



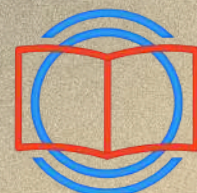
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# STORIES THAT MATTER:

## Exploring Narrative Accountability

### HANDBOOK

*A Guideline to Narrative  
Accountability & its Methodologies*



NACCS



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# Presentation of the NACCS Project

Website: <https://naccs.eu/>

Online platform:

<https://naccsproject.eu/>

## Who We Are: A Collaborative Vision

Welcome to Narrative Accountability in Cultural and Community Settings (NACCS), a dynamic 36-month Strategic Partnership in the Field of VET project. Our collaborative vision involves six partner organizations from Germany, Italy, Greece, The Netherlands, and Cyprus. Together, we are committed to addressing the horizontal priority of "**Inclusion** and **diversity** in all fields of education, training, youth, and sport."

## Our Mission

NACCS seeks to bridge the gap in understanding how stories are used in cultural and community settings. By promoting **narrative accountability**, the project aims to foster responsible and inclusive practices, empower marginalized voices, and contribute to the development of a pan-European responsible practice in digital storytelling.

## Objectives

Our primary objective is to address **social inclusion** through an integrated approach to narrative accountability. We strive to raise awareness within organizations on the ethical use of people's narratives and aim to produce open-source practical tools for community educators, cultural facilitators, and civic participation workers.

## Lifelong Learning Competencies

Through collaboration and knowledge exchange, NACCS aims to create a **lasting impact** on VET providers, cultural practitioners, and policymakers across Europe. We focus on key competencies for lifelong learning, emphasizing the improvement of digital skills, personal and social competencies, citizenship skills, and cultural awareness and expression skills. We achieve this by delivering training and creating educational materials for our partner organizations' teams and VET professionals.



# Meet our partners

**C**omparative  
**R**esearch  
**N**etwork:

## Comparative Research Network e.V. (CRN) - Germany

**Focus:** Non-formal adult, youth, and VET education and research.

**Expertise:** Storytelling, digital methods, media literacy, and project evaluation.

**Commitment:** Ethical considerations, critical thinking, and integration of accountability into media literacy.

**Website:** <https://crnonline.de>

# LE PORTE-VOIX

see hear make wonder

## Stitching Le Porte Voix - the Netherlands

**Focus:** Social justice through art and education.

**Expertise:** Artistic and educational projects, empowerment, and voicing of marginalized individuals.

**Commitment:** Inclusivity, diversity, and storytelling in cultural and community settings.

**Website:**



CAMERA DI COMMERCIO DELLA  
BASILICATA

## Chamber of Commerce Basilicata - Italy

**Focus:** Vocational education and training (VET) and community development.

**Expertise:** Local economic system, sustainability, competitiveness, waste management, and cooperation in the Waste Tracking System.

**Commitment:** Skills development, employability, sustainable business development, and tourism.

**Website:** <https://www.basilicata.camcom.it/>



STANDOUTEDU

## STANDO LTD - Cyprus

**Focus:** Research and educational organization with VET accreditation.

**Expertise:** Vocational education and training, professional and academic training under Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2.

**Commitment:** Advancing research and innovation, promoting equality, and encouraging social justice.

**Website:** <https://standoutedu.com/>

# Meet our partners



## E-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL GROUP - Greece

**Focus:** Certified Adult Education Centre and VET provider.

**Expertise:** Training VET and Adult Learners, e-learning platform development, and participation in Erasmus+ KA2 projects.

**Commitment:** Inclusive vocational education and training, international collaboration, and integration of digital and media skills into storytelling methods.

**Website:** <https://www.euprojects.gr/en/home/>



## Melting Pro - Italy

**Focus:** Cultural engagement, project management, digital storytelling, and audience development.

**Expertise:** Cooperative approach, design thinking, and visual mapping in cultural initiatives and professional training courses.

**Commitment:** Democratizing culture, fostering strategic skills, and promoting European openness.

**Website:** <https://meltingpro.org/>



# Process and Results

The research and results produced throughout the projects will be:

## Research and Reports (PR1)

Investigate narrative accountability, methodologies, and casestudies. Create a 'Narrative Accountability Report' to map the European landscape.

## Toolkit Development (PR2)

Pool learnings to create a 'Narrative Accountability Toolkit' supporting VET providers in community and cultural settings. Include digital, print, and audio-visual materials.

## Training and Capacity Building

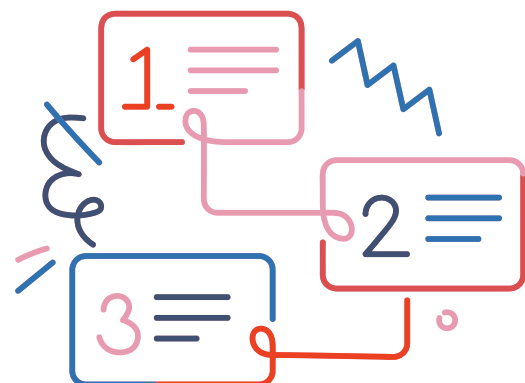
Conduct three short-term joint staff training events on digital storytelling, community development, and representation in narratives. Organise a co-design lab during the 5th Transnational Partnership Meeting.

## Policy Recommendations

Compile policy recommendations for narrative accountability in cultural and community settings. Disseminate recommendations to policymakers and decision-makers.

## Network Building

Establish a pan-European network of organisations and practitioners working with narrative accountability. Create a peer-support community of professional VET practitioners.





# Presentation of PR1



*In order to fully understand the current state of play across the participating countries and European landscape in terms of understandings of 'narrative accountability', methodologies and practices associated with this field and also case studies of its practical application, we must undertake research into this emergent and evolving field of study. From this research, we will produce the Narrative Accountability Report (PR1).*

## Topics

- Rapid evidence appraisal of academic understandings of narrative accountability
- Analysis of lived experience stories that account for the importance of narrative accountability when working with marginalised groups of people
- Case studies of the application of narrative accountability in practice

## Target Audience

The target audience for this PR are VET organisations working in community and cultural settings (i.e. community development, museums, art galleries) and also practice-based researchers and Artists.

## Continuity

Principles drawn from PR1 will underpin the development of PR2.

## Impacts

The impact of this PR will be in identifying a set of pan- European best principles to under narrative accountability in cultural and community settings within the broader informal education field. It will provide the contextual understanding of narrative accountability across Europe from different perspectives and support people to engender more critical thinking when working with and representing narratives.

## Conclusions

The report will conclude with a set of principles for embedding Narrative Accountability as a practice into the VET sector, which is an innovation in the field.



# Our methodologies



**LEARNING LABS** represent a structured and participant-centered methodology designed for the effective training of individuals. Employing principles rooted in experiential learning and active participation, Learning Labs transcend conventional training methods, fostering an environment that encourages deep engagement and practical skill development.

## 1 Experiential Learning

The Learning Lab methodology advocates for experiential learning, giving precedence to hands-on engagement with the subject matter. Inclusion of interactive activities and simulations is essential, fostering a deep comprehension of intricate concepts.

## 2 Active Participation and Collaboration

The emphasis on active involvement goes beyond traditional models, directing learners away from passive reception. Through group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative projects, a tapestry of engagement is woven, actively immersing participants in the learning journey.

## 5 Structured Learning Journey

A distinctive feature of Learning Labs is their commitment to a structured learning cycle, frequently aligned with esteemed models like Kolb's experiential learning. Participants navigate through concrete experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation, ensuring a comprehensive educational journey.

## 3 Peer Learning Dynamics

Grounded in the 'Each One Teach One' ethos, Learning Labs nurture a culture of peer learning. Participants contribute their diverse skills, experiences, and knowledge, fostering a vibrant and collaborative learning community.

## 4 Adaptability and Diverse Learning Styles

Learning Labs demonstrate adaptability, catering to a spectrum of learning styles and preferences. A diverse range of instructional methods, from visual aids to hands-on activities, addresses the nuanced preferences of individual learners.

## Benefits for Learners

### **Holistic Understanding:**

The methodology fosters a holistic understanding of the subject matter through experiential and active learning. Learners engage deeply, ensuring a nuanced comprehension that goes beyond rote memorization.

### **Skill Development and Application:**

Active participation and collaborative endeavours not only nurture knowledge acquisition but also foster the development of practical skills. Learners are adeptly prepared to apply their newfound knowledge in real-world scenarios.

### **Peer-to-Peer Enrichment:**

Peer learning dynamics enhance the educational experience, enabling participants to tap into a diverse pool of skills and perspectives. Collaborative knowledge exchange fosters a community of learners, reinforcing a culture of mutual enrichment.

## Application

### **Educational Settings:**

Learning Labs find resonance in educational settings, enhancing traditional teaching methods and enriching the overall learning experience. They can be applied across diverse academic disciplines, tailoring the approach to suit specific learning objectives.

### **Professional Development:**

Beyond academia, Learning Labs find relevance in professional development contexts. Corporations and organisations can leverage this methodology to enhance the skills and collaborative capabilities of their workforce.

## Goals and Aims

### **Comprehensive Learning:**

The primary goal is to facilitate comprehensive learning experiences, surpassing the confines of traditional instructional models. Learning Labs aim to imbue participants with a deep and multifaceted understanding of the subject matter.

### **Skill Proficiency:**

Aims encompass the cultivation of not just theoretical knowledge but also practical skill proficiency. Participants emerge equipped with competencies that extend beyond theoretical comprehension.

### **Cultivation of a Learning Community:**

Learning Labs aspire to foster a vibrant learning community, wherein participants actively contribute to each other's growth. The ethos of mutual enrichment permeates the overarching aim of community cultivation.

### **Skill-Specific Workshops:**

Learning Labs can be deployed in skill-specific workshops, ensuring participants acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also the practical expertise needed in their respective domains. The methodology is versatile, adapting to the specific goals of the workshop at hand.

In essence, the Learning Lab methodology emerges as a beacon of educational excellence, transcending conventional approaches to offer a participant-centric, engaging, and effective learning experience.

The **TRAIN THE TRAINER** methodology is an instructional approach designed to equip trainers, with the necessary skills, knowledge, and techniques to effectively train others. The focus is on building the capacity of trainers to impart specific subject matter expertise or teach particular skills to a target audience. This methodology operates on the principle that enhancing the abilities of trainers will subsequently improve the quality and efficiency of the training programs they deliver.

### **Key components of the Train the Trainer methodology typically include:**

#### **Content Mastery:**

Trainers undergo in-depth training on the subject matter or skills they are expected to teach. This ensures they have a comprehensive understanding of the material

#### **Communication Skills:**

Emphasis is placed on developing strong communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, to convey information clearly and foster effective interaction with participants.

#### **Assessment and Evaluation:**

Trainers learn how to design assessments, evaluate participant understanding, and provide constructive feedback. This includes methods for gauging the effectiveness of the training program.

#### **Continuous Improvement:**

The methodology often includes a focus on ongoing professional development for trainers, encouraging them to stay current with industry trends, updates, and innovative teaching methods.

#### **Instructional Techniques:**

Trainers learn and practise various instructional methods and techniques to effectively convey information, engage participants, and facilitate learning. This may involve understanding different learning styles and tailoring instruction accordingly

#### **Facilitation Skills:**

Trainers are trained in the art of facilitation, learning how to manage group dynamics, encourage participation, and create an inclusive and conducive learning environment.

