

Building Block 3: Understanding Who and How the Community Story Is Told and Received

Apart from the content of the community story, it is very relevant for community development by whom and how the story is told and received. As part of community development, it is important to ask whether there is already an **overarching, official story** about the community that is known to all groups of actors in the community. This can serve as common ground and create connectedness. Community members can always refer to this story and perpetuate it through their activities. If this story is not present in all groups of actors, this important connecting point is missing. The risk of an overarching story is that it can be too unifying and dogmatic. This often happens when the story only represents the perspective of one group of actors. The danger is that the perspectives of other groups of actors who are also connected to the core idea will be shortchanged, and in the long run there will be a disidentification and turning away of these groups from the community. Ideally, the overarching story emerges through a process that incorporates the perspectives of all stakeholder groups. This process can be designed as an important community development tool, as it itself strengthens the involvement and identification of all groups of actors.

ACCESS

For the ACCESS context, the following questions arise:

- *Is there already an overarching, official story about the ACCESS context?*
- *Is this story known to all groups of actors?*
- *From the perspective of which actor group(s) is this story told?*
- *Can all stakeholder groups in the ACCESS context identify with this story?*
- *Are there perspectives of particular actor groups that are not part of the story? What stories would these stakeholder groups tell about the ACCESS context?*
- *Are there currently groups of actors who are (too) little engaged and identified with the project?*

It has already been emphasised in **Building Block 2** that the **individual community stories** of the members are important for building up a sense of connection and belonging. It follows that there are naturally different interpretations of the story within the community, so that we must speak of stories in the plural. Such a diversity of community stories can speak highly communicatively for a vibrant community and can be communicated confidently and richly to the outside world through appropriate channels. This sends a signal "pars pro toto" to the outside world about the ways in which individual representatives connect with their community, and it can show potential members how they too can participate in the community. This multi-perspective approach to the community story(s) also involves risks, as it becomes more demanding to tell a story that creates identification for all groups of actors, and conflicts can also become visible in this way. The art is to integrate these conflicts into an overarching community history, which can certainly gain in excitement and attractiveness through disputes and their clarification.

ACCESS

For the ACCESS context, the following questions arise:

- *Is there already room for individual community stories in the ACCESS context? Are there internal community channels for individual community storytelling? Are individual community stories used for external communication?*
- *What conflicts, disputes, and clarifications have occurred in the ACCESS context and could be tension-building elements of an ACCESS community story?*

Due to the internationality and high diversity of the ACCESS stakeholder groups, it is very obvious that there are at least seven perspectives from the seven participating countries. The intercultural coming together in a common context with a shared core idea can also be an interesting thread of the community narrative, where different backgrounds, motivations and learning experiences and learning from each other can play a central role.

In this context, it is also important to ask who and how freely he or she is authorised or encouraged to report the community story(s) to the outside world. Storytelling can, for example, be controlled only through individual authorised channels (prototypical: press spokesperson) or through multiple channels and all community members freely, lively and possibly more conflictual. Here, community development should find a conducive **balance between participatory history writing and storytelling and top-down storytelling** and constantly rebalance it.



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For the ACCESS context, the following questions arise:

- *Who is empowered to tell the community story(s) on which channels?*
- *How freely do community stories currently circulate in the ACCESS context and beyond?*
- *Which actors and groups of actors tell each other their community stories?*
- *Between which actors and groups of actors does no narrative exchange exist so far?*

In general, the approach of learning story(s) lends itself here as well, which would be able to bring the ACCESS core idea into a narrative dramaturgy. In this context, it is particularly relevant who talks to whom and exchanges learning stories, as it greatly favours the goal of ACCESS if as many actors of the context as possible are involved in learning processes, i.e. learning stories, learning adventures, learning ventures, and learning journeys. Only when learning processes take effect individually can they also take effect collectively. The narrative about learning processes can itself be a part of the learning process by making learning successes visible and creating incentives and stimulating learning obstacles to optimise processes together.

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