

European Green Deal: Inducing Eco-Responsible Behaviours in the Post-Covid-19 Era

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In December 2019, the European Commission introduced the Green Deal, its ambitious growth strategy for the European Union to become climate neutral by 2050. The plan aims not only to create a cleaner, greener, healthier environment but also a sustainable, resilient, growing economy. However, commitments to address climate change are meaningless without civic engagement. Considering that citizens are at the heart of this environmental and ecological transition, communication is crucial to induce behavioural changes in favour of a greener lifestyle. It is foreseeable that the EU's communication strategy will have little effect if it is limited to wide and impersonal awareness-raising campaigns. A comprehensive multi-level dialogue with citizens needs to be undertaken, focusing not only on their behaviour but also on their attitudes and beliefs.

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted EU policy-making initiatives, including its ambitious flagship project, the European Green Deal. While it appears that the EU needs to finetune its communication efforts with regards to the public attention now focused on the EU recovery instrument (#NextGenerationEU), EU policymakers are still committed to putting the Green Deal at the core of their post-pandemic response. The EU, therefore, faces an additional challenge as it already had to engage citizens in the environmental and ecological transition. The current priority is to present the Green Deal as the smartest and most sustainable way to relaunch the EU economy. However, citizens facing the sanitary crisis and its aftermaths, i.e. the ensuing economic crisis, may at this time be less inclined to adopt an eco-responsible behaviour. This particular phase,

therefore, requires innovative persuasion strategies, which we will reference in this paper.

After looking at IEE¹ research on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, this report presents the main characteristics of the Green Deal before assessing the environmental policy prospects of the EU recovery plan. On this basis, the report looks at communication efforts in the sustainability field with a focus on persuasive communication strategies meant to trigger behavioural changes in favour of the green transition. Overall, this report is permeated by the argument that communication strategies regarding the Green Deal need to be supported by behavioural tools and incentives, notably through nudging, in order to gain the support of citizens.

Synergies with IEE Research

During the last months, IEE research has devoted a lot of attention to the effects of the sanitary crisis on EU policy-making and the EU's relationship with the rest of the world. François Denuit, IEE research fellow and political adviser to Philippe Lamberts (MEP and Co-President of the European Greens), has for instance studied the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on European social policies. His work within his political group has also enabled him to follow issues related to the Green Deal.

Likewise, Mario Telo, professor of international relations and IEE vice-president, is currently focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on European integration. He sees the recovery plan and its support by the German EU's presidency as a potential step towards more integration while observing the resistance the EU is facing.

¹ Institute for European Studies (ULB)

Finally, Luis Bouza and Alvaro Oleart, members of [OpenEUDebate](#), a Jean Monnet Network to which the IEE belongs, have been working, in the context of the coronavirus crisis, on the Commission's strategy to relaunch the EU and maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of European citizens.

The IEE-Protagoras report is complementary to the research mentioned above.

Fine-tuning the Green Deal

Through its Green Deal, the Commission initiated a policy package aiming at making the EU climate neutral by 2050 and proposed a plan to reduce the EU's greenhouse gas emissions for 2030 by at least 55%. To achieve this target, the Commission will revise all relevant climate-related policy instruments. Besides, the EU will dedicate 37% of its €750 billion recovery instrument responding to the COVID-19 crisis, #NextGenerationEU, to the Green Deal. In December 2019, the Commission proposed a roadmap² with various actions and investments to be carried out in order to ensure a fair and inclusive transition, and in particular to promote the efficient use of resources by moving towards a clean and circular economy as well as to restore biodiversity and reduce pollution. Although it builds on decades of already existing European environment and climate policies, the Green Deal was implemented to speed up and scale up their impact on society, and also to modernise our consumption and production systems. The Green Deal was positively welcomed by the various

² European Commission, 2019. *Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf [Accessed 20 April 2020].

stakeholders in the environmental and ecological sectors as well as by the European Parliament, even though the latter has asked for higher ambitions.

To secure its engagements, the Commission proposed a Climate Law, aiming at integrating climate-neutrality targets into EU law. The purpose is to protect “the generational challenge of climate change from more pressing and immediate priorities” (Elkerbout, et al., 2020 p.2). Through this initiative, the Commission wants to ensure that all EU policies and sectors contribute to the green transition³. Paradoxically, according to the Centre of European Policy Studies (CEPS), the current crisis could also create obstacles in its implementation (Elkerbout, et al., 2020 p.2).

The official communication frame pertaining to the Green Deal emphasizes the central role of European citizens in the transition. In addition to protecting “the health and well-being of citizens from environmental related-risks and impacts, the Commission insists that this transition must be just and inclusive for everyone. Given the importance and urgency of the issues covered by the Green Deal, the institution recalls the need for “active public participation and confidence”, which is a condition for policies to work and to be accepted⁴.

Initiatives to Empower European citizens

The Commission considers citizens as a “driving force” that institutions must engage with if the Green Deal is to succeed⁵. In this perspective, it has

³ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.2.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.22. See also: European Commission, 2020. *Enabling citizens to act on climate change and environmental protection through education, citizen science, observation initiatives, and civic involvement*. [online] Available at:

proposed the European Climate Pact “to engage citizens and communities in action for our climate and environment”⁶. This initiative, which was scheduled to be launched in March 2020 but has been postponed to the last quarter of 2020, is about giving the possibility to all actors in society to design and participate in actions related to the environmental protection and climate change. The European Commission, and more particularly DG CLIMA, seeks to encourage dialogue, information sharing, grassroots initiatives in order to increase understanding of climate challenges and find innovative solutions. Through the organisation of communication activities and events (such as participatory consultations and citizens’ dialogues), the Pact will raise awareness and encourage citizens and societal organisations to adopt sustainable behaviours and to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission is also willing to provide support for projects related to the building sector, mobility and other greening initiatives⁷. By offering a platform to discuss and inspire each other about sustainable practices, the Climate Pact is thus an important way for the EU to involve citizens in its growth strategy.