#### **Adaptability**

Trainers are equipped to adapt their training approach to different audiences, considering factors such as cultural diversity, varying skill levels, and unique learning needs.

**Train the Trainer** methodology is commonly used in various fields, including corporate training, vocational education, healthcare, and community development. The ultimate goal is to create a cadre of skilled trainers who can efficiently transfer knowledge and skills to others, thus promoting effective learning and development within an organisation or community.



## COMMUNITY REPORTING METHODOLOGY

Community reporting in the educational field refers to a collaborative and participatory approach to gathering and sharing information about the happenings within an educational community. This involves students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders actively contributing to the reporting process. The aims and goals of community reporting in education are multifaceted and can include:

### **Promoting Transparency and Communication:**

This involves facilitating open communication between all members of the educational community. It provides a platform for transparent sharing of information related to school activities, events, and achievements. This approach aims to create a more connected and informed community, fostering a sense of engagement and shared responsibility. By encouraging open dialogue, community reporting contributes to the overall transparency of academic and administrative practices, enhancing accountability and promoting a positive and collaborative educational environment.

### **Capturing Diverse Perspectives:**

It prioritizes inclusivity by including a wide range of voices and perspectives in the reporting process. This ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the educational environment. Moreover, it emphasises the recognition and celebration of the diversity of experiences within the community, fostering an inclusive and enriching educational atmosphere.

### **Addressing Challenges and Concerns:**

It serves as a vital platform to identify and address challenges faced by the educational community. It fosters an environment that encourages constructive dialogue, allowing stakeholders to collaborate in finding effective solutions and driving continuous improvements. This proactive approach ensures that the educational community remains responsive and resilient, working collectively to overcome obstacles and enhance the overall quality of education.

### **Enhancing Engagement and Involvement:**

It strives to encourage active participation. By fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility, it aims to enhance the overall well-being of the educational institution. This involves creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and collaboration among stakeholders, recognizing the valuable contributions each group makes to the educational community. Through active involvement, community reporting builds a sense of ownership and commitment, promoting a positive and supportive atmosphere within the educational institution.

### **Improving Accountability:**

It plays a crucial role in holding educational institutions accountable. By encouraging transparency in academic and administrative practices, it provides a platform for stakeholders to address concerns, propose improvements, and engage in constructive discussions. This accountability mechanism ensures a responsive and adaptive educational environment that values the input and feedback from all members of the community.

*Community reporting in education ultimately aims to create a more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative educational ecosystem, where all stakeholders actively contribute to the growth and success of the community.*

## STORY ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Story analysis methodology involves a systematic examination of narratives, aiming to understand and interpret the underlying elements and structures within a story.

### Identifying Narrative Elements:

Story analysis involves dissecting the essential elements of a narrative, including characters, setting, plot, and theme. This process entails recognizing the relationships between characters and understanding their roles in advancing the overall storyline. By delving into these fundamental components, story analysis seeks to unveil the structural and thematic intricacies that shape the narrative's meaning and impact.

### Character Development:

Story analysis involves a detailed investigation into the evolution of characters throughout the narrative. This includes assessing their motivations, conflicts, and personal growth as they navigate the story. By examining the dynamic nature of characters, analysts gain a deeper understanding of how individual journeys contribute to the overall development and thematic richness of the narrative.

### Theme Exploration:

Story analysis delves into uncovering the central themes and messages conveyed in a narrative. This process involves analyzing how the story addresses broader concepts or societal issues, providing insights into the underlying layers of meaning. By exploring the thematic elements, analysts gain a deeper understanding of the narrative's intended impact and its relevance to broader cultural or societal discussions.

### Symbolism and Metaphor Analysis:

Story analysis includes the identification of symbolic elements and metaphors within the narrative. This process aims to understand how these symbols contribute to the overall meaning and interpretation of the story. By recognizing the metaphorical layers, analysts uncover nuanced insights that enhance the depth and significance of the narrative, enriching the overall storytelling experience.

### Contextual Considerations:

Story analysis involves examining the historical, cultural, or social context in which the narrative is situated. This includes considering how external factors influence the story's meaning and relevance. By exploring the broader context, analysts gain a deeper appreciation for the impact of societal, cultural, or historical influences on the narrative, enriching the interpretation of the story.

### Reader Response:

Story analysis extends to exploring how diverse readers may interpret and respond to the narrative. This process involves considering the range of emotional, intellectual, and cultural reactions that the story may evoke. By recognizing the varied ways individuals engage with the narrative, analysts gain insights into the story's resonance and its ability to connect with a broad audience on different levels.

### **Comparative Analysis:**

Story analysis includes the comparative examination of a narrative with other works of literature, especially within its genre. This process involves identifying similarities, differences, and unique elements that contribute to the narrative's distinctiveness. By placing the story in context with other literary works, analysts gain valuable insights into its unique qualities, contributing to a nuanced understanding of its artistic and thematic significance.

### **Critical Evaluation:**

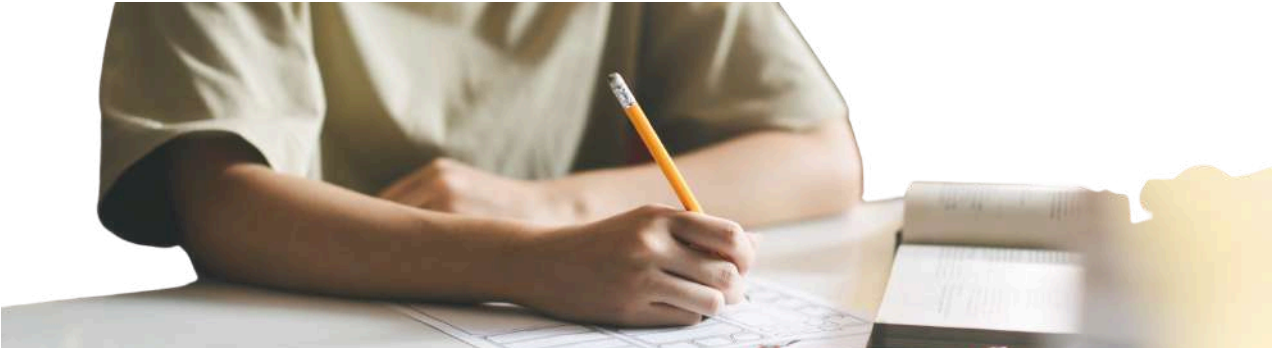
Story analysis includes a critical assessment of the narrative's strengths and weaknesses. This involves evaluating various aspects such as plot, character development, and thematic elements. Analysts formulate conclusions about the story's effectiveness in conveying its intended message or achieving its artistic goals. This evaluative process contributes to a nuanced understanding of the narrative's impact and its success in engaging the audience or achieving its literary objectives.

Story analysis methodology is a comprehensive approach that delves into the intricacies of storytelling, offering insights into the artistic, thematic, and cultural dimensions of a narrative. It provides a structured framework for understanding and interpreting the rich tapestry of stories across various genres and mediums.





# Narrative Accountability



***Hereafter we will dwell on why narratives and stories are important for people and broader for human and social development. We will show how stories and the way we relate to each other are the backbones of our work, of our professional activities and finally about our lives.***

## **1. Narrative Accountability: An Introduction**

The concept of 'narrative accountability' is used as an umbrella term to account for the dynamics of power, ownership, responsibility, control, representation and democratisation involved in storytelling and (story) curation processes. In present society led by paradigm of new public management and public governance, accountability has got an image of financial transaction and juridical responsibility. Did you spend public money well and did you realize the project as planned?

Accountability becomes a proof of conduct focusing on the costs and expenditures of projects on the one hand and the realization of what was promised and planned beforehand. In general this perception of accountability is based on a linear thinking and a clear managerial advantage of knowing exactly what were costs and benefits of projects and what were the results.

However, as shown above, social and cultural projects are often not realized following the assumptions that were made. Results do not exactly match the expectations beforehand. The blindspot of focusing upon the measurable elements of projects and the agenda or programme that was set beforehand, often does not correspond to the reality of project realization and the reality of experience of people involved in the project. In this type of accountability, budget-lines and book-keeping are at the core of the accounts.

This way of looking at project management, successes failures and risks are reliable in sectors in which material goods are produced and products can be counted in quantities. However, in the social and cultural fields this way of perceiving accountability also shows negative side effects.

In fact, accountability is not merely a case of accountancy, costs and benefits and realization of what was actually promised but it is intrinsically connected to the notion of impact on the lives of people. According to the partners of the NACCS project, the common notion of accountability needs to be reframed and take account of the voices and stories of lived experience of people, so that they can express and have a say in successes and failures of projects realized with public resources.

## Accountability and Responsibility

Let us get a bit deeper in the terms. In fact, in English accountability has a significance of control and of power. On the other hand, accountability in English calls for responsibility, be accountable of your own acts, this is actually an empowering dynamic. Expressing your own story. Accountability is also the action in which people are asked to explain and underpin asked actions. Thus, an account is "a statement explaining one's conduct" or a statement or exposition of reasons, causes, motives and a description of facts, conditions, events. In this sense, accountability becomes a way of proof of conduct and actions. Accountability is also business arrangements and involving the establishment and maintenance of an account, a bank account, or an account of clients for instance. Being accountable is that a subject, can be held to account or capable of being explained "answerable". Then accountability is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions. We can be hold responsible for our actions. And if needed we are to blame and asked to cover extra expenditures, juridical consequences.

The notion of accountability is referring to accountancy to the proof that investment led to measurable results and had the effect we planned before. The notion has therefore a strong link with new public management in social, cultural and educational settings. In fact, social institutions, cultural institutions and artists and educational institutions needed to show how their budget was spent and what the impact was of the activities realized. In these sectors, impact is not measurable easily in figures and quantitative results. Products and activities realized are mostly measurable in the field of improvement of developmental goals of individuals and groups, related to learning, awareness building, improvement of human relations, work on personal development, dealing with major difficulties such as (mental) illnesses, ageing, addiction, divorces. All of these are nowadays translated into measurable products: schools deliver diploma's (or not); hospitals deliver care to patients and make them better (or not); cultural institutions such as theaters, concert halls deliver entertainment, paintings (that can be sold), exhibitions that can be visited (and sold).

## The Account as Story

We also use stories to give account of activities, from our own personal perspective. On a social and systemic level, give an account of our activities, about the way we did our job. What we did achieve. What were the effects of our work and what impact can we expect. In fact we also need to give account of our activities in our social roles as researchers and policymakers, as students, teachers we need to show to the world, to our management, the direction, school institution, municipality how we met the criteria of the plans, the rules that were set. We need to give account of expenses and income and output. We need to show what impact of our activities were. However, accountability has more and more been associated to the fact to 'countable' things. Numbers, measurable and computable. However, most of the real impact are to be found in the invisible and emotional sphere. How to measure learning? What were the effects of learning processes on personal development and individual awareness? Only stories can give deeper insight in how individuals appreciate these activities and what it means to them in their own lives and in their communities.

Our viewpoint is that stories of lived experience (Geelhoed et al., 2021; Trowbridge et al.) are a necessary resource to show results and impact of activities that emphasize human relations and human development activities.

Only by gathering, exchanging and listening to stories, it is possible to make sense of social cultural and educational activities. How they impact on our personal lives, but also to negotiate how activities can be organized in such a way that perspectives of all types of roles and persons involved are heard.

