SheDrivesMobility 85 - Celina Negro

Katja Diehl (0:15)

Hi there, nice having you. I'm Katja Diehl, I'm hosting the podcast She Drives Mobility every two weeks. Mostly on German, but this time we will talk in English because I think what Celina, my guest, has to say is really important for all of us. She has written a master thesis regarding how we are campaigning car-free cities. She was focusing on the work in Berlin. There is a campaign running, 'car-free city of Berlin'. And yeah, pity to say, we shouldn't be this offending. We should talk more about liveable cities. We should more be inviting people who are driving a car to be part of the solutions. Sometimes people are feeling the offending of us, who wants to change the mobility for the better, is too much. We can complain about this, but I think it's better to work with this kind of offending and defending car-centric mobility. Because if you want to be successful, we have to address the people who are sitting in cars. We have to invite them to be part of our bunch of mobility changes. And Celina has some advice for you, some tips how you can change your communication. And I think it's also important for very local campaigning, because we are really working against a huge lobbyism, against a huge industry. But I think if we are embedding this kind of storytelling and we are embracing that we need some other topics that we can gain space, that we can gain quietness again, and that we also can shape rural areas away from car-centric mobility. This is something feeling more inviting for people. I hope you like this kind of approach. I hope you like this kind of episode of She Drives Mobility. Please tell your friends about my podcast,

because I think we need every kind of solution selling and every kind of approach to change. Because climate catastrophe is not waiting, and traffic is still such a huge problem regarding climate catastrophe. So, listen to this and give us some stars. If you like it, give us some comments and tell your friends about She Drives Mobility. Enjoy!

Katja Diehl (2:42)

Happy welcome. She Drives Mobility. This one, the session is in English, and I'm having it with Celina. Could you introduce yourself, please?

Celina Negro (2:54)

My name is Celina. The reason for the talking today is that I wrote my or I studied Sustainable mobility at the University in Geislingen. I wrote my master's thesis about the connection between public acceptability and communication. That is the topic for today.

Katja Diehl (3:19)

It's so nice having you because I think that a huge amount of the change, we need in mobility for the better is communication. It's not about technology, not about hyperloops or autonomous driving. It's about people coming together and talking about what can we do better for all of us. How did you start your approach? You're having these topics of framing and reframing. Can you explain, a bit beside your work, what is meant by this?

Celina Negro (3:50)

Yes. I used the concept of framing. Basically, what that says or is, like frames kind of like mental structures or ideas. There is no like really one definition, but what it says that these are like ideas that communicate like why a certain issue might be a problem and who or what is like responsible for that problem, what is the

solution or what we can do about it. And like rational or like motivation to act on it. Yes, and basically these frames, these ideas we have then like shape what we perceive as like good or bad outcome of certain actions—what we consider as "good." That are frames. Then like there's this concept of resonance, which basically describes, or you can also say that it describes how like appealing a certain idea is to people. That depends on a lot of things. The idea has to be like somehow align with your own values and beliefs. It also and that is a bit tricky, it can't be like too familiar, but also not too unfamiliar for people to accept it. And someone needs to be receive like solve a practical problem. Then there is lastly this idea of reframing. That manly comes from George Lakoff. He wrote a book called 'Don't Think of an Elephant'. That basically says that Reframing is about like changing the ideas people have. But there is often like two common misunderstandings. One is that you can just come up with a clever slogan. Then there it's important to realise that it's like frames are like these ideas, but not words. You can't only change it through word, but you need to establish new ideas. The second misunderstanding is that it's called like the knowledge-deficit model of communication—the idea that you can just deliver enough facts to people and they'll act and make good decisions. So, that are like two misunderstandings when you are trying to reframe ideas. Basically, what is very important there too, that you don't blame people which first sounds very obvious but when I started to look into this it's maybe not that obvious. So, it's important to like trying to understand those people you're not disagreeing with and then trying to change the messages or ideas.

Katja Diehl (6:54)

So, for me if you are talking, for me it's coming up also the core maybe. Question I ask in my book: "Are you willing to or force to drive a car?" You said people are always defending and offending regarding communication and also framing of mobility. So many people… I had like 60 interviews, and so many people never thought about. Is it my will or is It a lack of alternatives, a lack of security? So, is framing maybe something also we have like a routine? And that is maybe also the frame, we are just searching for points that are saying: "Yes, you are doing the right thing that are fitting into our frame of mobility", so to say car-mobility and we are not so open because it's so deep, such a deep routine to have a mobility that feels like everyday mobility. Is it also having like your approach. Is it the same maybe?