Besides, in its communication strategy on the Green Deal towards citizens⁸, DG COMM has recently presented a plan to raise awareness about environmental and ecological issues, emphasising

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/green_deal/gdc_stakeholder_engagement_topic_10-3_civic_involvement.pdf [Accessed 10 October 2020].

⁶ European Commission. *European Climate Pact*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/pact_en [Accessed 28 September 2020].

⁷ European Commission, 2020. *Call for tenders CLIMA/2020/OP/0005 - Operation of the European Climate Pact Secretariat (PactSec)*. [online] Available at: <https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/document/document->

on the emergency of the situation in Europe. The plan exposes the EU’s ambitions with regard to these challenges, with a particular focus on behavioural change. The Commission encourages EU citizens to make sustainable choices about “food, housing, appliances, transport, household goods, travelling”. To achieve this, EU communicators have presented several strategic axes, linking these actions to personal benefits, highlighting concrete actions that could be taken or illustrating how climate change is already taking place. Finally, the Commission has identified a whole range of stakeholders, among which the civil society, to consult them and direct their efforts towards a common goal: reaching climate neutrality before 2050.

If the Green Deal had to face several delays due to the urgency of the health crisis⁹, the interviews conducted with EU policymakers during the lockdown let us understand that the ambitions were still as high, if not higher than before the pandemic. The Commission issued a call for tender in the summer for a major communication campaign on the Green Deal aimed at citizens and to be launched at the end of the year.

<file-download.html?docFileId=80896> [Accessed 28 September 2020].

⁸ Presentation by Tina Zournatzi (Head of Strategic Communication, DG COMM, European Commission) on 10 February 2020.

⁹ Simon, F., 2020. *Green Deal facing delays due to coronavirus, EU admits*. [online] Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-deal-facing-delays-due-to-coronavirus-eu-admits/> [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Towards a Sustainable Recovery?

Given the anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, one of the risks involved consists of handling the sanitary crisis without considering its environmental impact (Elkerbout et al., 2020, p.2). The global health crisis has divided Member States over the place that the EU should give to the Green Deal, with one side believing that environmental policy should be at the heart of the recovery plan, while the other would prefer to put it on hold¹⁰. Seventeen EU member states have signed a letter asking for the Green Deal to “be central to a resilient recovery after COVID-19”.¹¹ Likewise, in its report, the Centre for European Policy Studies argues that the re-launch might “offer a unique opportunity for the EU to live up to the Green Deal’s promise of economic modernisation along the Paris decarbonisation objectives” (Elkerbout et al., 2020, p.1). Many policymakers and scholars agree to say that we must avoid managing the current crisis in the same way as we managed the financial crisis of 2008, i.e. by taking little account of environmental and climate issues in the recovery plan. Instead, researchers from CEPS and EGMONT recommend guiding “economic output towards lower-carbon activities” (Elkerbout et al, 2020, p.4), which would significantly reduce CO₂ emissions during the recovery (Blondeel, 2020, p.6). Hans Bruyninckx, director of the European Environment Agency, sums up in his own words the dilemma facing policymakers in dealing with the current economic

crisis: “either you recover the economy in an unsustainable way and afterwards you will have to pay a second time because you will need to clean up the unsustainable practices, or you make the choice to do it in an innovative way by investing in jobs of the future as well as addressing climate, biodiversity and circular economy issues”¹². While a policy framework may provide the certainty needed to ensure that ambitious emission reduction targets are set for 2030, the COVID-19 crisis could even accelerate the ecological transition towards more sustainability, e.g. in promoting the Green Deal as a lever for job creation and an engine of growth. In other words: affected Member States rebuilding their economies taking into account the environmental objectives set as part of the Green Deal.

On 21 July, the 27 agreed on the Recovery Plan for Europe to help repair the economic damage provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic¹³. While the Council conclusions say that EU expenditure will be consistent with Paris agreement objectives, CEPS considers (Gros, 2020, p.8) that the green targets will have to be reinforced, otherwise the results in terms of emissions and recycling will not be better than what was expected before COVID. According to CEPS, the benefit for the green transition “should not be measured by the emissions avoided through the projects financed by the RRF, but by the reduction in overall EU-wide emissions that can be achieved over the next decade” (Gros, 2020, p.10).

¹⁰ Poland, Czechia and Romania have suggested slowing down climate ambitions.

¹¹ Climate Home News, 2020. *European Green Deal must be central to a resilient recovery after Covid-19*. [online] Available at: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/09/european-green-deal-must-central-resilient-recovery-covid-19/> [Accessed 11 July 2020].

¹² Interview with Hans Bruyninckx (20 May 2020).

¹³ European Council, 2020. *Special meeting of the European Council (17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 July 2020) – Conclusions*. [online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45109/210720-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf> [Accessed 22 July 2020].

“A Long-Term Vision to Avoid Paying the Bill Twice”



Interview with **Hans Bruyninckx**, director of the European Environment Agency

What should be the place of the Green Deal in the EU's post-pandemic recovery plan?

We must not forget that the European Green Deal is also a massive investment program in the European economy. It is imperative that we invest the money in future-oriented sectors. The idea of going back to normal is non-sensical, as we will need to move forward to something else. To put it very simply, you have two options: either you recover the economy in an unsustainable way and afterwards you will have to pay a second time because you will need to clean up the unsustainable practices, or you make the choice to do it in an innovative way by investing in jobs of the future as well as addressing climate, biodiversity and circular economy issues. For that, we need to innovate in our energy systems, and we now have additional funds to do so. We must also invest in the European housing stock and come up with a plan to renovate older buildings. The aim is to give a stimulus to the building sector in Europe by adopting new working methods that are more sustainable.