### **Build Narrative Representation and Narrative Democracy**

A new context asks for a new democratic foundations and new views on representations. Manuel Castells shows that our world and human relationships have changed profoundly. If the nineteenth Century was characterized by the division of labor and industrial society and the second half of the 20th century was characterized by post-industrial society, Castells claims that with the invention of the internet a new era has started, called communicational society. Industrial society was characterized by labor as being force for action. Working class would use their labor as a power tool to make a change and strive at least in the Western World for better socio-economic situation. That is how in the end the actual welfare states were developed in the Western world. The period after the second world war and especially, 68 showed us that society was organized in a different manner. Touraine called this the post-industrial society. Not social class was determining social relations, but other types of cultural identities were emerging (women's movement, anti-nuclear movement) made us enter a post industrial society, where notions in which labor gradually became only one factor for the organization of society and human relationships. (Touraine et al., 1981)

In our present-day communicational society, the interactions between people through the internet became a real power tool. In fact, big new businesses such as google, Apple, Microsoft are interested in interactions, communication behavior between people. They are fighting for 'attention of readers' and push you to be as much connected and online as possible, so that all kinds of messages, stories, publicity can reach you and that you can reach the world. Through this constant flow of communication and shared information, stories have become a resource for data gathering and data analytics. Our experiences have become a resources in the platform economy.

The communicational society is based upon notions such as language, speaking the same language. In our global world, English has become our universal communication vehicle throughout the internet, and world-wide. De Swaan shows how the development of the English language become the spider in the interconnection in the world language system, based on interconnectedness of people and their need to exchange. Manuel Castells, puts the accent on the importance of the invention of the Internet and the global communication system as the motor for systemic change. All humans are touched by this technological change, and it also transforms human relationships.

Harvey would underline that our present modernity is characterized by time-space compression. We can instantly communicate with people from all over the world, realize projects with them in present time.

### **Towards a Narrative Representation and Democracy**

Stories and the way people tell their story and understand each other's story as their own are important vectors for the production of common meaning. In present day society, the field of politics and policy making do not have adequate responses to major changes in society.



The fields of Finance and economy are operating on a global scale. Globally mainly nationally organized political powers do not have an adequate reply to hegemonic development of global economy and – capital reigned by the banking sector. The power balance between economic and political spheres is distorted. Citizens all over the planet do not feel represented anymore. Populism, stories for the people and ideological discourses are stories the unrepresented want to believe in. These lies do not bind but separate us. The question is how can politics become again an agency that represents the voices of all? How can democratic values based on universal declaration of human rights become a valuable counter power?

For Pierre Rosanvallon, democracy is an unfinished process (2003). He also expressed that the actual crisis in democracy is not the end of the system, but it is showing that democracy is changing (2008). He introduced the notion of Narrative Democracy in a manifest called: *The Parliament of the Invisible* (2014), which has been published again in 2020, putting into light the actual movements in contemporary France. He underlined that we should listen to each other's story and rebuild a democratic system upon these. Many people have stories that were not heard, not listened to. Rosanvallon became editor of a series of books at Le Seuil, an important French Publishing house, called 'Raconter la vie' (Tell your life). In this book series, people are invited to share their story of lived experience. He would publish the story and in parallel he would also publish on a website with the same name raconter-la-vie. "If we want to reform democracy, we need to start with stories".



*The Parliament of the Invisible*  
(2014)

Currently, the raconter-la-vie website is mostly dealing with stories about work situations. Rosanvallon actually stated that present time workers do not deal with working conditions as it would be industrial society (Touraine), but workers express themselves in terms of working situations. What is at stake for many people from the "les gilets-jaunes" yellow-jackets movement in France, is the fact that they express their experience with their own working situation. This shows a personalized and more individual situation. In this sense, the observations of Rosanvallon, are close to the observations of Francois Dubet (1995), who already showed a similar shift. In all interviews he conducted as of the late 1980ies and 1990ies onward, he noticed that if people were asked how they would act in their work, as for instance a teacher, most teachers would express themselves not in terms of skills, in what they do and how they do their work, but they would talk about their experiences as a teacher, how they feel about their job.

This was a major insight for sociologists interested in change processes. In fact, the object of study was not only 'actions' of people, but their emotions, interpretations, reflections and perceptions of these actions. This sociology of experience shows that people's individual stories and ideas about work and a greater diversity of interpretations of their own work given by workers themselves, show that in all layers of society a subjectivation process is going on, in which all people are engaging not only their actions, but the reflection on their actions has shifted from being an internal and private process for each person individually but it has also become an issue to share with others. Sharing of experience has become a sociological phenomenon.

The sharing of experiences through publication has been evolving since the 1990-ies as well. In the early 1990ies at the time that many businesses went global, and became multinationals, we noticed that in the field of bookpublishing a counterphenomenon was occurring. (Geelhoed,2007) Due to development in technology, desktop publishing, evolvment of internet, publishers would be able to become selfsufficient. Also development in printing sector made the making of books less expensive. This led to a democratization in the field of sharing of stories: not only established writhers or established publishers related were able to make books, also people who would like to share their experiences, their memories had the opportunity to make their own books. This development of selfpublishing, and the development of micro businesses in the field of bookpublishing showed that also books for a small public could be published.



In France, next to the established publishing houses in Saint Germain des Prés in Paris, many very small local and regional publishing houses were created as of 1980ies. They would show another point of view with regard to general and nationally conceived stories.

Memories of colonial wars, collective memories of adaptation to the French National identity were published. Books in Breton language would be published not to be read to a large number of people, but to show and express cultural difference and show existence of the past culture in present day, a presence in the public sphere. (Geelhoed, 2007). The publisher became in this perspective a social actor enabling the entrance in the public sphere of collective imaginaries, of memory of past events. So that these experiences and past social trauma found their way from the inner world to the outside world. In fact, we saw sociology of experience in action, showing counter stories with regard to the generally accepted national historiography, or the stories of established intellectuals.

## Narrative Accountability as Responsible Professionalism

Accountability is related to the professionalism.

In fact professionals need to give account for their actions. They are held accountable for the activities they have realized. Accountability is however most of the time a top down term. You need to be accountable to someone who is supervising the project, or someone who finances the project. They exercise the role of management and control. Are professionals realizing what they promised they would do? The question we would like to ask is: are the persons who are in control still aware of the needs and experiences of people for whom the projects are meant for? New public management strategies in public governance show that the sphere of the political operates more and more as the economic and technocratic sphere.

The notion of accountability has become a managerial act, overestimating bookkeeping, checks and balances, costs, and benefits.

In cultural and community settings accountability should be considered not only to be a check on a juridical, financial or managerial basis, but should be a notion of common responsibility, a moral and ethical act of reciprocity. Did we do the right thing of the right people at the right time ?

In order to realize a narrative account next to the managerial and financial account, it is important to measure the overall quality of interventions as a common responsibility and as a common learning process. We can do this through the collecting of stories of lived experiences, through giving people a voice about actual project realization, expectations and future improvements, formulation of new needs or ideas for common activities.

Accountability should not only be meant for measurement of financial or political successes and failures but should foremost be dealing with the change and development with and for people in cultural and community settings. To measure this, stories of lived experience become necessary elements shift the balance to the impact of policy, politics and of our projects on the lives of people. Accountability should therefore not only be seen as an issue to be represented in numbers but also in words as a narrative account, as a story and as an act of shared responsibility of organisations in the social and cultural fields with the people who benefit from the projects.

The English language opens the possibility of both. This means that the questions we would ask are: How do people appreciate the realization of a project? Is the project or ideas we realize responding to the needs of the people we work for? What are the social and cultural impact of projects on people's lives of what we contributed to it? In that sense, accountability is also related to social impact of activities, on a notion of caring and sharing. It involves a powershift and a shift in perspective and thinking about our own actions and our own live vision.



## 2. The NACCS Project

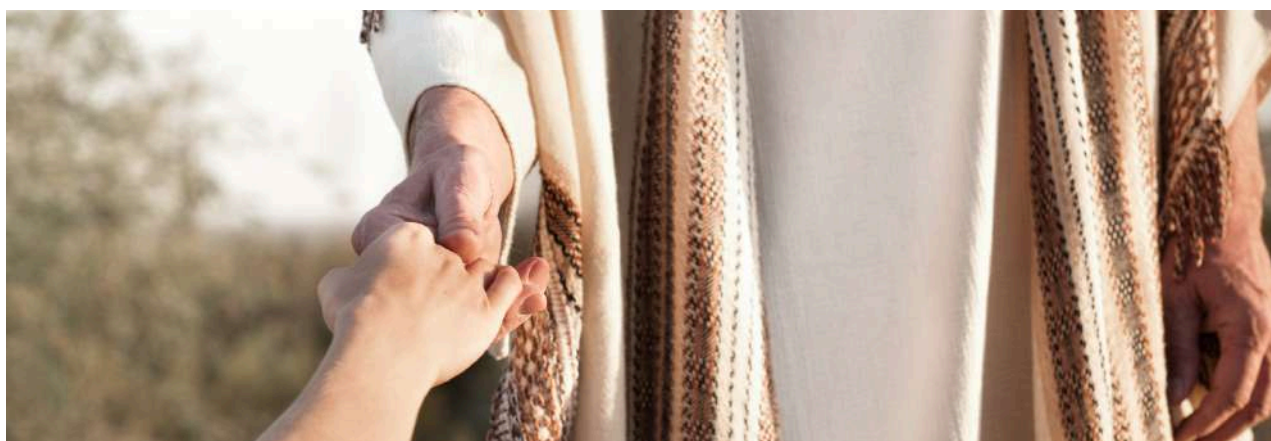
What the project NACCS envisages is the valorization of stories and the impact on the lives of people in the accountability processes, so that people for whom projects are actually meant have a say in successes and failures of projects. It therefore calls upon common responsibility and a shift of power, in which institutions and (political and policy) representatives are taking account of experiential knowledge about the impact of policy and of projects on the lives of people.

This would help to reconsider the focus of the actual neo-liberal ideology and - system based on costs and benefit balance, financial controlling, eternal growth, benefits and efficiency to the necessity of logics of care, of human development, care for environment, including respect for the living on earth and sharing responsibility for that.

**Narrative accountability (how to bring about what the process of meaning of interventions/policies were for people? And translate it to new proposals for future policy and production of new democratic forms?)**

Draws on the achievement of bringing about the results of evaluation of activities based on experience of people, upon their voice and their appreciation of services delivered by (local) government. But how can these stories be translated into policymaking cycles? How can these stories told in the words of each person be translated in an other collective story of all, but also in such a form that not only policy makers, and highly intellectual and skilled people can understand what it is about.

The project on narrative accountability that we are proposing is related to the quest for other ways of representing what happens in the reality, in real life of people, in words, image, photo, film and drawing. How can research reports, policy documents and decision making documents represent in an adequate and understandable way what is needed and what next steps in the project should be? In this project we would like to propose an innovative ways of developmental narrative accountability, in which all stakeholders, all groups, people, involved are able to contribute. In fact, the texts we produce are a product and a power tool, because they are only understandable for the ones who can understand the language of the powerful, the scientific jargon, the political jargon. How can layered products be made to produce accounts of policy in a gradually developed tower of stories and collective giving of meaning ?