Celina Negro (8:00):

Yes, and I think that there is like a lot of like underlying basic frames. That then structure for example that we belief or lot of people belief that there is the freedom to drive a car, and that then structures everything what we like belief are suitable solutions.

Katja Diehl (8:21)

But is it like something… As I started like 20 years ago, there was this huge… like today I think it is 50 years old. Club of Rome said: "We can't do this anymore. Fossil-based expansion is not the right way." And we have all those facts, and I was starting like 20 years ago: Okay, the hardest part would be agroeconomic, would be industry to cut down, to decarbonize it. There are now like 40 percent less and in mobility this year we are also upon the '90s. Nothing is changing. That shows how deep this routine is also, I think. How did you work with your work? Did you get to

people? Had you interviews? Or how did you get the samples you needed for your work?

Celina Negro (9:19)

I did or used three different methods. I used the case study of the Berlin Car-Free Referendum. And first I analysed how they framed their concept based on their website. Then, I analysed the Twitter comments in response to the concept. Then I did the qualitative interviews with six people like they are all car owners who are living in Berlin. There I try to achieve a mix, like three of them were like not necessarily supportive by the campaign of car restrictions, and the other three were more like negative and critical, both towards the campaign and the idea of car restrictions.

Katja Diehl (10:05)

And what I think, what you pointed out before is this kind of: We have a problem. We have to address the problem, but we have to also unable people to be part of the solutions so to say. Because the statistics of Germany are saying: 'German cars are driving by one person 45 minutes a day. ' So, there is this reality of so many cars who could be left behind ad hoc. But we are still as we are car drivers, which I'm not, still defending and always looking for apologise so to say: "Yeah, yeah I know it's bad. But I need this for my grandmother to visit or my dog to go for a walk." Or I don't know. What did you found out? What was the point about negative approach to this car-free world? Is it also depending on a lack of fantasy maybe?

Celina Negro (11:08)

That was a big part, there was like two major differences between the group who was supported of car restrictions and who are not. And one of them was the ones who are critical like don't

like follow or understand the vision. Their campaign strength to follow because they used the concept of the 'liveable city' and a better quality of life. But that people didn't understand. Like it's not necessary that they can't like envision it really. But a big part of it was that in the communication there was so much focused on comparing different transport forms and why the car is bad and why very often the bicycle is better. So, in the End, people just perceive the campaign or the concept as like a conflict between cars and bicycles, and the vision got lost on the way.

Katja Diehl (12:12):

So that is something I think what you are also pointing that there is a really strong structure in our mind. Because Graefekiez in Berlin will get car free for six months and a young boy in RBB in the TV said like, "Oh no, this will look awful, because when the cars are away it can't be beautiful." I was like: "Oh my god. He can't even —as a small kid he can't imagine that it is more beautiful what is behind the car." So, I think you don't wrote your thesis to say: 'This is the solution'. But what can you point out? What can we do that people will understand that there is not a loss but a winning for all?

Celina Negro (13:03)

So basically, in the interviews, I looked at like three different steps. The first part was like how automobility is problematized and how like people react to that. And there the issue or what often came up that people said: "Okay, all these arguments that u use, that's like nothing new, we've heard all of that millions of times." And there lose its potential to mobilize people, even though their arguments themselves are like not wrong. Especially aspects with the climate change and impacts of air pollution and traffic safety things people have heard too many times. Or

on the other hand, some arguments were like too unfamiliar. Like for example, the campaign used the problem of traffic related noise and what impact that has on human health. And people, like most of them have never heard about and don't like see how traffic noise can actually affect your health. And there by, it also lost like its potential. And then a big part was like that many of the problems are not like subjectively perceived as problematic or there are not like directly experienceable. Like people said for example like who lived in one area of Berlin that might not be so heavily influenced by traffic as other areas, and they said: "Well, where I live, it's actually like nice. I can sleep at night with the door open; there's no traffic noise in my road". So, for them, it wasn't actually such a problem. I think it's important to realize that in a city not everyone will be equally affected by the negative impacts. And then people also generally said that traffic safety is an issue. But when I asked them if they personally feel unsafe in traffic, they not necessarily say that this is the case. And then it is also a lot of aspects that are just taken for granted, so people have never thought about it. For example, that the roadside is full of parked cars. That's so normal that people don't perceive that as problematic. And then the thing is that a lot of the arguments are like facts, and they are based on rational decision-making. But people don't make decisions like that. One of the persons I interviewed was a psychologist. He focused on that a lot and said: "Of course, rationally speaking based on this, none of us should drive a car. But unfortunately, that's not how human beings make choices in their everyday live. It's much more based on habits." Then, as you said, it's not like that I've developed solutions or like a blueprint for how to change this. But I developed like an alternative message what you could focus on.