It is all about using the amount of money that is made available in a win-win situation. Obviously, we need to support the economy, but we also must keep in mind that if we want this to be a success

story over a longer period of time, we need to address sustainability issues.

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a significant slowdown in production and consumption systems, which reduced greenhouse gas emissions in all over the world. Which lessons can be drawn from this?

Obviously, the health crisis and the slowdown in the economy have led to serious impacts on the environment and climate. As the European Environment Agency, we are monitoring that and we see clearly that air quality has improved, especially in southern European cities, as well as a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in all over the world. You could say that it is a good thing, but it comes at very high social and economic costs. So, the real challenge is to restructure the economy to meet the emissions reduction targets that are in line with Europe's ambition to become climate neutral, and that will, of course, not happen by creating a socio-economic crisis. We need to do that by innovating ourselves out of this crisis. I hope that we will be able to invest at the appropriate levels in the energy and mobility systems and keep some of the changes that have emerged as a result of the crisis. I am thinking about teleworking, which would produce less traffic, but also maybe about shifting away from the extremely cheap flights over Europe. We can use this as a part of the tipping point to move in the right direction.

“The Green Deal is the condition for a return to economic development and for the EU to be independent.”

Interview with **Gilles Gantelet** (Director for Policy, DG ENV) and **Gilles Laroche** (Head of Unit A2 - Communication, Directorate Policy, DG ENV)

What should be the place of the Green Deal in the EU's post-pandemic recovery plan?

G. Gantelet: Eurosceptics have used the crisis as a pretext to demand an end or postponement of the Green Deal, but the opposite is happening. Not only the Commission but also the member states have recalled that the Green Deal was, in fact, one of the conditions for a return to economic development. There is also a near consensus that the Green Deal is a condition for the EU to be independent, in response to the current crisis. We have seen that everything that has been undertaken in the context of globalisation has several inherent drawbacks. One of them was that we were completely dependent on countries like China or the United States. The Green Deal is therefore also a reappropriation of production from the development of the economy and consumption by Europe. A real social demand has emerged during this crisis. European citizens want local products, which is favourable to the acceptance of the Green Deal. Another important aspect to underline is that the lockdown has shown that the main source of the attacks on the environment and the climate came from our activities. The fact that people had to stay at home has improved environmental quality indices everywhere.

G. Laroche: The recent adoption of the second pillar, the biodiversity strategy, shows that the ambition has remained intact. The pact includes strict

European standards and has nevertheless been broadly welcomed, even if there is reluctance in certain sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. I even have the impression that this crisis has enabled us to go a little further.

Is there any reason to fear reluctance, particularly at the level of the Member States, because of the economic crisis?

G. Gantelet: Surprisingly, this is not what is happening. People continue to approve the idea that Europe must adapt and make its economic transition towards greater sustainability. The Green Deal came about because there was a real demand, which remains intact despite the crisis. Most economic actors are ahead of us and they are asking us to act. What they need above all are a framework and certainty. There is no ostensible opposition to the Green Deal. There is an unprecedented general level of approval for this policy.

G. Laroche: Having dealt with many industrial clients during my career, I have noticed that this time everyone was aware of the meaning of history. Some lobbies simply want to gain a little time to allow the industrialist to continue his usual practices for as long as possible.



Gilles Laroche

Gilles Gantelet

Why Communication is Fundamental as Regards the EU's Sustainability Strategies

The environmental and ecological transition cannot happen if the citizen is not at the heart of its process. As Ruhet Genç showed (2017), communication efforts are vital in any sustainable plan or strategy, both internally and externally. This report focuses on the importance of external communication in providing legitimacy in sustainable development and overcoming barriers of confusion. Indeed, the field sustainability is characterized by a significant level of complexity and uncertainty, which requires interpretation and popularisation work by communication professionals. Genç observes (2017, p.514) that sustainability goals often entail conflicts of interest and values, which can be resolved through communication by creating a common understanding that sets concrete goals to follow. But in the case of the EU, a public institution, it is also a question of democracy and transparency. Since capacity and decision-making on sustainable development are widely dispersed among different types of actors and levels of power, the EU needs to communicate and negotiate with a variety of stakeholders to act in the common interest of all. But above all external communication is necessary to convince citizens of the urgency of an environmental and ecological transition, as their active participation is needed. In this regard, European communication experts are in a position to stimulate an eco-responsible behaviour in several innovative ways, which we will examine in detail in the following sections.

Generating public participation and civic engagement towards a green transition requires communicating with citizens on several levels. Genç conceives (2017) three different ways to persuade individuals to adopt a more sustainable behaviour: communication about sustainability, communication

of sustainability and communication for sustainability.

The first one, communication about sustainability refers to the exchange of information and discussions related to sustainability issues. This type of horizontal communication, which can take the form of face-to-face interactions, provides an interpretative framework, in view of reaching a common understanding of an issue, but also to set objectives to be achieved. Communication of sustainability, on the contrary, is mono-directional, which means that it is based on a sender-receiver communication model. It is about informing and educating citizens, for example, without caring primarily about how they receive and process information. As for communication for sustainability, it focuses less on providing information or discussing sustainable issues, and more on establishing "societal transformation based on the normative goals of sustainable development" (2017, p.515).

These three forms of communication have their advantages and limits, yet not all of them deserve the same emphasis. And while information and education on sustainable development issues remain key, one must in the same time avoid a detrimental elitist stance that draws a clear line between experts and ordinary people.

Recommendations to Engage Citizens in the Environmental and Ecological Transition

1. Identifying social obstacles

Taking into account citizens' potential reticence towards the adoption of an eco-responsible behaviour, future communication campaigns ought to be addressing prior-identified obstacles.

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p.257; see figure below) have thereby looked at explanatory factors of influence and associated barriers. The authors first identify internal factors which comprise personality traits, habits, value systems and emotional involvement. Concerning external factors, they can be political, social and cultural. The infrastructure and the economic situation can also enter into play, in addition to barriers (represented by black boxes) to positive influence on pro-environmental behaviour, such as old habits.