## Sense of urgency

Present day society is full of stories, of lies and experiences. Populist discourse, the community rhetoric of antidemocratic leaders rule the world. They found common ground in mistrust of people in political and policy representation. They promise a new ideal world. They use stories for propaganda and produce a story for control. Their story is clear, but based on simplicity in a complex world.

1

Narrative accountability is actually what is needed in present day policy making cycles and accountability structures. Attempts are being done to work on policy development with communities, in design phase and evaluation phase of policy making.

2

Narrative accountability asks for a process of subjectivation and human dignity. It refers to a reflexive attitude towards the writing, translation of experiences into a (written) document: stories are a live? If we collate them, we fix them: the researcher, policy maker, etc. Makes his own story out of it...

3

Narrative accountability is a process based activity, in which people are involved to produce change from the grassroots, it asks for ownership of community in the process of use of stories and experiences to draw the future, to write a new common history.

4

Narrative accountability, is a process in which stories are gathered and collated, becoming a shared story for and about communities. In this sense, narrative accountability works through notions of shared experience, shared imaginary, in order to produce shared representations of the self and others, leading in the end to equitable representation of all in the political sense, and there with also to change the fundamentals of democracy and human development.

5

Narrative accountability asks for a multiple approach to language, using words, images, other types of communication, so that the story based upon stories of others is understandable/recognisable for the ones who told their stories in the beginning. (In policymaking field this would mean that those for whom policy is meant should be able to understand what the document is about. This asks for New forms of reporting (visual accountability, films, websites and not only written paper)

Do all partner organizations have the same view on the importance of narrative accountability and the notions of accountability? We discovered at one of the meetings that in the Netherlands that is governed by a strong technocratic government based on advanced digital technology in public services and policy making, standardizing accountability of projects and asking for detailed and quantified proof that projects are realized in a proper way. In Italy these questions were not that pertinent.

## General findings after 18 months project

We discovered now that we are working together for 18 months that the project is not only about sharing of new practices with people, but it is also an introspective process for each of us as professionals and individuals and of our own organizations about how we wish to develop and evolve in society. How do we value the stories of the unlucky people, the have-nots, the one's who are not heard or seen in the mainstreams politics?

### Realizations

To make a valuable and innovative toolkit for accountability, we worked on:

①

A general inventory about how in our countries were are obliged to realize accountability June to September 2022.

②

Exploring different digital storytelling techniques, in LTTA in Rome and online community reporting training September in Rome.

③

Reflecting and analysing the representations in narratives, in our own community reports and digital stories; producing our own images in photos of notions we need to be accountable of such as inclusion, looking at art and getting inspired by the importance of showing what we see in our own visual expression, February 2023 in Amsterdam and Amstelveen.

④

Sharing our stories in life and developing ideas about the strengths of fragility in line of what Nussbaum said that certain moral truths are best expressed in the form of a story: "We become merciful, when we behave as the "concerned reader of a novel," understanding each person's life as a "complex narrative of human effort in a world full of obstacles."

### How narratives, stories, and lived experience of people play a role in accountability processes

During the project implementation, CRN sometimes employs specific tools with partners:

- project journey envisioning /Hero's Journey (at the beginning and at the end of the project).

It's a storytelling methods to get everyone on board, understand expectations, create common vision.

This can be done also in later stages of the project.

- Theory of Change - a story a project tells about how we think it's gonna make an impact (a story looking forward) or how it has made an impact (a story looking backwards). It's a causal story that speaks to people.

For example, in Horizon2020 project EUARENAS we implemented an action planning method that is based on the Theory of Change. We encouraged the cities to create their action plans by organising a co-creation event with their stakeholders and team members, and to try to think about their pilots by starting to identify the main impacts they expect to achieve.

Then, based on the impacts they were asked to identify outcomes, outputs and the actions and inputs necessary to achieve them. At the end they identified the links between all these elements. While discussing about the pilot, they co-created the main elements of the Action plans, that after was described in a more structured way with the help of a template.

In another project, **Narratives of Impact**, each participant (usually staff member, project managers), record a video account about the meeting or training.

These stories are then posted on our project website (under Vlog).



We have been working with narratives, (digital) storytelling and critical thinking. We find that a story is always a good way to communicate about the project to external audience, because people engage with stories. The digital element makes it easier to disseminate on social media and Internet in general. This is however not a standard accountability method, but more an “non formal” accountability for us as an organisation, and for our target groups.

Very often, our partnership is also the target group of our projects - the staff members, trainers, educators. In those cases, we always have ongoing reflections during project implementation.

For example, an already mentioned project Narratives of Impact (it addresses the storytelling as a methods to create and measure social impact), we have a vlog - after each meeting, partners make little video reflections about the process.

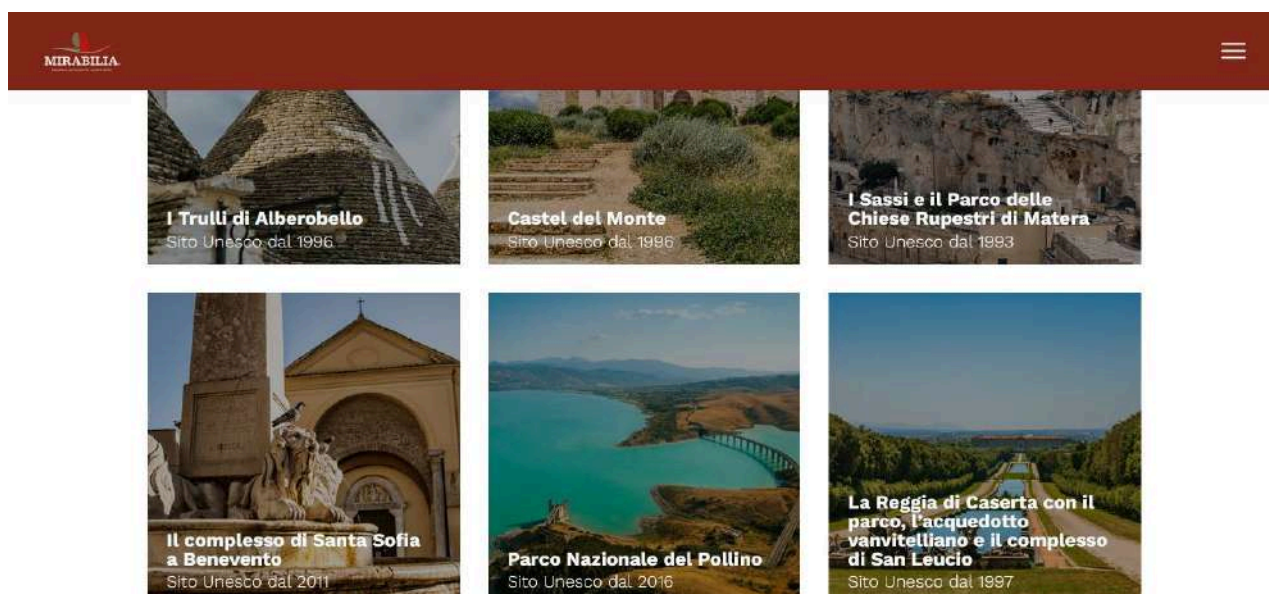
In other cases where we work with communities, or deliver trainings to specific target groups (e.g. young people, people with migrant backgrounds etc.), we perform evaluations. Different methods can be used.

#### *Some examples:*

- Kieztraum: as the last step of the project, we had co-creation workshops to draft action plans based on the needs assessment together with community members (information collected during the project using various community narration methods).
- In trainings: learner diaries, questionnaires, comfy groups at the end of the day
- For needs assessment: empathy interviews

We find it very valuable to include the target group into the accountability and evaluation of the project, as it gives us real time honest feedback. When done during the implementation, it gives us a possibility to reassess the process, make changes when possible.

The **Mirabilia** project stands out for enhancing and presenting innovative ideas that have been realized or are being implemented in all the sectors involved (culture, tourism, food and wine, artistic craftsmanship and technological innovation). It also wants to highlight the importance of the interconnectedness between the different contexts so that each one allows to gain advantage and support from the affirmation of others.



In this context, the enhancement of real success stories plays a fundamental role with reference to responsibility. Success stories serve as easily available information for the impact of the project. In addition, they also serve as tools for communication and marketing of the activities carried out and the results achieved.

The path to enhancing the cultural heritage and tourism as outlined by the Mirabilia project was pursued by The Chamber of Commerce of Basilicata into the winning experience of Matera European Capital of Culture 2019, favouring - in the wake of collaboration with the Matera Basilicata 2019 Foundation - the creation of a broad network with a series of national actors and international organizations such as musical and theatrical foundations, parks, universities, as well as with the 131 Lucanian municipalities, stimulating a process of collective growth of the skills and knowledge of the cultural ecosystem of Matera and Basilicata.

In this context, the following themes were valued:

- the millennial relationship of humanity with space;
- the redemption of Matera between the past and the distant future;
- the rediscovery of the value of time and the slowness of the forests of the Pollino Park;
- the lever of memory and the wise use of technologies;
- food and wine as an identity factor of a territory;
- communities as protagonists of a change



## The start: July-August 2021. Inventory how do we work on accountability and on narratives?

We saw similarities and differences between partners in the NACCS project.

All partners emphasized the necessity of clear internal processes, related to financial flows and book keeping. Also external accountability to public organizations, local and national government, EU funding schemes were explored.

As one of the partners underlined in the online questionnaire we shared:

It is a rather 'dry' and standard way of reporting that would not be really understandable to external stakeholders without any context.

Almost all the reports have standard questions regarding the management, communication, implementation of the project results, timesheets of the project team and the budget that has been claimed and spent.

What came out of this inventory is that narrative accountability becomes easier and logic to realize if the project content in itself is based upon participatory purposes, empowerment and voicing. CRN gave an interesting example on Kieztraum, a neighbourhood project in which "The Comparative Research Network saw itself in this project as a moderator and initiator who, as a mentor, supports the residents in finding their own voices, generating their own solutions and implementing them directly within the scope of their possibilities".

This project was an example about how impact, stories and accountability were actually realized in one project, as the topic was about selforganization and civic engagement of people in the neighbourhood. The introduction of narrative tools helped the community to develop strategies for reframing places with negative image into positive ones.

NACCS partner in Rome, **Melting Pro**, underlined that the accountability deals with the dry stuff: how to get the money to do the real stuff in practice. The project realization and the narrative side of it actually deals with impact of a project in a social or cultural context. We engaged a conversation about the difference between impact and accountability and what the role of narrative accountability should be. We came up with the idea that narrative accountability actually combines both elements, valorizing the impact on lives of people in the dry processes of costs-benefits account on the one hand, and the realization of contractual agreements, project requirements as stated. Does the agenda we set correspond with the project we realized?



# Changing the story: An alternative approach to system change in public service innovation

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**Abstract:**

Storytelling is a powerful instrument for system change. Telling stories of lived experience, listening to them, and sharing them contributes to a culture of trust based on dignity, mutual respect and shared values. In this paper we draw attention to public service innovation and co-creation with the people the service is meant for. In the past years, public service innovation was result and output driven, targeting technological and managerial innovation. Stories of service users revealed the unintended negative consequences of such innovation policies and opened new perspectives for conversations of change based on shared values leading to innovations based on human development and dignity.

