

Energy, transport network and financial issues: PR perspectives for economic development in time of Euro-Med area change.

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Overview

In the last year the Mediterranean region has seen a long series of major events taking place in many of its countries, enabling us to consider this area as the *leading actor* in the global scenario, directly and indirectly influencing and influenced by, policies and decision making strategies of governments, industrial sectors and social entities.

Observing from outside of the frame it seems to look at a chain reaction, an explosion of many specific mines which, one next to the other, have been triggered for apparently different reasons but, at the same time, incredibly and profoundly linked to one another. In fact, one of the key aspects in this scenario and common to all its people, was and still is the strong desire to reach a fearer way of living in order to have the same opportunities of growth and development as the rest of the world, where the right of each person is safeguarded to live in a free and democratic life.

We are witnessing a unique process of change that probably was expected to happen and that many of us knew would occur. Not with the intention of desiring conflicts and social - political tensions, but hoping in the structural reaction of people to a wearying and critical social and economical context.

The present situation, still going under constant change, is therefore not yet stable in many ways, but it certainly triggers profound thinking and the need of awareness building on what is taking place, on its points of strength and weakness as well as the opportunities to grab within this complex and delicate process of change.

In this new and dynamic scenario, I find important to underline and understand how “relations , relations building and strategies” influence and are used in managing institutional relations, negotiations, decision making revisions. All inevitably connected to obtain a better socio- economic equilibrium in the area, involving both private and public sectors and common fields of interest. As a consequence, public relations’ profession should analyze a possible new approach in the Med area regarding its specific applications and methodical adaptation.

Awareness building of the new geopolitical scenario. What can PR do.

Any project, strategy or partnership that needs to be stimulated or managed in the Euro-Med area, should undergo a new effort, which is related to the evolving relational structures at all levels: governmental, corporate, social, cultural.

Looking specifically at the Med area, it is not possible to think anymore in single country terms, being necessary to have clear how the socio-political dynamics of one part of the region, or one member country, determines change and effects to others.

It becomes important for everyone, therefore, to understand the new relational effects occurring on a wide scale and regarding the area as a whole. At the same time, though, it is also necessary to build awareness on what the new scenario can represent for each country and its people.

The events are related to two major issues:

- an economical and financial issue, which touches the development of each country and area of the region;
- a cultural and human issue.

This second aspect must not be considered as a marginal issue, but probably should be seen as the core element which enabled part of the Med area to react as we all know. The great change in act must, therefore, be analyzed and understood under this fundamental point of view, which I believe has, for many reasons, a major role in public relations planning and implementation.

So, the cultural, mental and human aspect in the Med region changing process cannot be underestimated, being the true invisible base on which the equilibrium and balance of the area is placed. The practice of public relations, in a time when such important historical moment is occurring, should help reconsider “relations” as one of the strategic tools necessary to reach strong and competitive long term results, enhancing socio-economical goals in an international arena.

Public relations community, as managers of relations, has the possibility to decide whether to seize the opportunity to analyze the modified Med scenario, obviously still under inevitable further evolvments, in order to understand how to readapt, realign, the practice of pr in specific fields of the region. Creating better knowledge and understanding of cultural assessments and the various nuances regarding approach and reciprocity, at all levels.

We should consider to macro levels:

1. government high ranks, on the one side, great private corporations, on the other;
2. local entities, local government, Small and Medium Companies, local community, common people.

It is within these two spaces (and its relational interstices) that policies and institutional relations strategies should be analyzed. While the first level is certainly able to organize public relations strategies, aware that it regards an important function in managing complex strategies, the same does not occur in and for the second macro level. At high levels, as a fact, knowledge and mutual understanding, which is at the base of any pr action, is considered instrumental in order to carry out and fulfill great interests. On the contrary, there is a lack of the same attitude necessary to devote, to transfer and to stimulate the same awareness at lower levels, which represent, what's more, the platform on which is based the weight of the entire evolution in act.

Common people, used to live in a simple way, whose interests and habits are different from those of the first macro level, find themselves in the unaware need to understand, in real terms, how the culture to which they are used to and to which they refer to, is also changing. We roughly all know about the changes, but maybe we do not profoundly grab their evolving effects, which inevitably touch cultural and mental aspects as well as prejudices and stereotypes.

It is in this second aspect that communication and relations management seem to be one of the weak links. I believe that, in a time where political and socio-economical nuances change, relations management cannot be undervalued or chosen at random. On the contrary, it should be transmitted and absorbed consciously and with instrumental intent.