The arrows indicate how these factors "influence each other and, ultimately, [affect] pro-environmental behaviours". The larger arrow represents the leading positive influence on pro-environmental behaviour, when "internal and external actors act synergistically". The role of the different factors and the synergies between them vary during the development process of the individual.

Although this model remains theoretical and does not incorporate all the factors behind pro-environmental behaviours, it could nevertheless help in identifying behavioural patterns as regards green transition, thereby backing the work of environmental marketers and policymakers.

2. Identifying strategic target groups

The EU cannot address all citizens in the same way; strategic target groups need to be identified. Based on theoretical models such as Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) and studies to understand the behaviour of citizens and the obstacles encountered regarding more eco-responsible behaviours, EU communicators must identify strategic categories of citizens, notably according to the types of barriers that they face, their habits, their interests and their region. This tailored targeting will increase the chances that the message will be heard and accepted.

On the subject of targeting, Gilles Gantelet, Director for Policy in DG Environment of the Commission, observes that upper class "bourgeois citizens" – meaning those who are rather well off financially – "are significantly greener than citizens from the lower classes". One challenge is thus to reach out to a wider yet, specific audience; people who still care little about environmental and ecological issues or prove unaware of ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

3. Focus on targeted communication initiatives adapted to the local peculiarities of the different region

Gilles Laroche, Head of Unit (Unit A2 – Communication – DG ENV), observes that "the communication developed at the central level, particularly in DG COMM, is only reaching a limited number of people" and therefore underlines the importance of local initiatives: "it is relevant for us to mobilise cities, which represent the entity that speaks to the citizen. Europe is too big and may seem too impersonal, whereas the city is where we evolve every day". Public authorities thereby need to opt for horizontal strategies, by listening to the

variety of needs and concerns about the transition before responding adequately. True adaptive dialogue is more likely to have an impact than one-way, impersonal communication targeting the “general public”.

4. **Strengthening cooperation schemes with local and regional relays**

Local and regional relays are also needed to fine-tune the EU’s pro-environmental agenda. While the cooperation of Member States remains crucial in contributing to a coherent and unitary narrative in support of the Green Deal, heads of state often tend to reframe EU’s ambitious targets in view of national priorities and, as Gantelet notes, “only refer to the EU to assign responsibility for failure”. As such, local initiatives ought to act in supporting and complementing formal EU institutional communication initiatives, particularly to stress the local and regional impacts of climate change. Deepening local partnerships and identifying more actors in all regions are therefore key in raising awareness on climate issues and promote the Green Deal.

“It is a pivotal decade to reflect on how we want to shape society for the future.”

Interview with Hans Bruyninckx, director of the European Environment Agency

How should we communicate to induce behavioural changes in favour of environmental and ecological transition? On which aspects of its daily life can we favourably influence the citizen? Taking into account the new situation...

What we see in Europe, notably through big data, is that the COVID-19 crisis had a serious impact on mobility. Even though it is a consequence of the lockdown, it led numerous citizens to reflect on their mobility patterns. People are going more and more for the bicycle. Also, as most people are appreciating the fact that they do not have to be in their car or in public transports 2–3 hours a day, we must continue to promote teleworking, but not as massively as we do it now, because we all see the limits of this method. There is also a high demand for local food, the short production and consumption chains. An increasing number of people are reflecting on their own behaviours and consumption. Now, I am not naïve. I don't think that there will be a total reset of society and that, all of a sudden, everyone will become deep ecologists, but it could be part of this tipping point in behavioural change.

Also, I would like to stress the fact that the responsibilities that we have towards the environment and ecology are embedded in the systems that surround us. I would therefore not fall into the trap of individualising responsibilities to citizens-consumers. The big players in the production chains have a significant role to play in this transition. They determine to a large extent what we find in the stores. They spend billions on

promoting specific types of consumption. So, one needs to balance this understanding of personal responsibility and the reflection about the systems in which this happens. Serious sustainability challenges will have to be met by the big players in the production systems. They are also policymakers in their own realm, since they implement corporate policies towards sustainability. They carry big responsibilities towards the future and the next generation, and they should take them seriously. This is the moment to do it. It is a pivotal decade for climate, for biodiversity as well as to reflect on social justice and on how we invest and shape the society for the future. Because scientists can come with models and scenarios but, at the end of the day, it is not about predicting the future, but it is about shaping the future. The transition can still happen. It is just a matter of organising priorities, both public and private.

Do you think that citizens' behaviour in relation to this transition is likely to change negatively? Is there a risk that it will no longer be a priority in people's daily lives because of the economic crisis that will follow?

Again, I think that big players and public institutions have an important role to play here. They should be the ones that are making sure that the money we are investing will be in the right direction. They should have a longer-term perspective and position the public good as a needle on the compass to drive their policies in the right direction. Individualization of responsibilities only comes in second place.

There are also policymakers that are claiming that it is not the time to be strict on the car industry or to put high standards for 2030 in European policies. But again, the risk is that we will pay twice and that we will fall behind other big players, such as China, who will continue making the transition to electric mobility, for example.

“Working with local relays is essential to get the European message across on environmental issues.”

Interview with Gilles Gantelet (Director for Policy, DG ENV) and Gilles Laroche (Head of Unit A2 - Communication, Directorate Policy, DG ENV)

How to get EU citizens' support for the environmental and ecological transition?

G. Gantelet: The reality is that bourgeois citizens are significantly “greener” than popular citizens. A part of the citizens is demanding. Interestingly, we are even almost lagging behind the demand. It is quite incredible because in the last 5 years we have begun to be overtaken by civil society, which is demanding action at this level.