**Keywords:**

Storytelling, system change, dignity, narratives, action research, user voice, social innovation, service innovation, public services, personalization, human development, culture of trust, cocreation

## Introduction

In this article we will show how storytelling as an alternative approach contributes to a process of system change and innovation of public services. We argue that listening to stories and making them visible, contributes to 1) opportunities for seeing issues from different perspectives and avoiding unintended negative outcomes of (public) social service delivery for people who depend upon them and 2) opening up conversations for system change and the redesign of public services with all actors, including citizens for whom the service was intended.

**In section 1**, we will explain how Community Reporting was used within the framework of the CoSIE as an instrument to engage collective sensemaking and Participatory Action Research within a larger experimental research and action project about innovation of social services through co-creation practices.

**In section 2**, we will show how current public service design based on purpose-driven and instrumental rationality (Weber, 1979) sustained by digital technologies, lead to — often unintentionally — added bureaucracy and the dehumanization of services, shown by de-personalization and othering of people for whom the service was designed to support in the first place.

**In section 3**, we address how stories, by connecting people at an empathic level and sharing personal experiences, encourage changes of mindset and behavior. Actors in different roles and positions develop common awareness on the essence of public service, its purpose and values, namely in supporting citizens in meaningful ways. Narratives in this instance are being used as instruments for service innovation and contribute to identification and acknowledgement of cracks in the system that produce social injustice instead of reducing it.

**In section 4**, we will apply Community Reporting as a storytelling technique within CoSIE in a broader perspective and relate our findings to the wider calling for paradigm shift within public governance as introduced by Rosanvallon (2015, 2020) and Wieviorka (2020).

Storytelling invites all actors to think and reflect together, offering possibilities for reframing service innovation and thus introduce storytelling as a narrative intervention within public services (Tesselaar, 2018), and a tool through which change can happen here and now.



## Methodology

Broadly based on the Cynefin decision-making framework for complex environments (Snowden and Boone, 2007), Community Reporting has been applied in the CoSIE Horizon 2020 project as a tool for supporting co-creation within innovation process of public services across Europe. From probation services through to the health sector, Community Reporting has supported services to have better insight into the worlds of the citizens they are supporting — providing them the space to set the agenda about what matters to them, open dialogue between different actors and perspectives and enable reflection from both people accessing services and the people working in them to support on-going learning and service development.

Within the CoSIE project scheme, over 250 stories of lived experiences of people who access services and public servants of different types of public services(1) were collected, curated and analyzed. The present article is based on this data set and gives insight in the need for fundamental system innovation based on a paradigm shift from instrumental rationality to value rationality. Furthermore, we draw on observations in several professional networks in the Netherlands (Narrative Accountability Network, DiVoSA network on Responsive Civil Servants) and several projects run by the People's Voice Media and Community Reporters Movement.

### *Innovative social science research in CoSIE*

Community Reporting emerged in 2007 as a digital story telling instrument to express voices of people who are not heard. It is born from community action and evolved to a useful and innovative tool in interpretative and participatory action research schemes.

Thus, throughout the years, Community Reporting developed across Europe as a mixed methodological approach both based on community development and action on the one hand and research in and about communities on the other hand. Community Reporting through the organization of People's Voice Media contributed in participatory (action) research, co-producing policy, service development and citizen engagement in decision-making and governance processes. Use of storytelling and Arts Based Research Methods (Leavy, 2007; Van Heijst et al. (2019); Geelhoed, 2019, Grieder, 2013) also show that we can speak of a "narrative turn" in the social sciences (Jackson, 2015). In fact, academic knowledge and practical (professional) knowledge are combined with experiential knowledge, incorporating stories of the heart into the study of social realities.

As Glasby (2011) and Durose et al (2013) have suggested, lived experience storytelling — such as Community Reporting — highlights how lived experience and knowledge-based practice can be used in the settings listed above and contribute to deeper and more accurate information about people's lives. Storytelling in this realm, as Durose et al (2013) argues, allows for the representation of "different voices and experiences in an accessible way". Knowledge production and sharing becomes a practice for all and not exclusively for researchers or intellectuals.

This human approach to doing research was one of the basic purposes of CoSIE project, integrating practical innovation with learning strategies both for citizens, professionals, and researchers.

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(1) CoSIE consortium is composed of academic partners and professional organizations and social services in Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the UK. For more information.

The telling of and listening to stories through Community Reporting and peer-to-peer dialogue techniques create the possibility to share earnest and personal stories. Using audiovisual media and art-based interventions ensure that the information is transmitted through readable text. Audiovisual techniques involve all senses in understanding and interpreting the story (Geelhoed, 2019).

Within the CoSIE project, we used peer-to-peer dialogue interview techniques and collective sense-making activities based broadly on discourse analysis (Brown and Yule, 1983) and notions of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Tummers and Karsten, 2012). Affiliation with interpretative and sensemaking traditions in qualitative research was combined with emancipatory and critical research tradition that was based on action research. In fact, Community Reporting was used to analyze actions and behavior and engage action, thus exploring ways for positive change for both people who access services, professionals and the public services involved. This mixed methodology has provided a framework through which divergent and varied lived experiences of public services — through both the lens of professionals and citizens — can be amassed and synthesized into a set of learnings and findings. This dataset underpins the findings and arguments of this article.

### **The unintended consequences of instrumental rationality in public services**

The CoSIE project was developed to propose innovation of public services based on co-creation with the citizens for whom the service was meant. In fact, this is a value-based experimental approach to innovation and asks of all actors involved to listen, not to judge and attribute equal importance to perspectives of all. It positions itself against the regular perception of (smart) innovation that is related to technological applications and data driven solutions to improve service delivery. CoSIE is in line with the findings of the Smart Urban Intermediaries project (Van Hulst et al. 2019; 2021) that focuses on innovation and development of cities, neighborhoods, services based on citizen's initiatives, valuing "smart people", their stories and actions.

It relates to the idea that innovation is not about best practices only but also about best persons (Van den Brink et al., 2012), able to connect people and, by doing so, make needed community and common projects happen. This perception of innovation involves a bottom-up approach, following needs and energies of people at a given place and period of time. It also shows the importance of evolving, growing, and building together, tackling the issues at stake when they occur and using new technologies when appropriate or needed to improve people's quality of life.

The very essence of the public cause, and therefore of public services, is based on human values and meant to organize solidarity, inclusion, social justice, and equality for all citizens, rich or poor, young or old, established or an outsider or newcomer. It comes down to the idea that political representatives and public servants are at service of the community and are accountable to them. This notion of public value was at the heart of the development of national welfare states in the aftermath of World War II. It was the guiding rationality for the setting up of a care system for citizens within modern national states (De Swaan, 1988). This collective arrangement implied a new working area, bureaucracy to organize it and curation by the state.

However, this way of looking at responsibility of the state and human progress in terms of social equality and solidarity has become under pressure. In fact, the western idea of progress has been accompanied by a growing importance given to instrumental rationality (Zweckrational) over value rationality (Wertrational).(2)

Flyvbjerg (2004) calls this "the Rationalist Turn, meaning the narrowing of modern society's notion of rationality to a predominantly instrumental one" (Flyvbjerg, 2004:53). This specific idea of progress and modernization has led to technological innovation and produced economic and financial growth, which has been profitable and was seen as the best way for future development. In fact, due to (economic) globalization processes, this national welfare system was difficult to maintain.

Gradually, value rationality, proper to political and social actions, slipped to the background within public institutions guided by liberal views based on minimal state interference. Instrumental rationality based on measurable purpose, efficiency, cost and benefit analysis gradually became the way to go in the political sphere and for how the state and local authorities would act. During the 1980s and 1990s, state-owned companies were privatized, such as banks, postal services, or public transport. The state and governmental logics became gradually dominated by instrumental rationality out of technological and economic spheres (Fox, 2017).

This development is also visible in the use of language in politics and policy making. Nicolina Montesano Montessori (2016, 2019) made a critical analysis of policy discourses. She stated that using terms such as human capital to speak about EU-citizens shows depersonalization and instrumentalization of the citizen to the functioning of system empowered by capital. On local levels, citizens who claim rightful financial support from public services would not be called citizens but beneficiaries or even service users, a term directly borrowed from the ICT sector. Public servants would call the citizens they assist clients or customers, which implies a relationship based on financial or economic transactions. Public institutions who were responsible to realize public services or realize social assistance or social care were obliged to reply to "open calls for proposals" on how to realize public services, giving a detailed project plan with a budget, showing provisional cost and benefit analysis.

In fact, as a Dutch public servant would underline already in 2015: "local authorities operate as social investors. We do a call for tender for the realization of social policy plans" (interview, 2015). Organizations can offer proposals. If they win the bid, local authorities have a controlling role in asking for proofs of accountability and social return on investment. The very term of accountability asks for measurable proof. These terms show that local and national authorities organized themselves like businesses (Geelhoed, 2017).

In-line with this, a 2020 policy briefing based on data sets from Community Reporter Movement (Davies et al., 2020) of over 350 lived experience stories of citizens across Europe found that "process has replaced common sense, and protocol had replaced humanity" within services. The process referenced is borrowed from the processing and splitting up of tasks proper to tech processes. The authors suggest that this was caused by three intrinsically linked notions: bureaucracy, depersonalization, and othering (Davies et al.,2020).

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(2) See Max Weber's classic study about *Economy and Society*, in which he outlines a classification of types of action, *Zweckrational* (instrumental rationality) and *Wertrational* (value rationality). We draw on the English Translation of *Economy and Society* by the University of Berkeley Press, 1978.

These three characteristics of how services would operate create a void between service and citizen. In fact, this barren process ultimately leads to “decision-making without empathy” based on instruments and evaluation tools rather than on human needs and human dignity. In the end, this way of working, although based on rational approach, tends to be ineffective. These conclusions based on the analysis of a dataset based on stories of lived experience show that public services have drifted away from their essential value, organize solidarity with those who need support to guarantee existence.

This is not to suggest that good pockets of practice and work do not exist in public services or that good public servants or services do not exist. It is rather to say that, overall, there has been an unforeseen consequence of years of instrumental thinking and rational choices borrowed from business, consultancy, and technology. This trend shows that humanity and relationships were valued less than the managerial structures that govern the services.

Hereafter we will highlight through the stories told in the CoSIE-project the negative impact of bureaucracy, depersonalization and othering on public services and why system change, at a fundamental level, is needed and secondly, demonstrate how storytelling as value-based practice can be one element to support system change and bringing back value rationality in public services and moreover in the political sphere.

### *Bureaucracy and the dehumanization of public services*

**Loss of personal connection.** In Valencia, the CoSIE project proposed to co-create a business development and entrepreneur hub with and for unemployed people. To develop this new type of service, stories were gathered from people who were currently unemployed to better understand their needs and how current provision was working for them.

One of the people involved in this stated that “there is a lot of information online that doesn’t feel helpful”. She is “stuck at the moment due to bureaucracy”. She felt that current services “lack empathy or connection” with the people who are contacting them. The result for persons like her is the feeling that the dream of running a successful enterprise may be unachievable. This quote shows that people do not feel encouraged in realizing the project they have in mind. They lose not only confidence in the service, but also self-confidence.

**Anonymity.** Bureaucracy in public services takes on several forms. This case stresses the problem of anonymous online administrative processes that hinder the effective workings of service. Although accessibility was one of the European goals of national states of e-governance and internet in public services, no reciprocal interpersonal contact was established, which left the service inefficient.