So, apart being a great opportunity for public relations, I believe that it should also be valued as a duty by the profession itself. Before planning any pr strategy, it is therefore essential to have clear some simple and plain questions, necessary to understand the state of the evolution in act in the Med area: from where did it all start? Which are the main causes and why? How did the present scenario form as a whole? Which could be the right direction for the Med area's future development? What is the relational pattern in a specific field, where institutional and corporate interests converge and develop?

A complex relational chessboard, where each country or area must be known not just as a single entity, but seen as part of "*the big actor*" in the Euro-Med's complex political and socio-economical frame. Evaluating and analyzing connections and relations among governments, institutions, corporations which benefit, and at the same time help the Med region to benefit, from the best economic development that the area is able to produce and that is, hopefully, able to enhance.

Single changing events as part of a jigsaw puzzle regarding a unique great evolving phenomenon, often unpredictable, where public relations cannot afford to ignore or undervalue the importance of building relations in a particular and stimulating context such as the Med one. Followed by the importance of taking action to move the profession in this direction.

Public relations practice needs to strengthen its ability by enhancing its basic knowledge with the acquisition of environment and relational understanding of the area, both as a whole and in its single and intertwined aspects. This will enable to create a stronger tool of relations management which the profession cannot do without, if it wants to carry out plans and reach goals at its best. It also becomes strategic, for the same aims, to identify cross areas to connect to one's pr model for the Med area, being aware of differences in specific situations and fields of application.

For the reasons described, I believe that public relations can undertake a very important role in helping to build a stronger and effective relational system in this area, based on specific models and criteria which, on the long run and with the help of adjustments and monitoring systems, will enable to be part of a powerful socio-economic environment, able to represent an important support in the European and international scenario.

Three main issues for a shared starting point: Energy, transport network and financial system

In order to put into practice the above considerations, the first step is to seek and stimulate dialogue, share common considerations and best practices among the pr community, institutions and corporate sector at all levels, on specific issues related to fields and sectors of common interest, with the aim of identifying tangible communication approaches.

Considering that all major fields of interest and related issues are connected to one another, meaning that their relational strategies are also interconnected in an invisible pattern, it is important for public relations to study how communication strategies, actions and tools are planned and shaped in each sector, on the one hand, and how, on the other hand, public relations strategies form a wider relational network, from the connection of the different sectors existing in the large picture.

My starting point takes into consideration three complex and important sectors in socio-economic strategies in the development of the Mediterranean area. Each one is intertwined with the others, and they are:

- Energy system and development
- The transport network
- The financial system

Three themes that need to be discussed separately, understanding future developments in each sector, their goals and their commitment in the development of the Med area and, consequently, learn about the implementation of communication strategies and actions.

Focusing on the energy system, it will be possible to understand the changes in institutional relations strategies after this year's crisis, the considerations and concerns of field experts and opinion leaders, aware of the delicate role of communication, both on the public and private side. The transport network takes into consideration all types of "transports" and how they are supported by public relations programs: from civil to trade transport (air, route, sea), telecommunication, energy distribution, to the web and information as means of communication. Thirdly, it is important to understand how socio-economic development of the Mediterranean area is financially sustained, primarily pointing at agreements and investments sustained by high level negotiations regarding the corporate sector as well as government approval and interest, and again understanding the role of public relations.

These three different issues are, as I said, inevitably connected and therefore it is not possible to discuss one subject without taking into consideration the effect that a certain decision will produce on the others. There is no energy without transport or without the financial aspect of its development. One sector cannot set aside the others. And *vice versa*.

And this is true in respect of economic development strategies in the Med area, as well as looking at the question under a communication point of view, where development and relations management efforts aim at becoming competitive both in the regional as well as in the global scenario.

For the next three years, MedCom, Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Public Relations, will focus on these three themes, with the aim to produce, at the end of this period, an analysis of relations patterns, approaches and applications regarding public relations in this area.

In the struggle for social and economic development of the Med area, which sadly is still a weak partner for Europe's strategies in the global context, and also weak as a region in itself, one of the aspects that is still undervalued in many programs and strategies is, in fact, the role of strategic relations and, consequently, public relations.

I believe that the euro-med pr community should get together and help the profession to grow and improve in a context, the Med one, which needs greater awareness and knowledge on the profession, its approach and its specific applications related to the Med area. Even if the interest from the pr community is high, the quality of each practitioners is growing, as well as the best practices presented, it is of primary importance to stimulate and create interaction among the pr community and its stakeholders. This is certainly vital for professional opportunity sharing and growth in the Med area, but it's much more valuable when defining public relations models in relation to the interaction of specific sectors and business fields.