

MIRTO campaign
Joint methodology



Introduction

Why people choose to mitigate, downplay, or ignore risk has been researched by different scientific disciplines over the last 25 years in areas for natural-and human-caused risks. Among these risks forest fires have met an increasing attention. The desire of many people to travel to areas which provide wildland amenities leads during the summer period to huge tourist fluxes into rural, forested areas of the Mediterranean, increasing the risks of human induced fires. Prevention plans must be able to present these messages to a variety of diverse segments of people of different age, interests, culture, language.

The project MI.R.TO. has analyzed this issue trying to identify common features for an awareness raising and preparedness campaign which could take place in the Mediterranean area. The project between entities from different countries has shown that cooperation can concretely improve the approaches, methods and tools to address the fire prevention issue, increase awareness and have the tourists prepared to face an emergency. The issue, however, is complex and the MI.R.TO. project has focussed on some crucial aspects although many questions, remain open.

Awareness raising

A paper published more than 30 years ago (Christiansen et al., 1976) reports that US forest managers involved in prevention and communication activities interviewed on the forest fire prevention issue pointed out several topics indicated as critical and offered recommendations for improving the degree of success:

- improve communication strategies and technologies,
- recognize the importance of prevention activities (often considered marginal if compared to fire fighting options),
- provide more and better training to the personnel involved,
- sustain greater emphasis of fire prevention work,
- need for better methods of assessing the degree of success of prevention activities.

Apparently the topics reported are still hotly debated nowadays and largely correspond to what emerges from a similar survey recently carried out in the framework of the FP7 project Firesmart ([www. http://www.firesmart-project.eu](http://www.firesmart-project.eu)) involving forest managers of different South European countries.

Actually, the communication on forest fire prevention has been rapidly changing over the past two decades. It has evolved, at least partially, from a one-dimensional reliance on public announcements (e.g. "Call 112 if you see a fire") to a more sophisticated approach based on successful techniques used by commercial marketers.

Recently fire prevention experts rather than dictating the way to communicate to the public, are learning to involve stakeholders, associations, other professionals and the public at large to listen to the needs and desires of the target audience themselves, and building the program from there.



This focus on the "target" involves in-depth research and constant re-assessment of every aspect of the communication strategy. In fact, research and evaluation together can be considered the pillars of social marketing.

The approach mentioned was developed thirty years ago when it began clear that most of the marketing principles used to sell products could be useful when approaching the public to suggest ideas, attitudes and behaviours, the core of awareness raising campaigns (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971).

Awareness is often considered a somewhat vague term and its use is often criticized for this, yet one that is intuitively widely understood. Generally speaking it can be considered a process connected with informing the public or a group on an issue, with the intention of influencing them positively in the achievement of a defined purpose or goal.

Awareness raising on forest fires can be considered the sum of several often very diverse actions organized in a communication process which opens opportunities for informing in order to increase knowledge and skills, and modify behaviours towards a higher level of safety. To be effective the process of awareness-raising must develop a mutual interest of the actors involved (Seyers, 2006).

In short, communication or communication plans oriented to awareness raising includes all the processes by which the promoting administration responsible for the campaign, addresses the target audience to inform, influence and modify the behaviour of other people.

In this sense the aims are substantially the same of commercial initiatives and lot of the knowledge a successful awareness raising campaign is based or derive from the huge experience of the commercial sector. There are, however, relevant differences:

- the aim of the campaign is not business oriented,
- the social relevance of the topic must be clear,
- values like involvement, solidarity, responsibility should be perceived.

Awareness raising campaigns are generally based on the simplest communication model – the linear approach, a one-way view communication from one "person" to another without real interactions. Other communication models, where feedbacks are included, involve two or more people. Transactional and transformational communication models may have a role in awareness raising campaigns when, for example, stakeholders have to be convinced and involved in the campaign or voluntary associations are asked to take part to it. The first approach includes multiple relationships, the second is expected to increase the morale, motivation and performance of the individuals within the group and the group as a whole.