**Risky benefits.** The pilot in the Houten municipality in the Netherlands focused on the matching between the long-term unemployed persons and available jobs. At the start of the CoSIE-project, many jobs were available in the municipality. However, long-term unemployed persons, receiving social assistance benefits, did not find their way back to paid work. Community Reporting stories revealed a “broken” benefits and jobseeker system. The stories show that the unemployed persons were scared, confused and angry. They ended up in unsuitable jobs or even in debt because of the system organization. One individual describes that she was employed for a limited number of hours and that her scarce income was supplemented by the state, until the level of minimum allowance was reached.

These benefits were due to stop when she received another job and higher income. Eventually, she was without enough income to run her car— which was essential to the job she had found.



This pushed her to move to a more unsuitable job closer to home. This was unfortunate as the job she was in had been able to offer more hours if she could have stayed and waited for six months. This person describes the legislation as “discouraging and counterproductive,” and the system itself as “a necessary evil” which they felt offered them no support. In this example, it is shown how the social services are dealing with indicators designed behind a desk and based on received income only. The experience of this person, having extra expenses to get to work, are not taken into account and leaves her with less income than while receiving social benefits. Newcomers in Houten are often long-term unemployed people. Integration in Dutch society through work is highly promoted. However, within the same dataset, a group of Eritrean women point to the system and its bureaucracy as being confusing. One woman spoke of her experience when she was 22. Having received refugee status, she was given a house to live in as well as benefits. However, a year later she received a letter from the tax office demanding her to repay €3,000, an amount of money she did not have. She eventually managed to get help from a local welfare organisation but this took a lot of time and effort.

She blames the lack of information available at the start of the process: “You find out because it happens to you, but you really should have this information in advance.” Another woman in the group suggested that the language barrier is an issue as the information that is available online is only in Dutch. The language barrier also makes fixing the problem a slower process. Another woman added that they wait in fear for what might happen with their benefits. She said her community understands that earning a certain amount causes you to lose rights to certain benefits, but they have no idea what that amount is or how it works in practice. Another Eritrean woman who is a single mother shared a similar story.

After three years of working every day in order to have independence for herself and her children, she received a letter saying she should reimburse a huge amount of money that she did not have — all because she did not have the rules properly explained to her. She felt that no one in the service would take responsibility for the problems caused. When she explained to the tax office that because of this she couldn’t afford to pay rent or buy food for her children, she was simply told to go to the food bank rather than being offered practical solutions. She became emotional when she said: “Nobody has a voice in a free country. Only those in power at the unemployment services. With one strike of a pen they mess up your lives.” She now believes it’s better not to work. “You remain dependent, but you stay out of problems.” This sense of the system being broken also comes through powerfully in another person’s story about his business failing, leaving him broke and homeless. He felt that the lack of support from the system at the start made his situation worse. This has left them as a “ghost citizen”. At first, he was refused support because his case wasn’t considered “bad enough”, but then when the situation escalated, when he got personally indebted and lost his house, he could not access support anymore because he was not registered in the system. This was because he no longer had a postal address of his own. Asking for benefits while sleeping on the couch with friends would shorten benefits or social assistance from them.

This former entrepreneur was put under pressure from employment services to accept a job in a factory despite not having any means of travelling to the role. He was told he would not be allowed any benefits if he did not accept the job. He found himself in a Kafkaesque situation.

This case shows how the bureaucratic system becomes authoritarian if instrumental judgement takes over and human relation and values are cut out of decision-making process. The public servant applies the rules based on criteria, measures and ruling defined beforehand.

It does not take the context of the person into consideration. This person wants to work but is unable to because of the system and the negative spiral he came into.

This sort of paradox is another example of a system that works against itself, causing individuals to be forgotten because they do not fit neatly into one box or another. The system's criteria and indicators seem to produce injustice and enhance the initial problem instead of solving issues that can happen in the life course of any person.

### *Depersonalization and loss of dignity*

With bureaucratic systems like this in place, it is unsurprising that depersonalization occurs. The stories above show that personal needs are not being listened to. In fact, the anonymous treatment of people as being cases made people feel that they lost their dignity as human beings. The services who were supposed to support them were largely ineffective and even caused more problems. This leads to loss of trust in public services and in political representation and eventually in the democratic system.

The UK pilot sought to enhance personalization in probation services through cocreation. It was shown in many of the stories that a personal approach is necessary and that "one size doesn't fit all". This was shown literally in the following story. A woman in probation was made to do paid work in boots that were too big. In fact, the type of unpaid work she was allocated was usually done by men. She was the only female on the unpaid work site and felt uncomfortable with the "sexism" experienced on the site. She describes her experience and says she "was very scared to be honest... it was really hard". Although she eventually received boots of her own size and she gained more acceptance in the all male group, the woman was not as positive about her experience at the worksite. Her personal needs as a female — practically and socially — were not met from the start.

Echoing sentiments of this, another woman on probation detailed the importance for probation services to understand how older women on probation feel and to recognize their needs. She wished that probation workers had "treated [her] more like an adult, not like a teenager" and understood issues such as domestic violence that had played a factor in her prosecution. The experience of probation made her feel "belittled" and she felt that it would have been good if her intelligence had been acknowledged. This also shows that, in this case, the probation system is organized in such a way that no room is left for subjective experience and personal capabilities. This harms personal dignity and self-confidence. This understanding is paramount to enabling people to turn their lives around.

As one worker explained, "it's about unpacking what has happened in the past to move forward". For them, hearing people's stories should be seen as "privilege" as people trust them with details about their lives. It is through building these relationships of trust and understanding of the people they are supporting that professionals are in position to help people to make positive changes in their lives.

However, a number of the workers who shared their experiences of working in probation found that, in many instances, the system itself works against this more human and relational approach. They argue that they are confronted with many changes that occur in the service as part of system reforms. Sometimes, staff members feel they are in a constant process of change that is hard to handle. This leaves them uncertain about their professionalism in the way to support people in probation. One worker outlined that the number of cases they need to handle and the computerization of the process has negative consequences on the quality of personal support. He said: "There's far too much computer work".

The increase in cases has left him feeling like he “doesn’t know whether [they] are coming or going”. Furthermore, the computer system in this specific service was often not available due to technical issues. With all the records being stored on it, it made it difficult for workers to do their job when they could not access it. They don’t remember the faces of the people they support and, in consequence, they cannot develop a personalized service to those people who depend on it. How, for example, can you build a relationship with someone if you don’t know who they are? In this case the computer prevents the worker from developing a genuine interpersonal relationship.

### *Tech control as self-control*

The Italian pilot focuses on reducing childhood obesity. Through storytelling they aimed at gaining a better understanding of how families — parents and children — saw their health and wellbeing. A female child talked about a fitness bracelet she had on at the time of the storytelling. She displayed a high level of awareness about the function of the bracelet and also of her parents’ deception in its presentation. She had been told that the bracelet was a present from her grandmother. However, she knew she had it because she was part of “the program” about obesity. She also knew that the bracelet connects to her mother’s phone. She revealed the impact that the bracelet had on her behavior. She wore it through-out the night so that the bracelet can continue to count her steps when she gets up in the night and first thing in the morning.

While technology may appear to present easy solutions to monitor health and activity in anti-obesity programs, this story reminds us of its unintended consequences. In fact, through tech we may produce new panopticons (Foucault) in which people exercise self-discipline and gradually lose confidence. The idea of being watched leads to the internalization of other behavior, self-discipline and eventually to self-control. Ultimately it changes behavior but also represents a loss of self-esteem and subjective judgement. E-health monitoring and control impact the feeling of safety and the psychological state of individuals, especially young people, who are depending on the positive encouragement to develop themselves as independent and free adults. Furthermore, it highlights that what is a solution for one person, is not necessarily a solution for someone else and, in fact, could have a negative impact. Following this story, the bracelet was taken away from the child and work was done to reverse any negative consequences of the initial approach.

### *Othering in public services*

At its worst, a lack of personalization in services can lead to “othering”. This is when the service no longer sees the people they are serving as people and they instead become numbers on a spreadsheet. It is at this point that the humanity, compassion and empathy within a system ceases to exist. In the Swedish pilot, asylum seekers — a group that generally has the least power in society — shared their experiences of public services. One asylum seeker talked about “feeling powerless” with “fate being in the hands of the authorities”.

He had been told he will have to return to Afghanistan soon. This makes him fear having no family, fear for his life, but he has no say in his situation. Another asylum seeker felt he was “running out of hope” and used his story to plead with the authorities to put themselves in his shoes before deciding on his case.

Awareness of both past trauma and on-going mental anguish that accompanies the uncertainty of an asylum seeker’s situation is therefore paramount for services to be able to provide effective and approachable support.

Empathy emerges as a key value that individuals seek and have a right to expect from the services supporting them. However, in these instances the consequences of the decisions being made by services on the current lives of people (i.e. negative impact on people's mental health) and future potential consequences (i.e. persecution in their home countries) does not seem to be factored into how asylum seekers are being supported.

Instead, the people within these services make decisions without really connecting to how they impact the people. In fact, the overall austerity policy and defined quota and budget lines are leading. Decision-making about their fate is being anonymized by becoming administrative decisions. In short, the asylum seekers who shared their experiences with us are not being seen. They have become case numbers, not human beings.

When people are "othered", they often feel powerless to affect any kind of change and this leads people to lose hope. One woman who shared her experience as part of the Dutch pilot described feeling "bossed around" by the housing support services. This eventually led to her turning down support from them. This story demonstrates how the ways of interacting with service providers can compound the existing feelings of powerlessness, thus render the services ineffective. They fail to help those that they are supposed to support.

This again is proper to instrumental and purpose-driven ways of organizing public services and calls for re-emphasizing on treatment in line with principles of equality, empathy and humanity. The woman also mentioned that trust in the public service is connected to proper communication between public service staff and the sharing of information about issues at stake, so that the staff has the proper information on what is relevant and important for people that day. Not being listened to or not being seen as a person within institutions ultimately leads to distrust in the institutions that are there to govern and support society.

The stories above show the importance of human-centred approaches and shared ethical values, related to reciprocity, dignity, recognition of personal problems. We will show in the next section how storytelling can contribute to changing the system.

### *Changing the system: Putting the heart back into public services Value rationality*

The Community Reporter stories gathered do also detail how services are (and can be) delivered in a more human way. In Finland, the pilot explored solutions to youth marginalization — in essence, young people who were not in education or training, and where "drifting" through life. Many of the young people we spoke to as part of the story gathering process felt like outsiders with no purposes in life and were calling out for someone to talk too. The process of telling their stories through community reporting represented a first step to personal recognition and dignity.

As one young man who is living "a life that sucks" stated: "If I could have someone to talk to and something to do with in my life", that would help. Similarly, one young man who felt isolated due to social exclusion because of his looks and ways of being, suggests that "it would help to have a service where someone connects a few people to meet and get to know each other". Other young people's stories echo this sentiment, with one suggesting having a "cup of coffee" with other young people like them would help. These more social or community forms of support reach people who aren't currently engaged with traditional services.



Making such services feel more informal and less like a service would be key to this type of support. A young man who moved to Finland from Somalia as a teenager said that the family home he was put into when he arrived didn't really feel like a service. Another Somalian man who moved when he was young stated that although he provides immigrants support in accessing services via the official support services, many people would come to his shop for more informal advice and support, instead of contacting the formal services. Support within familiar or community settings would help to engage some of the marginalized (young) people and help them to identify and then address their needs.

