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.

**STEPS**

**01 DEVELOP STORY SPINE**

Prior to workshop a topic/problem is identified and a template with pre-defined structure to guide participants is developed. Participants are invited.

**02 SET THE STORY SCENE**

At the workshop, the topic/problem is introduced, tailored to audience and their previous experience with storytelling.

**03 INVITE DIVERSITY**

Participants write individual stories based on story spine, then tell their stories. Groups discuss commonalities and differences and identify shared challenges.

**04 ENVISION**

They tell their stories, groups identify conflicts and write one common story about desirable futures based on the challenges identified in step 2. Participants write individual stories about desirable futures based on the challenges identified in step 2. They tell their stories, groups identify conflicts and write one common story about desirable futures.

**05 SHARE AND SUMMARISE**

Groups share collective stories with each other in plenum or by moving from table to table. Action points/take-home messages are identified.

**06 EVALUATE**

After the storytelling process, material generated is written up and results provided as input to decision making. Participants should be informed about how their input is used.

**BENEFITS**

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

**CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS**

- Lack of skilled personnel. Storytelling is demanding and time-intensive and requires people with organisational, moderation and analytical evaluation skills.
- 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 straightforward.
- 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.

**OUTCOMES AND IMPACT**

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

**RESOURCES NEEDED**

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

**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.

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 adapted to its local context and to participants to create a safe environment for conversations.