They are focused much more on the impacts of traffic jams, that people have to spend a lot of time waiting on traffic. And I also asked people like: "How it is actually for you driving a car in the city?" And there like a lot came up that no one is actually like enjoying driving a car in the city. That's actually like a huge point what everyone can agree on and what you could start with. And if you focus on traffic jams and the time people lose in traffic jams, and on searching for parking spaces, that is like much more personal relevant for car drivers. It can like lead more to that people start to critically reflect their situation instead of like trying to feel blamed or attacked by all these reasons why cars— and they are for themselves as car drivers—are like doing a bad thing.

Katja Diehl (17:24)

But did you see maybe people in between, that they are deniers and that they are fans of car-free cities, and some people are jet undecided? Because sometimes I think it's too much about black and white. And maybe the majority is also for a better city, but the undecided don't have like a hook to come there....Did you also speak to people who are in this group maybe?

Celina Negro (17:58)

I think very much like even the three who were like critical toward the campaign were not necessarily critical towards the ideas. One person even said like he wishes he could be convinced by the campaign, but he is unfortunately not. And the big part is he felt like kind of personally attacked by the way they ride their proposals. There is a lot of people who are like in-between and could be convinced. Because in the end, all these people are car owners I talk to, they are not just like car drivers.

They also walk, ride bikes, and take public transport. Yeah, I think there is a lot of people in between.

Katja Diehl (18:46)

I think it is also a bit unfair that car people so to say always need this kind of being pampered. "I understand. You have to change." And people without even having a driver's license or a car are always affected since ages. Did you also point this out that the actual mobility system is something in disbalance?

Celina Negro (19:15)

No, I didn't point that out in these interviews because there was much more the focus trying like to understand the [unverständlich].

Katja Diehl (19:26)

And did they gave like tips? Because sometimes it's also easy to complain, but the people in between or also the people who felt offended—did they have an approach to what would be better, what would work out for them?

Celina Negro (19:42)

Yes, they came up with a lot of potential solutions. That was also part of the problem like: The interplay between like these problematizations and the solution of like suggesting like drastic reduction of private cars is not necessarily seen as like effective for like all the problems they mentioned. So, people like suggested a lot of other solutions, like for example electric cars to solve the issue with noise pollution. Then, speed limits to make traffic safer for all participants. Even a lot of people suggest that pricing mechanisms to reduce the number of cars so that the ones who are willing to pay for it can still do it. They suggested underground garages for cars so that they are not blocking the public space on the road. So, there are a lot of soluti-

ons, and that is also important to consider that there isn't just one solution trying to address all these problems. We have to consider like can the solution actually address the problems and what it maybe can't address.

Katja Diehl (20:56)

But to be honest, one of your conclusions is that the liveable city is something people don't know, people can't imagine. And that is why, your thesis points out that maybe it is also not the good point. Maybe we need some steps between, or?

Celina Negro (21:17)

Yes, that was a big point. I started for example asking people what quality of life to them in the city means. That was very difficult. Most of the people said they had never thought about it like what that could mean and how mobility or cars affect that. At least, you can't say like the liveable city, and everyone will know what that means or what it is motivating about it.

Katja Diehl (21:51)

I think what I wanted to point out that we, as, so to say, pioneers—I don't know a better word - the pioneers who are always leading a kind of change. We have really concrete ideas what we can gain with or regain from this kind of change. And sometimes I think it's also regarding having not this kind of academics speak, maybe also about the language, which is very complicated sometimes. What's really easy for the deniers is that they can use like one sentence: "Everyone wants to ride a car. Point." And then you are the one explaining, "No, that's not true, la la la la la," you need more time and you need more words to explain it. We can't put your visualizations here, but you pointed out in your thesis that it is really, really important to give people a picture of the future which you want to build, or?