In the Spanish pilot, the focus was to support unemployed people — particularly those who were long-term unemployed or at a greater distance from the labor market — to set up their own enterprises. One of the stakeholders involved states that services for unemployed people should seek to “empower” them and be supportive. It is important for such services to understand that “the long-term unemployed people carry an emotional load, and it is important to work on their capabilities and skills”.

This understanding has been factored into the pilot and has had several benefits to the people accessing the service. A large part of the support provided by the pilot revolves around the mentoring of the participants. As one person explained: “We felt tremendous support from the mentors and so we have achieved things that without being here would have been impossible. The atmosphere here is very healthy, very calm and colleagues are always willing to help”. This way of working creates an enabling environment which makes it possible for their business ideas and themselves as individuals to flourish.

The mentoring is achieved formally by the appointed business mentors and informally by the peer network that the co-working space has created. Both approaches contribute to the supportive environment that the person is referring to. Both have been instrumental in enabling people to development both personally, and professionally, as part of the pilot.

A key part of this, as one person acknowledges, is the “real, practical support” that the mentoring provides. It has given her a “grounding” and made the idea of running her own business “real” and “doable”. Furthermore, as one person stated, it is not the same to start alone as it is to have some support: “For me it's been of great support. I have no family who are entrepreneurs so to have those mentors has been of enormous help in how to continue and progress”.

In essence, the pilot is successfully reaching out to people who would not usually engage with start-up project and support and offering them opportunities for economic and personal development that they would not have otherwise had access to. Key to this is that the people being supported know that the mentors supporting them care about them (as do the other entrepreneurs around them), and this has been key to building relationships of trust.

### *The strength of togetherness*

This human approach to service delivery centered on relationship building is also evident in the Hungarian pilot that is focused on supporting rural communities to develop household economies. As a member of the Kunszentmárton social cooperative details, co-creation is an important part of the process: “We will prepare it together, we come together, each one of us will have something, and we will do it together.” This succinctly summarizes the spirit of many of the stories, which demonstrate examples of various types of community members coming together to become more self-sustaining by reviving household economy traditions.

Exemplifying this is another Kunszentmárton participant who at a cooking event organized by the social cooperative, was responsible for preparing noodles for the first time, says, "I am very excited, because I feel that I am not yet prepared for it. But we have such a community, we are making the program together. I am in it as a member of a social cooperative, and I really like the other members in the cooperative. I can rely on them, and therefore "I believe it will be all right."

This sense of community support within the areas involved in the pilot is key to enabling people to learn new things and take on new challenges.

One of the key values central in this example are the importance of togetherness, of sharing and the general safety that is provided by the community. People feel encouraged to learn, to ask for help and to experiment with new activities. They feel respected and recognized as individual human beings with their own subjective capabilities, needs and vulnerabilities, which can be shared with others.

### *Recognition of personal capabilities*

In the Netherlands, a man living with autism had previously a negative experience with the support system around employment and taxation. This had impacted severely on his mental health and financial situation. He describes however that another department of the same municipality had been very supportive. He tells about his work in the archives of the municipality, first in a participation role, which was designed to help people with disabilities to find work, before being given a permanent role.

"Since I returned to the municipality in 2017 [in a participation job] I took giant steps in self-development. The municipality learned a lot from me too. They made many modifications. For instance, they gave me extra space for conversation and to walk outside for a while to 'reset'. I needed this in the beginning because now everything goes so well that I don't need it anymore. [...] The municipality gave me a permanent job at the beginning of 2019. There's a lot of work. I feel very comfortable, and I like it a lot. Now working and living are going well for me". He says that the chance he was given by the municipality was "fantastic": "I belong here. They saw that too." This story shows again that being treated as a person, with personal needs and capacities, and not as a case, makes significant differences for people. The public servants who hired him saw beyond his autism to recognize that he as a person was a great fit for the role and organization and gave him what he needed to thrive.

### *Public service delivery is about human values and dignity*

What the instances and ideas outlined in these stories represent is that it is possible to deliver services with humanity based on values such as mutual respect, genuine interest and empathy, based on capabilities of people. To do that, we must ensure that the things that make us human — relationships with others, empathy, emotional intelligence etc. — are at the forefront of service design and delivery. As Davies et al (2020) called for, public services must push back against a culture of "computer says no" and look for nuanced solutions to providing support for the citizens they service. Storytelling — and valuing people's lived experiences — has a role to play in the development of individual and social dignity. Public services should again operate along the lines of value rationality, in which every person feels accepted in his own and unique way and recognized for their personal set of capabilities and skills.

## Storytelling as a motor for system change

Stories of lived experience at the heart of decision making. Within the CoSIE project (and beyond), Community Reporting has been used as a tool for co-creation in different types of public services. What this practice does is put stories — our own personal experiences both as citizens and as professionals — at the centre of discussions and decision-making processes. As has been identified within the CoSIE project, the impact of Community Reporting has mostly been found in the “behaviors and ideologies held by individuals and in the delivery and spaces of services delivered by organizations” (Trowbridge and Willoughby, 2020). As, Trowbridge and Willoughby (2020) suggest:

*Whilst there have been some indicators of wider impact... it is unsurprising that systemic impact is an area where little change has occurred. This is because this type of change and impact often takes longer to come to fruition and is usually influenced by interconnected, networked and incremental changes at individual and organizational levels.*

In essence, what Community Reporting and the use of storytelling as an approach to system change is asking for is a “paradigmatic shift in terms of how societal and governmental institutions operate” and this is not a quick process (Trowbridge and Willoughby, 2020).

### *Changing the public service working culture...*

A culture of listening. Nonetheless, this should not imply that storytelling cannot bring about — or at the very least — have a role to play in system change. Just within the CoSIE project we can see the seeds of this in terms of how it has changed the approach of individuals working in services and how they see the value of it. As one of the leaders of the UK pilot explains:

*Community Reporting has been a really different way of actually finding out about what staff and service users think about [the service] and what I really like about it is that it is really listening to the voices of people directly rather than putting it through the medium of various councils and panels, which is what [previously] people have been used to.*

**A culture of personalization and connection.** Based on the stories gathered in the project, a toolkit was co-produced with peer mentors in the probation service and key staff members that foregrounded the use of storytelling to create a working culture of personalization — not just personalization within a service— via the creation of personal connections. As the toolkit identifies, this involves going beyond process and is about really getting to know people. Essentially, this can be achieved by talking to people, hearing their story, and getting to know them.

**A culture of holding space.** Similarly, in the Dutch pilot, Community Reporting led to the lead Policy Advisor reflecting on and rethinking how the municipality serves its citizens:

*It's not rocket science. It's a basic thing that as a civil servant we tend to have an agenda — a well-meaning agenda but an agenda, nonetheless. [Community Reporting] took us away from our agenda and allowed people to make their own.*

What this demonstrates is that giving people the space to talk without a specific agenda provides an opportunity to become aware of it and for different thinking to emerge. This process is a sign of (or the seed of) system change — it is abandoning top-down, paternal notions of service delivery and creates space for bottom-up change processes to emerge, perhaps those that are more in-line with asset-based development practices and with notions of inclusion.

### *Conclusion: Community Reporting as narrative intervention for system change*

Community Reporting in the CoSIE project can be seen as a narrative intervention. All different stakeholders involved in the public service, beneficiaries, public servants, managers and policy makers were interacting together and designing a new story for the public service in question. Community Reporting was both an instrument for common analysis, common sensemaking and designing actions for system change. In this sense, storytelling can be seen as a tool for change, but eventually, it becomes the system change itself (Tesselaar, 2015). By using stories and getting deeper insight in the meaning of individual actions within public services, people will be encouraged to make changes happen. This bottom-up approach asks for professional space within public services. It calls for the ethical reflection upon one's own work and the relationship with others.

What is needed is that all actors involved in the realization of public policy are aware of the role they play and the constant reflection about one's own actions it implies. In fact, instead of talking about accountability of social policy and public services being the working elements in this, it is important to introduce also narrative accountability techniques, based on storytelling, visual accounts, conversations, and films, so that in all phases of policy making and decision-making processes the experience of beneficiaries are at the heart of public service within the public services and public administration. In the next section we will call for a narrative technique within the bureaucratic system of public services.

## *The calling of narrative democratic system and responsive governance*

The above experience within the CoSIE project and the impact of stories on innovation of public services is in line with growing awareness that public governance cannot be ruled by an instrumental rationality and cost-benefit ideology that comes with it alone. However, it is not easy to integrate narrative and co-creative approaches into the present system.

Public administrations and most organizations work with plans and targets defined beforehand based on prospects. Available resources, time and money constitute a well-defined and predetermined frame. Working with narratives and involving people requires time and space to develop and learn (Sarphatie and Geelhoed, 2020).

The CoSIE project showed that the narrative processes, inherently present in co-creative approaches to innovation, have another starting point. It starts at the heart of the matter, the shared values, instead of the distribution of available resources. Often this does not correspond to planned time, requirements and available resources. It is also important that decision-makers provide for space to integrate open outcomes and unexpected solutions.

These do not always correspond to the budgetary lines and organizational structure of local administrations. Our earlier research on innovative social investment showed, however, development of new initiatives based on shared responsibility, community values, safety and respect for differences, flexibility and reconsideration of predetermined goals. If the targets and goals are not met, this does not mean failure or loss of benefits. It is simply a step forward and a learning process.

However, in line with the work of Pierre Rosanvallon (2008, 2011/2013), these new ways of working are signs of change of democracy itself. He observes a general need for "Narrative Democracy", as he calls it (Rosanvallon, 2015). We need to go back to basics and listen to the stories of those who are not visible, those whose voices are not heard in the political arena and who do not have access to communicational tools (Castells, 2013).

Listening becomes a core virtue in public service delivery. Through the sharing of stories, a common understanding of what living together actually means could be achieved. As Rosanvallon underlines, democratic systems are not static structures. In fact, democracy cannot be achieved — it is an ongoing process. It needs to adapt to major, current social transformation and be in tune with our time. We need to strive and fight for democracy and define democratic foundations, based on the stories of all in their own natural and social environments (Rosanvallon, 2011/2013, 2015; Wieviorka, 2020). Therefore our project on co-creation and innovation of public services matters. It strives to lend voice to those who are not heard and is based on listening and adjustment of priorities according to citizen's needs. It offers a learning journey to those who wish to contribute to this fundamental cultural change.(3)

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(3) See also CoSIE website <https://cosie.turkuamk.fi/results/> It offers not only academic insights but also a practical toolkit. a roadmap to co-creation and a MOOC to make a start with a changing working culture in public services.



## Entanglement of multiple rationalities in public governance systems

Why it is so complicated is because it asks for a change of organizational culture of the bureaucratic system of public governance and administration. Van der Steen (2011) shows that public governance both on national and local levels operates along different rationalities, operational at the same time, which may interact and are sometimes in conflict with each other. The quadrant of Van der Steen (see below) shows how instrumental and value-based rationalities are guiding these four major action schemes of the public institutions and public authorities.

Firstly, it is related to the notion of **Public Administration**, the organization of the democratic system and the maintenance of rights and duties (see bottom left). He would link up to the legal disposition and rule of state. Secondly, public government is related to **New Public Management** and related to performance and the actual realization of policy in a legitimate, efficient and accountable way and within the available budget, (balance between costs and benefits) (see top left). These two perspectives are primarily ruled by instrumental rationality, based on the legal and managerial instruments. Thirdly, national and local authorities are also focused on **Network governance** in which extensive cooperation with external stakeholder groups and public/private partnerships are engaged to realize the objectives of governance and policy (see top right). Finally, national and local authorities are aware of **societal resilience**, to what happens within the active community. This is what Van der Steen calls **responsive governance**.