Several manuals deal with effective communication in awareness raising campaigns. There is a general consensus on some principles which are expected to increase the effectiveness of a campaign. In the framework of the project MI.R.TO. these principles were not discussed in-depth among the partners but were considered an already existent "cultural asset" of the partners.

These principles are the main pillars of several awareness raising campaigns. Just to quote one, the Firesmart program, a complex initiative dedicated to fire prevention running in the US, Canada and other countries, clearly states:



- define clear and reasonable objectives,
- define the target audience,
- avoid assumptions about people skills, what they think or want to do or will do,
- involve all actors (stakeholders) who can have a role in the issue addressed,
- identify the different and sometimes contrasting interests of stakeholders,
- coordinate with other organizations, private or public entities already working on the same issue,
- choose and test the messages,
- choose and test the media,
- plan carefully,
- monitor your efforts and evaluate the results,
- disseminate the results.

The mentioned points have to become the bricks the communication plan is build on. Like commercial marketing the communication plan has to address strategic questions regarding the communication activities. Main elements of a communication plan are

- the definition of the target/targets (sometimes sub-targets are identified),
- the purpose statement,
- the expected results,
- the current attitudes of the target.

There is still a number of critical points which have become evident also during the implementation of the MIRTO project as, for example, the difficulties in coordinating parallel communication activities in the different countries or involve concretely local stakeholders (e.g. ferry companies). The statement reported on the brochure ("Fire prevention is a priority") highlights the



Typical summer camp at the Mediterranean seashore. Rules for summer camp visitors may vary from country to country.

increasing consensus on the need for focussing on reducing the number of fire events and of their consequences. The organization of a fire awareness campaign, especially if participants are from different countries, should consider the various organizational, technical and legal differences which are today present among the different countries. Although surprising, considering the relevant fluxes

of tourists travelling to the several holiday destinations in the Mediterranean area, danger information (signals, and even emergency telephone

numbers) may vary from country to country and also the obligations related to fire prevention of specific groups (e.g. holiday house owners) are different. In addition, fire prevention initiatives rarely



consider the fact that a large part of the target audience (sometimes the majority) do not speak the local national language.

An awareness raising campaign on forest fires, or on other natural hazards as well, is not offering some physical product. It offers ideas and advice to one or more social groups. In order to have a viable product, people must first perceive that they (may) have a genuine problem, and that what is offered is a good solution for that problem. The role of exchanging information, analyze previous campaigns or involve experts is to discover the targets' perceptions of the problem and to assess how important they feel it is to take action against the problem. Images of forests burning reported on information brochures have exactly the aim of pointing to the effects of fire. Thus a totally reassuring approach may not produce the expected results.

Four aspects will be here considered to plan the communication strategy, points which in commercial marketing are indicated with the terms Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

The desired product is obviously safety. In commercial marketing the term "Price" refers to what the consumer must do in order to obtain the desired product. Referring to forest fires safe and untroubled holidays are more in detail the desired product and the price is the adoption or avoidance of particular behaviours. It is the tourist (consumer) to give up intangibles, such as time or effort, or to risk embarrassment and disapproval. If the costs (e.g. avoiding gas lamps in summer camps) outweigh the benefits for an individual, the perceived value of the offering will be low and it will be unlikely to be adopted.

On the contrary, if the benefits are perceived as greater than their costs, chances of trial and adoption of the behaviour (product) is much greater.

The term "Place" indicates the way the product will reach the target. For an intangible product, place is less clear-cut, but refers to decisions about the channels through which the target audience is reached with information. The MIRTO project team, which primarily referred to tourists travelling to the Mediterranean islands, identified in the ferries connecting them to the mainland an ideal opportunity (place) to contact the target audience. Another element of place is deciding how to ensure accessibility of the offering. By determining the activities and habits of the target audience (e.g. watching TV on ferries), as well as their experience it can be pinpointed the most ideal means of distribution for the offering.