Celina Negro (22:57)

Yes, that was a very big part. I used for example, in my developed framed messages, I used like real photographs of places in the city. Instead of, what the campaign for example does, they used a lot of like illustrations, I tried to use real pictures. And people often said that this conveyed much more closeness and made it easier like identify with what you see. And it seemed more like realistic. When you see like a picture, where like, for example, kids playing on the road, it seems much more realistic to people than if you see like a futuristic illustration. One person said that a lot of those illustrations seems like advertisement posters for a situation in 2050. That is something we can actually do now. That showed like out as a very important point to use pictures and photographs of real people and real situations.

Katja Diehl (24:07)

At the moment, we have a real conflict on the streets because we have less space for too many people who want to ride a bicycle, a car, go by foot, or in a bus. So, there's a conflict right now. And what's in the media is always the conflict 'cars against bicycles'. How can we—did you see some points—how can we build a better team for the change? That we are not... making even more conflicts throughout a line of change but even come better as a group of people who wants to have a liveable city. Did you see anything? What could be the solution to this conflict?

Celina Negro (24:52)

I think one part can for sure be to focus less on the different transport forms and trying to compare them. Because as you say there's an underlying conflict and you then start a lot of comparisons for them, it just brings out that conflict even more. I think it's better to focus more on the vision and what you're try

to achieve than on the means of transport. And that the, you focus on the vision, there are like the transport forms itself. Don't need to be on the focus, like you can focus on, if you want to, for example, achieve, that people can reach all the goods they need, they need for their everyday life, in their surroundings, can focus on like green spaces where people can relax. Whatever. But it doesn't have to be like so much focus on comparisons and depicting the car like a negative light.

Katja Diehl (25:52)

What is your conclusion of your work? What did you point out in the end? Having all these interviews, having all this research, what is your conclusion?

Celina Negro (26:04)

I think the main points are that you should try to use like problematizations that can be like tangible that are subjectively perceived as problematic. And also, it's maybe better to focus on structural problems than blaming individual behaviour. And the fact that you should acknowledge that not everyone is equally affected in the city by the negative impacts. Also, to like start working on reframing like persistent ideas that stand in the way of car restrictions. I haven't mentioned what was a big result of the Twitter comments that there was like these four main ideas that people have, like for example, that cars are an integral part of like cities, and they are sociated to modernity. That there's like the freedom to drive a car. That the economy depends on car-related incomes. And that car restriction is an idea of the Green Party. And as long as people believe in one of these ideas, it's very like highly unlikely that they will support car restrictions. So, it's important to like to try to work on like how to reframe these ideas because basically everyone knows they are going to

come up. But I don't feel like there is good way yet how to deal with these. That's important. And then really the part like, facts and figures alone will not motivate people. That you need to find...It's not that facts are bad, but you need to find other ways to how to convey their message. And that the vision is a very important point, especially the vision of the liveable city that is not yet established. And as you say, like right now we still need a lot of words and long sentences to try to explain it because it's not yet an established idea. And that takes time to develop.

Katja Diehl (28:21)

And now, are you have hope? Because maybe we can end up with hope and optimism. Or even other way around—did you found like campaigns that work better? Or do you think... maybe cities we should have an eye on? Or... how can we get over this that maybe we sometimes we're too complicated, too rational? What can we do?

Celina Negro (28:54)

I do have hope because I think once we like start thinking a bit more about the communication part that It can change quite a lot. Because so far, it is often like mobility is very focused on like solutions and trying to find the best solution, but not so much about how we can like best communicate. I think that can make an impact once people are a bit more aware of that and trying to think about different ways how, for example, car restriction could be communicated. So far, I haven't found like a very like examples who like who I think are doing their communication part very well. I think like one thing that maybe got has established more less is that you shouldn't call like campaigns car-free. So, I think there is more less. There is a lot of examples to call it like, I don't know how it's called in English but for example the

'Flaniermeile' or like projects that are called like 'more space for everyone.' I think that's something that got more less established. But otherwise, I don't have so many positive examples.

Katja Diehl (30:16)

I think it's the problem—that we're starting, we even didn't start, so to say. There's no city in Germany who is an example of a good campaign which is fulfilling the needs of people living in cities and also rural areas to have, liveable environment. I thank you so much. I think people can learn a lot from your approach and your thesis. What are you working up on next?

Celina Negro (30:47)

I've started working for consultancy company. They are trying to use a lot of knowledge in practice and trying to spread the message that communication is important.

Katja Diehl (31:03)

Thank you so much for the exchange, being my guest. I wish you a happy day right now.

Celina Negro (31:10)

Yes, thanks a lot.

Katja Diehl (31:11)

Thank you! Bye-bye.

Celina Negro (31:12)

Bye.