



Social Marketing: old school thoughts for modern dilemmas

Last week, the Summer School Social Marketing featured in Bled, Slovenia. The event was organised by the renowned National Social Marketing Centre (NSMC). With 24 participants from all over the world, we explored the connection between private sector commercial thinking and public good. We were present, enriched our knowledge base and had interesting discussions about the authenticity, modernity and reach of this discipline that has so little in common with social media marketing.

Social Marketing is increasingly hyped. Kotler wrote several books about the subject, the last one adding up to some 450 pages. The discipline, however, has existed since the 1970s which makes the confusion with the much more modern social media marketing even more of an anachronism. A short analysis of the Google results pages when typing 'Social Marketing' demonstrates a 25% waste referring to social media marketing. LinkedIn users are even more confused. 75% of the profiles popping up are about marketing through social networks. No wonder at least three participants expected a totally different programme when arriving in Slovenia.

Many definitions of Social Marketing exist. Wikipedia uses a description that is closest to ours: 'the use of commercial marketing concepts and techniques to establish positive public or social change'. Interestingly enough, this one is not often used. Social Marketing originates from the public sector and is (therefore) explicitly averse to any private sector practices. Many social marketers claim not just a new domain, but a whole new discipline, with the following definition: '*Social Marketing is the systematic application of the ideas, processes and practices of the marketing discipline alongside other concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals for social good*'. One would not be surprised that this latter definition is most used by consultants, a species benefiting from the complexity and vast reach of a relatively broad discipline.

What makes Social Marketing so fascinating? What is creating the hype? The notion that change can only be accomplished by addressing true insights, which can only be won by really zooming in on the individual and his or her needs? The fact that not education but conversation is the key to success? Or is it the realization that we need to look beyond the economical and rational costs and address the psychological and emotional costs of behaviour in order to evoke change?

New or not, Social Marketing is a wonderful expertise offering many opportunities. It points strongly to what the world could use right now: an approach geared at people instead of possessions, at health and wellbeing instead of financial profit, at long term success instead of short term bonuses. We are proud to be part of it.

Hanneke de Bruin & Emilie van Rappard