

FFFS Episode 4: The Medium Is The Message: Send Cash Not PPL

Script:

Hi,

my name is Lars Zimmermann:

- title board -

And this is: FFFS - Fixing Funding for sustainability. Episode four.

- title board end -

And this episode is called "The Medium Is The Message: Send Cash, Not People"

It is mostly an episode about conferences.

Most of us have been at conferences. They are important for the education of adults – post university – and also for a bunch of other things for example networking.

And of course there are some on sustainability or related topics.

I know a bunch of people that fly around the globe from conference to conference on a sustainability mission.

- mit Flugzeug-Modellen spielen -

They land. Stay in hotels. Talk for an hour or less at the conference about the problematic state our planet is in, and what they found out how to fix it. Then they meet a bunch of people with the same life-style while eating sophisticated catering food before they board their next plane – off to the next conference. To repeat all of this. Throughout the year.

Seems a bit ...

The Medium Is The Message

One of the most famous quotes of the last century is by the philosopher Marshall McLuhan.

The quote is "The Medium Is The Message".

And what he meant by this is that it does not really matter WHAT you say using a medium. The deeper and true message is in the medium itself, it is in HOW you say it.

You can go on national TV and claim how disconnected and isolated everyone is from everyone else in the country. If you broadcast this on national television it is obviously not true. The country experiences itself as connected in the same moment.

You can paint a colourful picture showing a world where everyone is blind and can't see pictures. But obviously this story gets into the brain of the recipients when they look at the picture! The true message is that picture. Is pictures!

Conferences That "Lie"

So the same is true for conferences.

It is not important what people are saying there. The medium – the conference itself and how it is made – is the true message. The medium is the planes that fly around the speakers, the expensive hotels and sometimes crazily expensive and resource intense conference infrastructure that often becomes garbage when the conference is over.

The speakers don't have to tell us how fucked the planet is. That message was already sent by the medium they use to speak to us. And they don't have to tell us their story how they fix things. Because their true message – the message of their medium – says the opposite.

These whole conferences are a mediums itself pretending to send a message of sustainability. But the true message is the exact opposite when they are made unsustainable. A sustainability conference where the medium – the conference – is the message would look different, there wouldn't be planes, luxury hotels and throwaway infrastructure.

I think.

OK.

What has this to do with funding?

Well. When people start to set up these conferences there is obviously funding available. It is supposed to be funding to create a message of sustainability. But it is invested in hotels, plane tickets and so on. It goes into the opposite! Rendering what the conference wants to say a lie.

Can we take this existing funding and invest it in sustainability instead?

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I have been a speaker at those conferences. I sat in these airplanes, I stayed in these hotels, I ate at these banquets and I projected my slides on these infrastructures. Why did I go? Because these conferences pay speakers fees! Speakers get money to speak. And these fees are an important part of my income!

The work I do with Open Circularity is incredibly hard to fund. This is the whole point of this video series: FFFS – Fixing Funding For Sustainability. And one income source is fees for speaking at conferences. It is a pillar of financing or enabling the work. And I know that it is the same for a bunch of these sustainability speakers.

How TRUE do you think my work with Open Circularity has been so far?

Fix It!

OK. How to fix this?

How to put this existing money into actual sustainability?

Well if you think about this for while and do some research – there are a lot of ideas out there how to set up conferences that are sustainable. Where the medium is the message. To many to list them all here.

But I want to give you at least a few to open your mind and convince you that thinking about it offers roads for at least different ideas.

For example:

Whenever you have funding available ... for your conference or whatever ... give a bit of it to the people whose ideas you love and would like to see at your conference (maybe as a donation) – and give the rest to your local initiatives! No planes. No hotels.

You could think for example about creating tandems. Connect the speaker whose ideas you love to a local person.

Pay both!

Make the speaker teach the local person his or her ideas so the local person can give the presentation. This comes with the side effect that you create a trained local agent of these ideas. And you force the speaker to find a way to deliver his or her ideas in a way that can be locally implemented and replicated quickly. Don't create an entertained audience but a well informed ready to start something person. A more sustainable outcome.

But this does not mean that you can never have a famous speaker at your conference. The British author Oscar Wilde was a famous speaker who travelled the world giving talks. He died 120 years ago. At that time there were no planes. How did he do it? He travelled the world and planned a tour. Going from city to city by train. Make people with interesting ideas go on tour. Provide open data about these tours and it would be easy for conference creators to create a great line up. Serendipity is the friend of creative insights!

Don't print posters, flags, cards, badges or order yourself one time infrastructure in the colours of your conference. There are smarter and much more sustainable design strategies for conference set ups like Pre-Use or Guerilla-Use... You can find links to these in the video description.

Or ...

- take a breath and a break -

Let me stop here.

There are more ideas how to use this funding for sustainability conferences to fund sustainability instead of plane tickets, hotels and throwaway infrastructure. Put it into the pockets of those who drive sustainable change.

I leave this open to you. I invite you to post ideas how to create GLOBAL EXCHANGE of sustainability ideas and education that do not involve planes, expensive hotels and 3 star catering but still full fill the human needs of status, interesting experiences, face to face conversations and networking.

Please share them here **//// mmh? Do I really want to make them post something? If so where? ?? ////**

And, if you are a local initiative and see a local institution set up one of these crazy unsustainable conferences about sustainability – send them this video / idea collection – if you like using an anonymous email address.

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/// ADD SOMEWHERE: When a British researcher meets a new project partner from Japan at a conference in South Africa it is very likely that the project they set up will be in need of more plane tickets... **///**

