From protest to product: how to reconcile a social movement with business

To help fight the Mafia in Sicily, a tourism business called Addiopizzo Travel was born. Addiopizzo Travel's key stakeholders — i.e., anti-Mafia activists, tourists, tourism service providers and entrepreneurs — don't have too much in common. But its secret to success is purposefully engaging all of them.



July 23, 2018

In Italy, swarms of tourists are a common sight. But in Sicily, tourists donning the eye-catching Addiopizzo (goodbye to extortion) t-shirts of Addiopizzo Travel play a special role.

©IESE Business School

They show their support for a unique tour organization, one that was founded in 2009 by a grassroots social movement to promote Sicilian hotels, shops and restaurants that refuse to pay the pizzo — that is, protection money extorted by the Mafia.

Addiopizzo Travel is a case study of success. Its customers (tourists) say they feel good about contributing to the Sicilian community while enjoying its beautiful surroundings and culture. Local enterprises (business partners) speak enthusiastically about their increased commercial opportunities and are grateful for the enhanced financial and physical security they have gained through the initiative. And anti-racket activists (those who started this social movement) are happy to expand their reach and impact.

It's not easy to please so many different stakeholders — especially ones that don't naturally connect. So how did Addiopizzo Travel do it?

Matthew Lee, Tommaso Ramus, and IESE's Antonino Vaccaro spent seven years studying the admirable organization, interviewing entrepreneurs, local tourism service providers, anti-extortion activists, and the tourists themselves. The researchers also observed the organization's daily activities and reviewed its communications, documents and previous relevant studies. They conclude that success came from proactively interacting with key stakeholders to frame the project in ways that resonated with each. This was a five-stage process. Understanding this process, the authors say, can help other social-movement organizations work on both commercial and social goals.

Framing the business

First Addiopizzo was a grassroots movement with four main levers or "frames" to motivate people to help end the practice of paying the pizzo. Addiopizzo's activists decided they were working for and with (1) community, (2) security, (3) dignity and (4) denunciation as their four core values. Then, five years later, Addiopizzo Travel was born as one of the social movement's projects. So, would the same four frames work with this commercial entity? Not exactly. The authors show that Addiopizzo Travel went through what they called "frame brokerage." Here's a breakdown, in five stages:

1. **Stage 1: Operating with original anti-racket frames.** Addiopizzo as a movement — founded in 2004 by seven friends — focused on community, security, dignity and denunciation as its anti-racket strategies. Addiopizzo Travel started with these four frames to design and promote activities to create a safer community, providing physical security (through tourist presence) to tourism entrepreneurs,

©IESE Business School

recovering the dignity of locals, and denouncing Mafia demands for protection money. Customers were given the message that by supporting Addiopizzo Travel and paying for its services, "you can help the fight for an economy without corruption."

2. **Stage 2: Validating the original anti-racket frames.** But when Addiopizzo Travel proactively sought feedback, they realized that only the community frame really resonated with tourists, who liked the idea of empowering local communities and could clearly see how they were contributing to social good. On the other hand, tourists had trouble connecting the other frames — security, dignity and denunciation — and some even found them off-putting or scary. The travel operators realized they
needed to find "a positive twist" to "appeal to tourists, tour operators and B&Bs."
3. **Stage 3: Finding new frames.** To refit some of the frames, Addiopizzo needed to listen to "responsible tourism" players (e.g., the tourists themselves and the businesses catering to them) as well as anti-racket activists. After engaging with these groups, Addiopizzo Travel decided to retain its emphasis on community (which appealed to all of these stakeholders), but to transform the security focus into a wider focus on sustainability for the community. The basic idea is that a community with security has a future. Likewise, the focus on dignity was broadened from personal dignity (of the Sicilians themselves) to focus on the beauty of the area, which foreign tourists could appreciate and connect with. Finally, the movement's emphasis on denouncing the pizzo and standing up to threats of violence was too important to activists to abandon or change, so they chose to selectively refer to it, when the tourists or business owners expressed interest. And instead of denouncing the Mafia's demands directly through the travel agency, those interested were referred to other parts of the anti-racket movement.
4. **Stage 4: Validating the new frames.** Addiopizzo Travel began to apply the modified frames, presenting their services as a way to build a sustainable community and open up business opportunities, while allowing tourists to enjoy the region's beauty. The new frames resonated better with customers and businesses in the responsible tourism industry while staying true to the activists' goals.
5. **Stage 5: Operating with successful new frames.** Once validated, the modified frames were used to design novel tour offerings and initiatives. Addiopizzo Travel began to participate in related community events (like a recently inaugurated "Eco-Village") and to offer bike tours and countryside tours that promoted beauty and sustainability. The agency encouraged tourists to meet with local activists to find out

©IESE Business School

more about anti-racket denunciation if they were interested.

As a result of this five-stage process, Addiopizzo boosted its appeal to tourists, local businesses and the grassroots social movement. This case study shows that by proactively engaging key stakeholders, organizations can find framing strategies to succeed in commercial goals and social causes.

More info: "Values Against Violence: Taking on the Mafia" and "Goodbye to Extortion: The Anti-Mafia Movement"

Methodology, very briefly

The authors conducted an in-depth field study of Addiopizzo Travel over a seven-year period, between 2009 and 2016. They interviewed the organizations' entrepreneurs as well as key tourism providers, anti-extortion activists, and tourists themselves. They also observed the organizations' activities for 41 days, and reviewed communications, documents and previous studies related to Addiopizzo and the anti-racket movements. By applying framing concepts to this data, the authors show how Addiopizzo Travel managed to successfully frame its activities through a five-stage process.

©IESE Business School