Thus, governmental action, be it on national or local levels, have different action frames that interact with each other and that have different instrumental rationality and value rationality as guiding principles. The horizontal axes are indicating the relationship between the public service/ governance and the society, and the vertical axis shows the relationship between results and preconditions. Within public services and their organization, the four fields of the quadrant are operating at the same time.

### From results to basic conditions

Performing governance	Cooperative governance
Legitimate governance	Responsive governance

The reality shows that many (governmental) institutions through their public services wish to be a networking and a responsive authority. In practice, however, legitimacy and management are dominant procedures within actual public services, policy making and decision making (Van der Steen, 2015).

Professionals within public organizations need to become aware of these different types of action. Also, in this situation storytelling techniques can help to increase better understanding and awareness of the actual purpose of public institutions. We would therefore also call for narrative approaches within the public administrations and services, and within the decision-making process (policy cycle), so that public and civil servants are able to adopt a reflexive approach to their work and integrate logics of cooperation and resilience within everyday work.

This may help to keep track of the agenda of the community, the persons the service is meant for. Current action research on narrative accountability in the Netherlands (Geelhoed and Sarphatie, 2020; Geelhoed, Sarphatie and Sprinkhuizen, 2020) but also the network for responsive civil servants set up in the Netherlands (Bakker, 2019) shows that there is growing awareness about the urgency for change. From current research results it becomes clear how public services in the Netherlands are counterproductive and even produce injustice (Frederik, 2021; Van Kampen et al. 2020; Knijn, 2021). The actual scandal around fraud regulation in the field of childcare which resulted into unjust accusation of fraud for many families, being obliged by the tax office to reimburse benefits over years of time, which left them heavily indebted, sometimes homeless (Frederik, 2021) or children taken into care. Emphasizing on legitimate governance and public management values with regard to citizens who depend upon public services and allowances lead to fundamental injustice, loss of dignity and growing distrust between governance and citizens (Van Kampen et al, 2020).

As we have shown above, Community Reporting can serve as a narrative intervention to provide for new insights on the one hand and open pathways for actual change on the other. In this sense, the "story becomes the change", as Suzanne Tesselaar (2015, 2017) states in her many books and interventions. In fact, through storytelling all actors become aware of their professional roles and from this awareness they can build new working relationships based human relations and mutual respect.

Thus, civil servants, managers, legislators, organizations and citizens can make a decent working environment together in which public professionals and citizens both feel recognized "in his unique right of being and doing" (Dijkers en De Bell, 2020). Tonkens (2020) calls even for social dignity, which is related to transforming the system in such a way that the system contributes to guarantee a decent life for each person in line, despite all individual and group differences, with their own capabilities and dreams. The real power of storytelling as narrative intervention lies in the mobilization of collective intelligence and imagination, contributing to drafting and crafting our pathway to a common future on this planet.

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# 4. Community Reporting & Method Identification of Case Studies of Narrative Accountability in Real-World Settings.

## Analysis of lived experiences

Accounting for the importance of narrative accountability when working with marginalised groups of people

1

E-SCHOOL:

"Ideally I imagine my future outside of Greece, you can't live here and have goals and dreams, you just survive".  
- Marilena

2

CRN:

"As an organization we have a really big responsibility for the treatment of the stories. It is important to us that the stories and the content that the people are telling us are as less changed as possible, to have a unique, real story, not to interfere in the story telling or go with pre-assumptions into the research".  
- Martin Barthel

3

Le Porte-Voix:

"Nathalie always makes sure that I am always work on achieving my dream. And that is becoming a doctor".  
- Adiza

4

Le Porte-Voix:

"This place means a lot to me. I have gotten to know a lot of people here. It is always very nice and 'gezellig'"  
- Jade



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1

E-SCHOOL: Marilena's Quote

This quote captures the essence of lived experience by illustrating a marginalized individual's personal struggle and aspirations. It emphasizes the need for narrative accountability by **advocating for stories to authentically reflect the harsh realities and emotional landscapes of the speaker's situation.** Marginalized individuals **often face systemic barriers** that prevent them from thriving, and their narratives should be preserved as unaltered evidence of these challenges.

**In this case, Marilena's voice offers insight into the broader societal and structural constraints without editorialization, maintaining her autonomy over her story.**

2

CRN: Martin Barthel's Quote

This quote directly addresses the **principles** of narrative accountability by emphasizing the **ethical obligation to respect** the authenticity of the stories shared by marginalized individuals. By **refraining from imposing preconceptions or altering narratives**, organizations like CRN seek to empower the storyteller and validate their experiences.

**The acknowledgment of responsibility implies that any distortion could lead to misrepresentation, eroding trust and perpetuating harmful stereotypes.**

3

Le Porte-Voix: Adiza's Quote

Adiza's quote showcases how **supportive relationships can help marginalized individuals maintain agency over their narratives.**

Here, Nathalie plays a role in fostering Adiza's self-determination and dream of becoming a doctor, which is an act of narrative accountability.

**Instead of imposing external definitions of success or appropriating Adiza's story, Nathalie ensures that Adiza remains the primary author of her aspirations, reinforcing the importance of individual empowerment in storytelling.**

4

Le Porte-Voix: Jade's Quote

Jade's quote highlights the **personal and social dimensions of her story.**

The use of the Dutch word "gezellig," which conveys a **unique cultural concept of coziness and community**, underscores the importance of preserving the specificity of individual experiences.

**Narrative accountability here means allowing marginalized voices to express the nuances of their lived reality, including their cultural and emotional context, without diluting or generalizing it for broader audiences.**

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5

Melting-Pro:  
"Positive expectations from the outside can make people grow in accountability and personal awareness."  
- Athena D'Orazio

6

Melting-Pro:  
"My colleagues considered me trustworthy, so I felt there. It was something that came from the outside and made me realize that I could be accountable."  
- Athena D'Orazio

7

Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura della Basilicata:

..."Those working with us today are people we have trained over the years, we don't like to push people away, our employees are like family to us, they are part of the company. Our company is like a family..."  
Anna e Domenico Canario

8

Camera Di Commercio:

"It's a job that we enjoy very much and despite the difficulties we would like continue and stay in our town."  
Paola Samela

9

Melting-Pro:  
"Accountability is empowerment and ethics because in my work people share private and personal data and stories."  
- Margherita Apone

## 4. Community Reporting & Method Identification of Case Studies of Narrative Accountability in Real-World Settings.

5

Melting-Pro: Athena D’Orazio’s Quote 1

This quote underscores the **reciprocal relationship between external support and internal growth**. When marginalized individuals are met with positive expectations, they are often **empowered** to take ownership of their narratives and actions.

Narrative accountability here involves **creating an environment where marginalized voices are validated and encouraged to reflect on their own agency**, rather than **being constrained by stereotypes or preconceived notions**.

6

Melting-Pro: Athena D’Orazio’s Quote 2

Athena’s experience highlights the **critical role of trust in fostering accountability and belonging**. When marginalized individuals are trusted and treated as equal contributors, it enhances their **confidence** in their capacity to be responsible for their stories.

**This trust is a key element of narrative accountability, as it shifts the power dynamic to ensure the storyteller feels valued and has control over how their narrative is shared.**

7

Camera di Commercio: Employees as Family

This quote reflects a **community-centered approach to accountability**, emphasizing **long-term relationships and inclusivity**. For marginalized individuals, being part of a supportive and consistent structure—whether a company or community—can **provide a safe space** to share their stories and **feel ownership** over them.

Narrative accountability here is **reinforced by the idea of care and collective growth**, where each person’s contribution and voice are respected **as integral to the whole**.

8

Camera di Commercio: The Loom Story

This statement emphasizes the importance of **place-based identity** and **resilience in narratives**. For marginalized groups, the act of staying and thriving in a place despite challenges often reflects a profound sense of belonging and purpose.

Narrative accountability involves **preserving and respecting these connections** to place and community, ensuring that **their resilience is not romanticized but authentically represented** as part of their lived experience.

9

Melting-Pro: Margherita Apone’s Quote

Margherita’s quote directly addresses the **ethical dimension of narrative accountability**. When working with personal stories, there is a **dual responsibility**: to **empower individuals** to share their truths and to **safeguard their trust** by handling their narratives ethically.

This perspective underscores that **accountability is not just about the storyteller but also about the ethical conduct of the listener or facilitator, who must ensure stories are not manipulated or misused**.

# 4. Community Reporting & Method Identification of Case Studies of Narrative Accountability in Real-World Settings.

## Analysis of lived experiences

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## Conclusion

The interviews and the quotes are highlighting many levels of the importance of narrative accountability. It is a **nuanced and critical framework** that underscores the **ethical and empowering treatment of stories** shared, in this case, by marginalized individuals.

At its core, it involves **preserving the authenticity** of these narratives, **ensuring they remain true reflections of the lived realities of the storytellers.**

By resisting **distortion, editorialization, or the imposition of external assumptions**, narrative accountability upholds the **dignity and integrity** of marginalized voices, ensuring their stories are not co-opted or misrepresented.

A central theme seen through the quotes, is the role of **trust and empowerment**. When marginalized individuals are met with positive expectations and genuine validation, they are encouraged to take ownership of their stories and **develop a sense of accountability over their narratives.**

Trust fosters **confidence**, allowing individuals to realize their **capacity for growth** and contribution, as highlighted in experiences of being seen as trustworthy or valuable.

This process not only reinforces personal agency but also **shifts the power dynamic**, ensuring the storyteller remains at the center of their narrative.

Equally important is the concept of **ethical stewardship**. Facilitators, organizations, and communities working with marginalized groups have a responsibility to handle stories with **care** and **sensitivity**, especially when they involve personal or private data. Ethical treatment requires a commitment to avoid exploitation, romanticization, or misrepresentation of these narratives.

**By acting as stewards rather than editors of stories, those in positions of power amplify marginalized voices without compromising their integrity.**

Additionally, **community and belonging** play a vital role in fostering accountability. Marginalized individuals often draw strength and identity from their connections to place, culture, and long-term relationships. Whether through supportive workplace environments, family-like structures, or enduring ties to one's community, narrative accountability ensures these aspects of identity are honored and preserved. This approach emphasizes **collective growth and inclusion**, demonstrating that the storyteller's contribution is not only valued but is seen as essential to the broader story of the community.

Finally, narrative accountability also involves **recognizing and celebrating resilience and purpose** within these stories. Whether it is the determination to thrive in challenging environments or the pursuit of personal dreams, these elements must be handled respectfully, ensuring they are not reduced to clichés but are instead contextualized within the storyteller's unique lived experience.

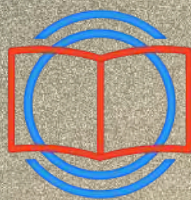
In essence, narrative accountability is about much more than facilitating storytelling; it is about **creating equitable structures** that validate and empower marginalized voices, **uphold their agency**, and **foster trust.**

**It requires an ethical commitment to preserving the authenticity, dignity, and cultural richness of these narratives while amplifying their significance to promote understanding, inclusion, and mutual respect.**

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