

DEMOCRATISING TRANSFORMATION



5th edition curated with



FINANCING INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSITIONS – Hoa-Binh Adjemian / Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

As a European commission official, I work for an institution that has a substantial budget to support infrastructure development. But we need much more than what we have and should move from billions to trillions. My work is not only about spending the money, but to ensure that we catalyse more change. The catalytic aspect is very important, because you can do a good project and or you can do a bad project that meets the requirements but doesn't bring the needed change.

Instead of only focussing on solutions, we have to look for tipping points. And this is part of our job. For example, I've been working on a project where we supported an entire community forcing the road constructor to include people from the villages around to help build the roads. And the way we did it was via contractual engineering, although it's complex it's doable. And then once you've done it, people also take care of the road because they know how to do it. The building is easy, but maintenance is so hard that most of the investments just disappear.

There are different layers to it: the first layer is not only to invest, but to invest in something that would last a certain time and has to be cared for. So moving from investment to maintenance is critical. Another important aspect is to look at how you build and how you purchase to create impact. And then it's about how you design. Design means engaging people. And yes, we have tools to do it and there is always a public survey.

But do we really listen? No, we pretend we come with a solution. And we try to convince and push it. You only listen if you are open to an alternative. But who is open to it?

What we need is humility, openness, kindness, at all levels. And here structural change is about people. We might not have the best tools. But with the tools we have, we could do much more. You need to convince the people, you need to engage the people, they need to be able to dream. When we talk about the value chain, we all are just a small part of it. That's very important. And we are always only a part of an ecosystem. I'm part of an ecosystem, but sometimes I can have a big impact as a member of the ecosystem. So for me, it's more the people than the processes.

As long as we think as specialists, and run the system by technocrats, we will not be able to make the change. I mean, you really need to listen and to see what the community is like. Have we walked around? Do we talk to people to understand their life? In policy, you want to intertwine different actors, you need to be able to bridge this thinking and the only way to do it is to be exposed to that. So I would encourage civil servants and invite them to different places where they can experiment with something that is totally different from their daily experience.

We do have the tools, we do have the money, we do have the people who are kind. But they are missing the beauty and humility of actually looking at the other. If you look at the world as a kid, you have the sparkle in your eyes, and you're open to exploration. We need to revive this in a very professional way. While making sure that the budgets are used in the right way, we also need to have this spark of remembering how it was when we were younger. When you're young, you know you're part of an ecosystem and you're open to change because everything is new. We should keep that in mind and encourage it - especially during the next critical years.