Finally, promotion should be considered. This terms consists of the integrated use of advertising, public relations, promotions, media advocacy, information activities. Research and assessment of results of previous similar initiatives is crucial to determine the most effective and efficient way to reach the target audience and have the message retained.

When considering awareness raising campaigns with many different audiences, various approaches have to be planned in order to be successful. External publics include the target audience, eventually sub-groups (e.g. young tourists), policymakers and other stakeholders, while the internal publics are those who are involved in some way with the implementation of the program and need also specific support actions.

Forest fire awareness campaigns as other initiatives regarding different natural hazards are often so complex that other organizations already committed on the topic should be involved in a close



cooperation, thus one needs to figure out which organizations have similar goals and identify ways to work together.

When planning an awareness raising campaign several steps apparently costly and time-consuming, suited for large-scale programs, may be addressed in very simple ways. In order to define exactly the issue to be addressed an effective approach is to have preliminary talks with the potential target, the people the campaign will try to reach. Different opportunities are offered to find cheap and easy ways of gathering information. Referring to the MI.RTO project the initial idea of the need of enhancing awareness and preparedness among summer camp visitors derived from the partners' direct experiences and from simple talks with the potential target audience. In general, and the monitoring activity carried out in the summer campaign testifies this, people are pleased to talk about themselves and are delighted to be asked for their opinions.

On the contrary, awareness raising campaigns at national level have the aim of develop a minimum level of awareness by communicating extremely simple messages. Their effectiveness, at least if considered from the point of the commercial sector, is probably very low.

Men and women, adults and teenagers respond differently to the same approach. To be effective it is necessary to segment the general target audience into groups that are as similar to each other as possible and to create messages specifically for each segment. Typical attributes for segmentation include sex, age, geographical origin, culture and language.

Audiences can also be segmented by behaviour. For example, rather than targeting all teenagers, a fire awareness campaign might focus on hikers or bikers. A prevention program for middle-aged people trekking in Corsica would use a very different approach. People still vary greatly within these segments of course but the more specific is the message the greater may be the impact.

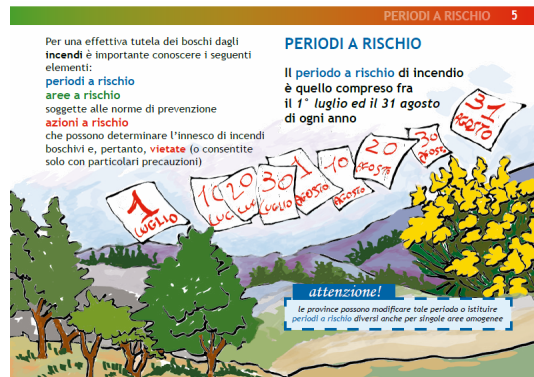
When trying to modify behaviours and attitudes long-term commitments are necessary and prevention activities often suffer of limited budgets. The cost of modifying an attitude requires a person's time and effort (to place a barbecue in a safe position or maintain correctly the vegetation around the house), giving up things he likes (to light camp fires), embarrassment or social disapproval (throwing cigarettes butts away). To counteract factors working against the adoption of correct behaviours the campaign promoters should acknowledge these potential problems and address them.

Finally the suggested behaviours has to be compared to others and assess their positioning. The latter describes what the target audience thinks about the campaign's suggestions. Positioning is usually referred to the benefits of it (safety) or removal of barriers (how difficult is it for me to do?). By contacting preliminary the target audience, one can learn the benefits they value most and the barriers they foresee.

A pillar of awareness campaigns is that the message must be given in places the target audience will encounter. "People will not go out of their way to find your message". When addressing the target audience it is useful to come to know how they were reached by the campaign, by which media, in which occasion.