G. Laroche: However, we observe that the communication developed at the central level, particularly in DG COMM, is only reaching a limited number of people. Even though we broadcast on social networks in all languages and use our representations in the member states. On environmental issues, we see the importance of a local strategy. It is relevant for us to mobilise cities, which represent the entity that speaks to the citizen. Europe is too big and may seem too impersonal, whereas the city is where we evolve every day; it is where we encounter our problems and where we find our solutions. This is why the EU must mobilise these relay actors, engage in citizens' initiatives on the spot. This allows us to adapt communication because we do not speak the same way in Helsinki as in a village in the depths of Bretagne. The EU has carried out various initiatives, very limited, I admit, at the citizens' level. We mobilised young people throughout Europe to organise participatory citizen workshops, but we were only there to facilitate, not to provide answers. Nevertheless, these workshops

have had a significant impact. They have helped to change the way waste is collected and the use of plastics in the city. It shows that the city is the right entity to communicate. By giving people the means to organise these citizen debates, we will get the European message across on environmental issues.

G. Gantelet: While central governments only refer to the EU to assign responsibility for failures, we are in the process of creating direct links with more local actors with whom we are very good at selling the European mission. So much so that today there is not a single DG that does not have an initiative linked to cities.

How do we reach citizens who are not yet convinced of the importance of the green transition?

G. Gantelet: The only issue at stake is job creation. There is certainly less support among construction workers, for example. But the Green Deal must be presented as a factor of wealth creation, of job creation. At that point, people will adhere to it. Popular wisdom should never be underestimated. People are ready to evolve and accept certain principles as soon as they see an interest in them. The big question is how to prove the interest of the Green Deal, and this is where the local relays are useful because the bureaucrats of the Commission will not be able to explain this to the greatest number of people.

G. Laroche: The role of local relays is very important in selling this financial program initiated by the EU. If the courage is not there at the national level, if we give in to the sirens of some who ask to continue as we did before, we will lose an immense opportunity.

“We do not only need to raise awareness; we must give citizens foresight.”



Interview with Geert Stox, Head of Strategy at ICF Next

To what extent has ICF contributed to the communication on the Green Deal?

We have contributed in two main ways. Firstly, we have contributed to the process of 'greening' EU projects, in particular with the Road Trip Project organised by DG REGIO. Every year, the DG organizes a road trip for young people to travel across Europe and to visit EU-supported projects and activities. This year, we have prepared this road trip as a Green Trip. The aim is to showcase green European projects and focus on the sustainability of these projects with a view to inducing behavioural changes. This example demonstrates that the Green Deal is not only a program but a vision for the future of Europe, which means that all projects as of now should be considered through the Green Deal idea. The aim is to inspire people and tell them that they are not alone in the transition. Secondly, there has been a call for proposals in the summer to communicate on the Green Deal, taking into account the new COVID-19 situation. We have worked extensively with behaviour specialists to prepare our tender for this project. We should never forget that there are regions around Europe that are still very depending on old industries, which are less sustainable. Here at ICF, we always use the stereotypical example of the miner who lives in a

region whose economy and employment are completely depending on the mining industry. If we go to these people and say that they must forget their job because it is not sustainable for the future, the whole region is going to have a problem. So, we do not only have to make them aware, but we also need to give them foresight. And here comes the EU's Just Transition Fund, which aims at supporting the regions having these kinds of issues. It is not only aimed at regions but also at people, as miners for example, who will be converted to new jobs.

How should we communicate to induce behavioural changes in favour of environmental and ecological transition? On which aspects of daily life can the citizen be favourably influenced? Taking into account the new situation...

We come from an era in which sustainability was something for the weird, but now people are ready to change. However, you need a spark; you need to ignite evolution sometimes. In many cases, people have good intentions, but they need to be accompanied. One way of doing this is to show them that they are not alone in this transition. Behaviour specialists have demonstrated the efficiency of study data. For example, “x % of the population is drinking tap water to reduce consumption of plastic bottles”, “most of the people are already in this mindset”, etc. Knowing that they are not alone motivates people to take action for the environmental transition. Through these initiatives, you also create a community of like-minded people. And we must also highlight the fact that the EU makes the fund available to realize these actions. To induce behavioural change, you cannot communicate with people in a patronising way as we did before. Now we must go to the next level, which means that instead of simply ordering small actions to protect the environment, we now need to make people understand that sustainability is about everything we do in life. It is not about saving energy

that is produced the wrong way; it is about producing energy the right way, and then carefully using it. So, the whole ecosystem and the thinking need to change. That is the behavioural change that we are focusing on.

Some observers believe that it is mainly the upper class that feels concerned about environmental and ecological issues. Would you agree?

I think that now the majority of citizens are aware of the climate emergency, but the problem lies above all in the fact that some of them do not have a solution to act in a more environmentally friendly way. For the upper class, the transition is easier insofar as it has the financial means and the solution to make it. We cannot say the same for the working class, which in fact concerns the majority of us. We cannot expect these people, the minors for example, to instantly isolate their houses or instantly buy an electric car. We must not only raise their awareness, but also give them foresight, prospect, and solutions. We need to help these people and their countries/regions, so we do not leave anyone behind. In the past, we have been forcing citizens towards certain changes, and have not really cared about those who could not catch up because “they were just a minority”. This behavioural change needs to happen with all citizens, not just the upper class.

5. Promote the Green Deal as a lever for job creation and an engine of growth

Given the impact of the economic crisis on many European households, it is essential to emphasise the potential of the Green Deal as an engine of growth. While some sectors have already bounced back from the economic crisis, it appears “some sectors of the economy will remain weak for some time because there are still restrictions on mobility and services requiring close contact remain” (Gros, p.4, 2020). For example, Daniel Gros explains that the travel sector is still suffering a lot, with sales figures still well below those before the COVID-19 crisis, while the sale of durable goods has almost fully recovered (p.4, 2020). Moreover, economic models suggest that many households “are cash-constrained and will spend any transfer they receive from governments”. Particularly now, citizens therefore need to be reassured that the transition will not be an additional cost and is, on the contrary, the solution to bail them out of the crisis.

