatening millions of people, including by direct storm damage, flooding, landslides and storm surges. Alerts have also been issued across east and southeast Asia.

Latest analyses



Hurricane Florence, September 2018

Hurricane Florence is forecast to cause widespread damage due to the storm surge, extreme rainfall and high winds along the US East coast.



Exceptionally high monsoon rainfall in Kerala, 2018

Torrential rain in South West India has led to widespread flooding – we are currently working on an analysis which will be available at the end of September.



Heatwave in northern Europe, summer 2018

The summer of 2018 has been remarkable in northern Europe. A very persistent high-pressure anomaly over Scandinavia caused high temperature anomalies and drought there from May to (at least) July.



Drought

Drought affects people in many ways, from reduced water & food supplies to increasing the risk of wildfires.



Extreme rainfall

Rainfall events from a major storm or hurricane, or intense localised downpours can lead to flooding in any type of location.



Heatwave

Heatwaves can be particularly

Above: World Weather Attribution

Campaigners have plenty of material to think about. For example how best to talk about 'the odds' or probabilities, a subject well studied by academics who have looked at topics like loss aversion and the desires for certainty and causality. One such psychologist, Kris de Meyer of Kings College, said to me after Otto's publication that he knew another scientist who had done a "back of the envelope calculation on the chance of different heatwaves occurring *together* around the entire Northern hemisphere this year". He'd found it would have about a 1 in 10,000 chance of occurring with unpolluted weather. "I have a feeling" said Kris, "that's a much stronger fact to communicate than 'the odds are 2:1' that climate was involved, which was produced for the UK/Northern Europe heatwave report".

Read more here.

Other Things

Plastics Strategy

I've posted a [presentation on plastics campaign strategy](#) at the Three Worlds blog, originally given at the Bristol 'Communicate' conference *Thinking Beyond Plastic* ([contributions here](#)). It tracks the development of the plastics issue before arguing that framing plastic as about litter or waste, which is strongly tied to recycling, will lead to plastic production being perpetuated. The alternative is to frame the fossil-plastic problem as pollution, which the evidence shows it is: pervasive, irretrievable and inherently hazardous (in the case of plastic, recycling can lead to pollution by a number of routes).

Peter Melchett RIP

Many campaigners knew and learnt a lot from Peter Melchett, who among many other things was Executive Director of Greenpeace UK and Policy Director of the Soil Association. He died earlier this year and numerous tributes to him can be found at Emma Rose's blog [Celebrating Peter](#). [He Had Our Back](#) is my own appreciation of Peter's very significant but often unseen contribution to Greenpeace.

How Change Campaigns Get Populated By The Usual Suspects

There are many consequences when change campaigns are dominated by one group, often a small section of society. Another *Newsletter* and post will explore how this phenomenon may have contributed the rejection of 'political correctness' and 'isms' by those who voted for Brexit, and for Trump in the US, and the lessons that may have politically, socially and for campaign design. But you can read about the details of the Values Mode responses to key elements of classic change campaigns, which one by one tend to filter out or sometimes even alienate all but the 'usual suspects', [here](#).

Books

Here are some books I happen to have been reading and found insightful for campaigning. Oldish and newish.

Marine Campaigners

There are lots of books about 'marine conservation' issues and ocean biology but not many about marine campaigners. Now Bob Earll has produced one which explores the issues through interviews with people who have fought to 'save the seas': [Marine Conservation, People Ideas and Action](#). I'm in it but that's not much of a recommendation. However so are

17 others from Roger Mitchell and Sue Gubbay to Elliott Norse, with much more of a legitimate claim to having made a real difference in combatting humanity's onslaught on the seas, which cover two thirds of our planet.

Ireland Says Yes

Not a new book but the story of the successful 2015 Irish 'Marriage Equality' campaign and referendum. I've been re-reading it as a case study in how campaigners can reach across divides and engage people not-like-themselves. More of that perhaps and we might not have had Brexit. (More another time). I recommend it though as a great campaign case study with lots of transferable learnings, described by those who did it, not just by academics or journalists. [Ireland Says Yes](#) by three great campaigners Gráinne Healy, Brian Sheehan & Noel Whelan.

[Rainforest: Dispatches From Earth's Most Vital Front Lines](#)

Indefatigable campaigner Tony Juniper justifies his enormous carbon footprint with this tale of his journeys from one endangered rainforest to the next in this mix of autobiography and fascinating treatise on the ecology of rainforests, the people involved in saving and destroying them, and solutions that have worked. It's long but an easy read. The parts that most stuck in my mind are his descriptions of the 'biotic pump', the extraordinary biological and physical moisture conveyor which allows rainforests to literally make rain, and the disastrous, probably global consequences if they do not, and his first-hand description of what it looked and felt like in the apocalyptic destruction of Sumatran forests growing on peat. Plus his very funny account of successfully walking into the Davos World Economic Forum pretending to be a 'Fat Cat' named 'Franc Suisse', and proceeding to hand out campaign leaflets.

Mark Lilla: The Once and Future Liberal

Lilla is an American political scientist and this is his critique of how the US 'progressive' left has lost it's way in pursuit of 'identity politics'. It's very US centric but in my view, anyone who does not like the ascent of populism or Trump and Brexit should [read this book](#) and think it over carefully. Short.

Jeremy Lent: The Patterning Instinct

I'm still reading this (long) book but it is very interesting. It's something of a cult volume and is about how our inherited cultures shape our thinking and society through metaphors we use to construct our 'world'. At least I think so. I am sure it has a lot to offer campaign strategists. If anyone has read it completely and would like to write about what it says to campaigning, do [get in touch](#) and I'll try to include that in a future *Newsletter*.

Book Offer

And finally, believe it or not some people want more than one copy of my book on motivational values *What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers*, for example for courses. The usual price is £19.99 but for multiple orders (three or more) I'm offering them for £10 each (a box by the way contains 17 books), plus post. Contact me if you want to take up this offer.

You can order a single copy of *What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers* preferably direct from me here, or find it on Amazon in which case they get lots of the money.

The Campaign Strategy Newsletter

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