

11. Storytelling

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Storytelling is particularly suited to addressing complex and ‘wicked’ problems, such as sustainability transitions within energy, climate, and mobility. It brings together stakeholders and/or citizens with different backgrounds, experiences, and points of view and creates an environment for recognition of and learning from the various perspectives represented by the participants. Through facilitation that ensures everyone a voice, storytelling encourages mutual understanding and collective action, but not necessarily a consensus.



STORYTELLING AT-A-GLANCE

- Facilitates inclusive learning, collaboration, and collective action.
- Requires professional facilitation and analytical skills and works best in person.



Benefits

1. Facilitates inclusive and empathetic dialogue and interaction between different knowledges and perspectives
2. Creates mutual learning and collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and generations
3. Contributes to conflict resolution and agenda-setting, which can support collective action
4. Gives a platform to diverse and often unheard voices
5. Results in rich data sets



Challenges and limitations

1. **Lack of skilled personnel.** Storytelling is demanding and time-intensive and requires people with organisational, moderation and analytical evaluation skills.
2. **Assumption that change will happen.** Stories do not change people’s material circumstances, and the impact of storytelling may not be easily measured or necessarily obvious straightaway.
3. **Results are not taken forward.** Organisers should put effort into taking the results further into policy and decision-making so that participants feel that their time and input was worth it.



Participants

Storytelling can be used for various target groups. The participants should represent a diversity of stakeholders and/or citizens and perspectives. The method is best suited to small groups (e.g. 4-6 people), but can be used in larger groups where the storytelling happens in breakout groups.

STEPS

Storytelling can be flexibly adjusted to context. Below is an example implementation (inspired by Mourik et al. 2017):



Timeframe: The specific method outlined above spans 2+ months with 1-3 weeks needed for preparation (which should start at least 2 months before the workshop), a 1 day workshop, and 2-4 weeks for evaluation. Other forms of storytelling (e.g. creating digital stories) will require different timeframes.



OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Storytelling generates qualitative data in the form of individual and collective stories and recorded discussions, commonly related to local level topics/problems. These can be used as material for research or as input for practitioners and policymaking, in particular on the local level related to specific projects and problems. Storytelling can provide impact on diverse actors, e.g. policy, publics, scientists, industry, businesses, civil society actors. Its participatory and co-creation nature encourages shared learning.



ONLINE/OFFLINE

Storytelling is preferably carried out face-to-face as interaction and creation of empathy between participants is central. However, with good facilitation it is also possible online

LEARN MORE

- Mourik, R., Robison, R., and Breukers, S., 2017. *Storytelling - SHAPE ENERGY facilitation guidelines for interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder processes*. Cambridge: SHAPE ENERGY
- Mourik, R.M., Sonetti, G., and Robison, R.A.V., 2021. *The same old story – or not? How storytelling can support inclusive local energy policy*. *Energy Research & Social Science* 73, 101940.
- Moezzi, M., Janda, K.B., and Rotmann, S., 2017. *Using stories, narratives, and storytelling in energy and climate change research*. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 31, pp. 1-10.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: SHAPE ENERGY

This EU Horizon 2020 project ran [storytelling workshops](#) to unpack the local energy challenges faced by city-level policymakers in 17 European cities. Each workshop used story spines but adapted to its local context and to participants to create a safe environment for conversations.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Physical space with enough rooms, equipment (tables, chairs, papers with story spine, pens, voice recorder) and catering for workshop(s); Good organizational, facilitation and moderation skills; Skills in qualitative social science analysis to ensure high-quality evaluation and input to decision-making.