6. Reassure citizens about the costs of transition

Now more than ever, the EU must provide certainty to citizens and ensure that the transition will be just. The context of the current crisis has to be taken into account. Some categories of workers are particularly affected, such as those who worked in the platform economy and who generally sign week, day or zero-hour contracts. Many of them are now unemployed and cannot claim temporary

unemployment benefits because they are not under any contract (Bloodeel, p.5, 2020).

Geert Stox, Head of Strategy in the European communication agency ICF Next, points out that “the EU must not only raise awareness, it must provide citizens with foresight, prospect and solutions”¹⁴. Some regions will find it more difficult than others to face the costs of this transition. It is therefore imperative to highlight the EU’s Just Transition Fund, which must address the economic inequalities that the transition will generate. This fund is all the more important today as the crisis is likely to accentuate this disparity. Stox insists that this fund is not only for regions but also for individuals who do not have the means to cope with this transition.

7. Highlight the job-creating potential and other short to mid-term benefits of the Green Deal

Citizens are more conducive to adapting their behaviour in line with the aspired ecological transition and climate objectives if they perceive concrete short to mid-term benefits. A focus on the job-creating potential of the Green Deal therefore proves to be particularly promising. By 2030, the Commission expects to create new jobs by meeting its energy targets as well as investing in a more circular economy¹⁵. For example, through the Renovation Wave (an initiative part of the Green Deal aiming at optimising the building sector to reduce CO2 emissions), the EU is expecting to create jobs in the building sector and “put money

¹⁴ Interview with Geert Stox (29 October 2020).

¹⁵ European Commission, 2019. *Communication from The Commission to The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The*

Regions. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf [Accessed 20 April 2020], p.7.

back into the local economy”¹⁶. Another area of action concerns sustainable vehicles, and alternative fuels or the installation of charging points meant to encourage the adoption of greener modes of transport. Communicating on such concrete endeavours developed in the framework of the Green Deal as well as on first results may trigger the required support and enthusiasm towards the EU’s flagship initiative.

8. Integrate more nudging into communication strategies

The EU can induce eco-responsible behaviours through nudging. Public authorities have several tools at their disposal to sway the behaviour of citizens: awareness-raising campaigns, financial incentives, legislation (prohibition or obligation) and exemplarity. Thierry Libaert¹⁷ proposes to integrate “nudging” as a fifth tool, aiming to address the limitations in the four traditional instruments, particularly regarding responsible behaviour and consumption. Nudge theorists Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein define (2008) nudging as “any aspect of the architecture of choice which predictably changes people’s behaviour, without eliminating any of the options or drastically changing financial incentives”. As underlined by *La Fabrique Écologique*¹⁸ (2016, p.9), the aim of nudging is not to convince, nor to change the options of choice available to individuals, but to provide an “architecture of choice” that leaves all possibilities

open and yet highlights the potentially most judicious choice for the individual and/or group concerned. Several policymakers have already included nudging into their administrative toolbox, as a way to guide the choices of citizens-consumers without forcing them to do anything, thus respecting freedom of choice.

Through his work on nudge thinking, Libaert aspires to fill the remaining gap between individuals’ intentions and how they behave daily. For him, nudging can operate using many different levers¹⁹, each helping the citizen-consumer to eventually make the choice that would be most beneficial for him or the community while leaving him total freedom of action. The researcher lists different examples of levers that can be used. One of them consists of “applying the default solution which the implementing authority considers best” and “simplest to apply”. For example, many businesses now send digital bills by default (instead of printed paper), because they assume that the majority of their clients have an internet connection. We can also mention the lever of social norms, which implies “highlighting a behaviour exhibited by the majority around us (neighbours, colleagues, etc.)” and is supposed to encourage individuals to act like the others so that they conform to social norms. Another example of strategy that is mentioned is the promotion of environmentally friendly products through attractive packaging – with the hope that the consumers will opt for sustainable branded

¹⁶ See the roadmap on this webpage: European Commission, 2020. *A Renovation Wave initiative for public and private buildings*. [online] Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12376-Commission-Communication-Renovation-wave-initiative-for-the-building-sector> [Accessed 18 September 2020].

¹⁷ Member of the European Economic and Social Committee and scientific collaborator of the “Earth & Life

Institute” at the Catholic University of Louvain (UCLouvain).

¹⁸ *La Fabrique Écologique* is “a Think and Do-Tank which aims to promote ecology and sustainable development on the basis of pragmatic and concrete proposals”.

¹⁹ *European Economic and Social Committee Opinion 2016/685/ECSC of 15 December 2016 towards applying nudge thinking to EU policies*, p.5.

products (coming from local agriculture, for example).

This new behavioural trigger therefore appears to be interesting for inducing behavioural changes in favour of the sought ecological transition at EU-level. Since the main advantage put forward by its defenders is the ability to have a significant impact for a lower cost, the authorities have everything to gain by using nudging as a complementary tool to make citizens behave in a more eco-responsible way. As Libaert notes, “nudging cannot help much in communicating the Green Deal, but it is rather going to help the implementation of the Green Deal and its very effectiveness in changing citizens’ behaviour”²⁰.

Nudges nonetheless have “risks and constraints” that we must take into account²¹. Indeed, they raise technical and ethical questions as they are sometimes accused of being a manipulative technique. Libaert points out that they “should not be a substitute for informing individuals and educating them about their choices”. Moreover, we must keep in mind, that in this case, nudging would not be used for commercial purposes, but rather to induce responsible behaviours and thus positively influence citizens.

