

Campaign Strategy Newsletter 95 January 2016

Paris Politics Gift Campaigns A New Narrative on Climate

The December 2015 'climate conference' in Paris turned around the global political leadership. By adopting a new ambition to actually do what the UN FCCC (Climate Convention) always aimed to do – captured in the pledge to 'try to' limit the average increase in global temperatures to 1.5°C – it dramatically changed the political alignment. Out goes giving up on trying to keep the climate within safe bounds, in comes trying to do so.

Many analyses have set out the array of measures adopted in Paris, and the host of actions that will be needed, some underway and most all in need of huge expansion if the world is to stop using fossil fuels and curb other pollutants in time. (For instance [Grantham Institute/LSE](#), [Carbon Brief](#) on 1.5°C and an [interactive](#), [James Hansen](#), [350](#), [Polly Courtice](#) at [CISL](#), and a comprehensive one from [E3G](#)). As climate campaigners take stock of the post-Paris landscape, there is, as one put it to me this week, "everything to play for". There are lots of potential targets but 'Paris' may have also gifted campaigns something else, in the shape of a new political 'narrative'.

For the most horrible of reasons, politicians gathering in Paris had a powerful incentive to make the summit a 'success': in the wake of the Paris ISIS attacks, they had an acute need to show solidarity with France, and that international governance could still work. The imperative to stand against ISIS terrorism injected much-needed short term political will into the climate negotiations.

US President Barack Obama neatly nailed it when he asked "*What greater rejection of those who would tear down our world than marshalling our best efforts to save it*"?

I'm not saying campaigners simply 'got lucky'. From the time campaigners had a hand in getting the key Convention aim of limiting human climate change to a level and rate which ecosystems can adapt to naturally back in the early 1990s, though subsequent decades of hard graft, they have consistently done what governments did not. But before they press their noses back to their grindstones, they should stop to think about what the politics of Paris have given them, for it may help them bind politicians to their commitments, now they are all, however shakily, pointing the right direction.

Getting to the 1.5°C target is impossible without rapid phase out of fossil fuels. For the politics of this to work, fossil fuels have to become a 'bad' thing, a pariah industry like tobacco.

Ready or not, if governments are to make good on the promise of Paris, they need to break the dependency of their societies on oil, coal and gas. The coal industry has

already given them a helping hand in developing this narrative: the leader of Euracoal anticipated that his companies would now be “hated and vilified, in the same way that slave traders were”. Quite possibly so, because freedom from terrorism has become bound up with freedom from the terror of catastrophic climate change, and that means ending enslavement to oil, coal and gas. Such a freedom can be popular, inspiring and optimistic. People deserve it. Campaigners could do worse than to consider how to build on Obama’s words.

Read more in my blog [*After Paris, Climate is A Question of Freedom*](#)

Trouble With Stories

We all like stories, and they can be very powerful tools in making campaigns work. There’s no doubt about that but I at least am a bit concerned that the current emphasis on ‘story-telling’ in campaigns is at risk of conflating ‘great story telling’ with ‘great campaigns’, when one does not necessarily lead to another.

I’ve explored this in a blog [*Trouble With Stories*](#). My apologies for the length of it. My thanks to readers of this Newsletter who responded to an earlier request for help with examples of the contribution stories make to campaigns.

Here’s the gist of my concerns:

- Campaigners should primarily be story-makers not story-tellers
- Real-world experience is fragmentary – most often the audience makes the story from fragments: most do not see, hear, read or experience any complete story created by the campaigners, so being trained in story telling techniques designed for audiences who consume the whole story, is not a training for real life campaigning
- Audiences are at a premium in the digital age: those made by mass media are draining away, so there is a strategic need to create audiences that stories can be told to, whether through ‘digital’ or in real life, and whether as fragments or in complete form
- Most campaigns have to use stories to get where they want to go: stories to motivate, to explain and to organise but campaigns also have to ‘make stories come true’, and story-telling itself is rarely sufficient to achieve that.

I don’t argue against story-telling or even against using the formats often deployed in story-telling training that are designed for contexts and channels where there is an opportunity to tell a complete story, something that is rare in much real-world campaigning. But it does worry me when I come across campaigners trying to remedy problems in a campaign which are, for example, down to a lack of clarity or quality in strategy, by trying to develop a ‘more compelling story’.

It worries me even more if people commissioning campaigns see story telling as a miracle cure for making then work, in the way that some managers, boards and bosses once assumed for 'publicity' or press coverage, 'getting on the internet', social media uptake and many other useful tools which were in vogue at one time or another. It's not fair on those charged with creating the stories, for a start.

At the end I list seven possible things to do.

1. Try to be story-makers rather than story-tellers. Make real change that leads other people to want to tell the story of what you make happen. Be the story.
2. Make it easier by investing more in In Real Life real-world campaigning activity than in story-telling, especially digital story telling.
3. Make that 'easier' by exploring how to create campaigns without 'digital'. The digital will arrive later anyway. Otherwise you may get stuck in the bubble.
4. Remember that people pick up fragments of your story, whether told deliberately or not, and construct the rest. So make each fragment, each moment, 'make sense' in itself. Prioritise the audiences you need in order to make a real difference.
5. Invest in expanding audience opportunities where people can 'get' your beautifully crafted complete stories. But sparingly and strategically as this is expensive, and very few will ever see them. Unless you get very clever, very rich or very entertaining.
6. Construct critical path strategies that are about achieving objectives leading to change (ie evidence-based 'theories of change', not generic theories of change), and develop bespoke, tested stories to help motivate key audiences at each step. Be led by change strategy served by stories, not a strategy of storytelling.
7. Reach across social silos, especially online networks of 'like' people. Be plural to engage different audiences. Don't waste time trying to bend a diversity of audiences to accepting stories that don't feel right to them. Match stories against values, don't try to change the values of the audience. Find out what does work for them, in doing what you need to make happen, and find a way to give them that, whether you are the story author, messenger, channel or not.

Read more [here](#).

Tiny Bits Of Good News

I don't know about you but when both Houses of the US Congress apparently combine to agree on a piece of legislation that could make a real difference to a new and insidious pollution menace, it brightens my day. Exactly that happened just before Christmas. The redoubtable Grist Magazine reported in an article headlined *Congress agrees on microbeads ban. Wait, what?* that both Congress and Senate had agreed to ban

companies from putting plastic microbeads into cosmetics. (Read the piece for more on how it happened. We could add analysis about it being a very close-to-consumer issue and so on but let's not and just say "well done" to the campaigners who made it happen).

The Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015 was signed into law by the US President five days later. What about other countries? In the interests of human health and that of the oceans, Europe and the rest of the world should follow this rare example of American non-partisanship. UK readers can sign this petition.

It's nice to have two good things to say about American politicians in one *Newsletter*.

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Books By Chris Rose:

How to Win Campaigns: Communications For Change (edn 2) Earthscan/Taylor and Francis 2010

What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors, and Pioneers, Troubador (2011) at <http://www.campaignstrategy.org/threeworlds/> post and packaging free in the UK (contact chris@campaignstrategy.co.uk for costs outside the UK), or UK Amazon, iTunes or from the publisher

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