The use of a variety of approaches appears to be the most effective approach especially if the target are communities, small groups and individual activities. When a simple, clear message is repeated in many places and formats throughout the community (e.g. during the summer there is

complete fire ban), it is more likely to be seen and remembered. The variety of approaches depends on the program's budget and what will be most effective with the target audience. Consistency and continuity are key to a successful campaign. Although specific manual are available for the US, Canada and Australia there is a lack of specific information on models and approaches for forest fire



Fire ban highlighted in an awareness campaign supported by the Region Toscana (I). The fire ban period may be different in other regions/countries.

awareness campaigns which have shown to be effective in Mediterranean countries. In facts there are among different geographical areas local differences (e.g. vegetation) or different behaviours, attitudes, traditions which should be carefully considered.

This lack of information enhances the need the awareness raising campaign with its target audience to verify its potential effectiveness. One of the methods most associated with this kind of campaign is the focus group. This involves bringing together a small group of people with particular characteristics relevant to the

program and leading them through a focused discussion on a given topic.

Focus groups can be used to learn what people in the target audience think about the issue and why, the language they use to talk about the issue, and their reactions to messages or materials developed. In the framework of the project MIRTO a preliminary test regarding the videos to be broadcasted on the ferries was carried out in schools of the different participating countries.



From an awareness campaign supported by private companies in Portugal

A successful campaign requires the involvement of all actors who play a role in the addressed issue. A powerful message requires groups throughout the community to come together in a coordinated effort. Organizations concerned and committed on the same issue can provide an essential support complementing the planned efforts through their involvement. By pooling resources with other organizations working toward the same goal, the campaign can have a greater impact as well as access to new audiences.

Involving stakeholders and building connections (and understanding the existing ones) with key people (e.g. the major of the local municipality) and organizations who have the potential to bring attention and credibility to the program is an essential step towards an

effective result. For example, while implementing the summer campaign of the project MIRTO a crucial role to involve the ferry companies was played by the local port authority, an entity normally not involved in fire prevention activities which decided to share the objective of the project. Beneficial relationships should be developed with local associations, local media and reporters covering the addressed topics, inviting businesses to sponsor the project, exchanging positive corporate publicity for their financial support. Other potential allies include professional associations, local service organizations, religious groups and existing community coalitions.



Monitoring and evaluation is the cornerstone to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign and improve the program. When the program is implemented, there is the need to monitor activities to assess whether they are occurring as planned. The answers will allow to make adjustments and improvements.



Preparedness

As mentioned in the MIRTO project report preparedness is defined as the process of ensuring that an organization or people are in a state of readiness to react to a condition of emergency and to contain the effects of a potentially dangerous event, to minimize injuries to people and damages to property.

Enhancing preparedness in a tourist site is one of the most critical challenges in areas prone to natural hazards. It implies to encourage residents to invest in individual and collective actions that would reduce the damaging impact of low-probability, high-consequence environmental events.

Talking and communicate about preparedness is more challenging and somehow tricky compared to awareness raising as it refers to a condition where fire, the hazard considered, is approaching the people addressed or is even very near. This kind of information is expected to result in more rational behaviours, as this is the only way to mitigate the risk condition. Referring to tourists what makes this goal of enhancing the level of preparedness difficult to achieve is that the relative rarity of such events means that those who are at risk have limited experience to draw on when making preparation decisions. Those who have prior experiences on the other hand may provide misleading guidance on how best to prepare.

Information should be limited to the essential aspects and reported in an reassuring way. In addition the involvement of authorities (e.g. camp managers in summer camps) plays a key role.

Typical topics of preparedness enhancing campaigns are the following:

- **Invite to calm down and to follow the instructions of the authorities**

The typical feelings of people experiencing a danger conditions are often of the following kind "I'm afraid I won't know what I have to do...that I'll panic...I don't think I'll be able to cope..." Reassuring messages can be useful to get a rational response to an approaching danger. In addition knowing that skilled and trained people will care for you will be extremely helpful. This kind of preparedness provides self-confidence, and reduces anxiety, thus stimulating rational behaviours.