9. Prioritise local nudges

According to Libaert, nudges cannot be effective if they concern distance communication. They must reach out to things that concern the environment close to the citizens, which are integrated into their daily lives. Indeed, “green nudges” are useful to naturally facilitate eco-responsible behaviour, either by restructuring the environment or by displays,

such as footprints painted on the asphalt to indicate the way to a rubbish bin. Another example is to deploy smart meters for housing. Making real-time consumption data available to households will enable them to better monitor energy consumption in their homes. More generally, Libaert observes that nudges work very well for “the fight against waste and the promotion of eco-gestures in daily behaviour”.

For the researcher, nudging can only be involved in large campaigns insofar “as you communicate after taking a decision from a nudge perspective”. You can imagine changing the architecture of choice and then making an announcement about it, but ex-post, to the citizens. The EU should therefore avoid overestimating the effects of nudges in wider awareness campaigns organised at the institutional level. Libaert explains that “nudge thinking must be about things that are targeted and that lead to a certain behaviour, such as stickers or markings on the ground”. Many local initiatives on nudges already exist in several European cities, but the EU can play a central role in strengthening and systematising the efforts.

10. Use the lever of social norms

Social norms are an important factor of influence. Tosun et al. (2020) have looked at EU citizens’ reluctance to give up bottled water for tap water – a conduct linked to displeasure as to sensory properties as well as health-related apprehensions. The authors show that making tap water available in public places such as canteens and restaurants may have an impact on behavioural change – a change often highly dependent on social acceptability. Libaert concurs that social norms

²⁰ Interview with Thierry Libaert (18 September 2020).

²¹ European Economic and Social Committee Opinion 2016/685/ECSC of 15 December 2016 towards applying nudge thinking to EU policies, p.8.

constitute a “powerful behavioural determinant”, to the extent that “they can be used to encourage citizens to act in a given way”. The researcher underlines the relevance of a strategy “highlighting a behaviour exhibited by the majority of those around you”, which is supposed “to encourage individuals to act in the same way so that they conform to social norms”²². Hence, with reference to more effective communication, one should look at producing the necessary incentives for upright adjustments in concrete settings and human situations.

Geert Stox believes that the use of figures can help “to motivate citizens by showing them that the transition is already taking place and that they are not alone in taking action for the protection of the environment”. Libaert also observes that in the fight against energy waste, the lever of social cohesion, and more particularly using data from study results, worked very well. By saying “in your community, 65% of people have reduced their heating consumption by the same amount”, Stox says, “you can create communities of like-minded people”. It also demonstrates to citizens that small actions can have a big impact when other individuals also carry them out.

11. The advantages of transport-related initiatives

According to a study by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, transport represents 30% of EU household carbon emissions (Hollingworth and Barker, 2018). Efforts to reduce the burning of transport fuel therefore constitute a

strategic priority. Crawford Hollingworth and Liz Barker, experts in behavioural science, argue (2018) that providing real-time and personal feedback to drivers could help to reduce their fuel consumption. Several techniques allow people to drive more economically, such as moving up the car gears quickly enough not to exceed 2500 rpm (for a petrol car, 2000 for a diesel). Letting drivers see how small changes can make a significant difference in fuel consumption is likely to motivate them to drive in a more eco-responsible way. To achieve its goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050, the EU could also promote these feedback systems for driving, which can be implemented through one-to-one training sessions but also new technologies developed in cars such as Nissan’s ECO Pedal²³.

12. Offering opportunities to discuss and sharing good practices on nudging

The European Climate Pact represents an excellent opportunity to follow Libaert’s recommendation to provide a platform to different actors (such as public institutions, authorities, businesses, associations, NGOs, etc.) allowing the sharing of information and good practices on nudges. The objective of the Climate Pact²⁴ is to encourage societal engagements in the green transition through a wide range of communication activities and events, such as participatory consultations. It emphasises cooperation by helping to bring together people and organisations to share ideas and experience. The Commission also wants to support initiatives with knowledge/capacity-building designed to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Besides constituting an opportunity to exchange experiences about

²² *Ibid*, p.6.

²³ Nissan. ECO Pedal. [online] Available at: https://www.nissan-global.com/EN/TECHNOLOGY/OVERVIEW/eco_pedal.html [Accessed 20 August 2020].

²⁴ European Commission. European Climate Pact. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/pact_en [Accessed 28 September 2020].

nudging, the Climate Pact could also follow another Libaert's recommendation, which is to ensure transparency for those who are "nudged"²⁵. As he advised, "nudges should be understood, discussed and shared to be accepted in the best possible way" and to avoid accusations of "abuse" or manipulation.

²⁵ European Economic and Social Committee Opinion 2016/685/ECSC of 15 December 2016 towards applying nudge thinking to EU policies, p.3.

“Nudging can be a useful public policy tool to make the EU Green Deal effective in its implementation.”



*Interview with Thierry Libaert,
member of the EESC*

Regarding the communication and policy issues related to the EU Green Deal, how could nudging be strategically relevant and how can it strengthen the communication of the institutions?

Nudging cannot help much in communicating the Green Deal, but it is useful as a tool within the effectiveness of the Green Deal itself. To put it another way, nudging is not going to help communication, but rather it is going to help the implementation of the Green Deal and its very effectiveness in changing citizens' behaviour. I do not consider nudging as a communication tool in the sense of valorising and even promoting the Green Deal, but rather as a public policy tool among others to make the Green Deal effective in its implementation.

What else can nudging offer compared to traditional communication tools?

Nudge thinking is not a substitute, and it comes alongside other tools. It focuses on specific niches. I no longer tend to overestimate its effectiveness, but on a certain number of specific themes, and particularly the fight against waste, and the promotion of eco-gestures in daily behaviour, it works very well. Nudging is not a communication objective; it is one of the instruments within a communication strategy.

Is the use of “green nudges” more suited to local initiatives or can a larger scale nudging campaign be imagined (as part of wider awareness campaigns organized at Commission level for

example)? If so, is there a difference in terms of effectiveness?

In my opinion, the most effective nudges are those of proximity, and they cannot be effective if they concern distance communication. It is even a bit antinomic. I cannot imagine nudge communication in corporate, institutional campaigns. Nudge thinking must be about things that are a bit targeted and that lead to a certain behaviour, such as stickers or markings on the ground. Nudging can only be involved in large campaigns insofar as you communicate after taking a decision from a nudge perspective. In the levers of nudge, there is the architecture of choices. It refers to the fact that all citizens must take action while having the opportunity to reconsider their choice. You can imagine changing the architecture of choice and then making an announcement about it, but ex-post, to the citizens.

What types of nudges are likely to have the most impact in the context of the European Green Deal (for environmental issues)?

It is not possible to give a global answer to this question. In other words, there is no one lever that would be more effective than the others. But by theme, each lever can be more effective than another. For example, we have seen that in the fight against energy waste, the lever of social cohesion worked very well. For example, by saying “in your community, 65% of people have reduced their heating consumption by the same amount”. In the fight against food waste, the promotion of behavioural patterns for better nutrition is a proven strategy. For example, in collective catering, putting in appropriate lighting, etc. – a process fairly close to sensory marketing – works very well, whereas social cohesion would have worked much less well. Generally speaking, therefore, there is no one lever that is more effective than the others. However, a link of effectiveness can be seen between the type of lever and the type of field.

13. **Reflecting sustainable goals in EU communication initiatives**

As Geert Stox points out, “the Green Deal is not only a project but a vision for the future of Europe, which means that all projects as of now should be considered through the Green Deal idea”. The Road Trip Project, an initiative of DG REGIO for young people to travel across Europe and to visit EU-supported projects and activities²⁶, has become The Green Trip this year. The aim is to showcase green European projects and focus on the sustainability of these projects with a view to raising awareness about climate urgency and inducing behavioural changes. This initiative should be part of a wider process of ‘greening’ EU projects and serve as an example for DGs that could integrate environmental issues in their projects whenever they consider it relevant.

14. **Using lockdown as an opportunity to reflect on citizens’ habits**

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a significant slowdown in production and consumption systems, which reduced greenhouse gas emissions (Elkerbout, et al., p.3) and improved air quality in all over the world. Although this comes at a dramatic social and economic cost, it could be an opportunity to make citizens reflect on their habits, such as their modes of transport, and how it influences their carbon footprints. In her February 2020 presentation on the Green Deal communication strategy, Tina Zournatzi pointed out that one way to engage citizens in the environmental and ecological transition is to highlight “concrete actions that could be taken and their effects to promote self-efficacy”. The lockdown that we went through this year showed us many examples of actions – or non-

actions – with a potential positive impact on the environment. As Gantelet notes, “the lockdown has shown that the main source of the attacks on the environment and the climate came from our activities”. Hans Bruyninckx suggests that we could keep some of the changes that have emerged as a result of the crisis. “I am thinking about teleworking, which would produce less road traffic, but also maybe about shifting away from the extremely cheap flights over Europe. We can use this as a part of the tipping point to move in the right direction”.

²⁶ European Commission. Road Trip Project. [online] Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/communication/road_trip/ [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Conclusion

The Green Deal has become even more indispensable since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, this prosperity plan to make the EU economy more sustainable faces several challenges related to its legitimacy in the eyes of EU citizens. One of the major objectives identified by our contributors is to be able to communicate beyond the “Brussels Bubble” or the audience of already convinced eco-citizens and to reach to a different public, for whom environmental issues are still often of little importance or are not a priority because of the pandemic. For that, the EU needs to mobilise innovative communication initiatives to engage citizens in the environmental and ecological transition. In this report, we have explored a number of them.

The participants who have contributed to the content of this report agree that the mobilisation of relays and intermediaries is essential when environmental issues are at stake. This is justified by the fact that engagement and behavioural change are essentially possible through communication adapted to local particularities and necessities; massive and impersonal awareness-raising campaigns alone will not be enough to guide citizens through behavioural incentives. This is why the EU must strengthen its links with European cities and encourage local citizens’ initiatives.

In the process of inducing eco-responsible behaviours at the local level, the nudging technique appears to be particularly relevant, since it allows having a significant impact at a lower cost. Mostly effective on a small scale, green nudges have already gained the support of several European cities which have undertaken innovative, sometimes playful initiatives to guide citizen-consumers’ choices in favour of the green transition. It is in the

EU’s interest to centralise and encourage these efforts. A commitment is necessary to systematically integrate nudge thinking into EU’s communication strategies on the Green Deal.

The report shows that the EU alone cannot change people’s behaviour. Beyond investing in strategic sectors, it needs to step up cooperation with stakeholders (NGOs, businesses, associations, etc.) and coordinate the efforts of the different levels of power (national, regional and local). Discussions with interviewees Gilles Gantelet, Gilles Laroche and Hans Bruyninckx issued that the industrial sector plays a key role in converting the behaviour of EU citizens. This is why the EU must provide a path for European businesses and global players to raise their ambitions with regards to their commitments towards the protection of the environment. The EU has the opportunity to confirm its leadership status in terms of soft power, and thus set an example by being the first world power to move towards a green society.

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In December 2019, the European Commission introduced the Green Deal, its ambitious growth strategy for the European Union to become climate neutral by 2050. The plan aims not only to create a cleaner, greener, healthier environment but also a sustainable, resilient, growing economy. However, commitments to address climate change are meaningless without civic engagement. Considering that citizens are at the heart of this environmental and ecological transition, communication is crucial to induce behavioural changes in favour of a greener lifestyle. It is foreseeable that the EU's communication strategy will have little effect if it is limited to wide and impersonal awareness-raising campaigns. A comprehensive multi-level dialogue with citizens needs to be undertaken, focusing not only on their behaviour but also on their attitudes and beliefs.

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