- **Define when to worry**

Giving precise indication when to worry is a reassuring approach in fire prone areas or exposed to other risks as well. Continuous tension conditions do not help to have correct and rational responses in case of emergency. Clear and precise indications (e.g. seeing smoke) can be extremely effective.

- **Call the Emergency, describe clearly where you are and what you need**

Risk situation may result in a state of confusion or helplessness. It is vital to know how to react. This helps people to become more comfortable facing an emergency. Contacting prepared and specifically skilled emergency experts results in facing the danger in the appropriate way.



From an awareness raising campaign carried out in Syria (Anonymous, 2007).



- **Get the family or friends into action**

Preparedness campaigns should encourage discussion in the family or among friends. Knowing how to react appropriately in case of emergency reduces anxiety and improves reaction capabilities. Focus on active measures everyone can take together right now. Staying together reinforce concentration and self-confidence, reduces the risks of being isolated.



Definition of a general approach to the information campaign

According to the general view exposed, the MI.R.TO. project highlights a number of strengths as, for example, the different experiences and skills offered by the partners or the clear definition of the target before project begin. There are, however, also weaknesses which are related to the differences in the legal framework of the different countries, the attitude of tourists travelling from very diverse areas, their cultural and behavioural approach.

The following are the points the project addressed by defining its communication strategy to be applied in the different pilot areas.

1) Recognise the information needs - knowing what is known, knowing what is not known and identifying the gap

A first point which was fixed among the project partners was to identify clearly these differences and, if relevant for the campaign, decide how to manage them in the information messages. Highlighting these differences to the public is, according to our opinion, a way of stimulating discussion among people addressed and stakeholders.

2) Distinguish ways of addressing the gap - knowing which information sources are likely to satisfy the information need. Construct strategies for locating information

This aspect was covered by the process of information need assessment and was extremely useful as it allowed a general assessment on how information (prevention) campaigns are organized in the different countries.

2) Organise, apply and communicate - knowing how to associate new information with old, to take actions or make decisions, and ultimately how to share the outcomes of these actions or decisions with others

- Involvement of stakeholders is considered of extreme relevance for their knowledge of the area interested by the information campaign, for their direct contact to the target, for the operational support they can give to the initiative. It should, however, be noticed that their might be conflicting interests between the information campaign and some stakeholders. Typically summer camp managers/owners are reluctant to take part to these campaigns as they fear the simple information can negatively affect their business. The involvement of these stakeholders in the meetings determines a positive pressure to have them accept the initiative.
- Understand local existing communities and their needs. A reassuring approach is generally requested by the local stakeholders. This is reasonable because often their efforts for reducing fire risks are relevant and have to be recognized. It is important according to our opinion that the position expressed in the information material is clearly communicated while images causing fear can be easily avoided. Response mechanisms (2-way communication with key target audiences) should be developed. Stakeholders must be able to respond and to feel they are contributing to the process.



3) Synthesise and create

A multilanguage approach is necessary and is surprising that holiday destinations intensively visited by foreigners inform tourists from other country so poorly about existing hazards. Information given by signals, also the simplest one, or other alerting means are rarely addressing foreigners.

Once the information to be communicated is identified messages have to be prepared according to the general aims of being concise, clear, and effective. Support from communication experts is essential.

4) Compare and evaluate. Organise, apply and communicate

One of the major objective of the project was to define clear targets and effective messages. For the reasons already mentioned the need a preliminary evaluation of the results expected should be carried out. Again, the involvement of communication experts can be extremely useful.

Once the campaign has started all efforts have to be devoted to reach the target according to the work framework defined.

5) Synthesise and create

Define a monitoring approach to synthesize the results of the information campaign and identify an approach for evaluating the results. The latter will be the basis for future initiatives. A specific task has been foreseen for this in the MI.R.TO project.

6) Share the outcomes of these actions or decisions with others

Dissemination of the project results adds new knowledge to the existing one. It helps to improve future information campaigns and to highlight the needs still existing.



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