CONDITIONS to FLOURISH

Understanding the Ecosystem for Narrative Power

October 2023

Global Narrative Hive

About the Global Narrative Hive

The Global Narrative Hive is a new network working to connect and grow the global ecosystem of activists and campaigners, communications workers, researchers, artists, journalists and others who are using narratives to advance their visions of a more just world.

Born out of an eighteen-month co-design process involving more than 400 individuals from around the world, we work to bridge disconnects in the narratives ecosystem; facilitating shared learning between actors with different skills and knowledges, and curating spaces for new actors to build connections and experiment with narrative strategies.

This synthesis is one of a number of resources published in 2023 as part of the Hive's launch.

If you are interested in learning and doing alongside us, visit: narrativehive.org

About the author

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Between 2021-2023 James had the privilege of working with a brilliant team to lead the Narrative Network Initiative – the process of co-design and imagination from which the Global Narrative Hive has emerged. Before that he was the European Director of Fund for Global Human Rights and has also worked with the Open Society, Oak Foundation, Panic Button, and Amnesty International. He has degrees in international law, Turkish and Arabic and lives in the UK.

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Overview

In 2021, a group of activists, campaigners, communications experts, researchers, artists, journalists, filmmakers, organisers and creatives from around the world, and from across different movements, began a vast collaboration. What united the group is a deep belief in the importance of narratives to create systemic change and an understanding that that this can only happen when movements themselves possess the knowledge and resources to effectively use narrative strategies and take collective action.

Over the last two years, we've held space for movements across different countries and parts of civil society – from grassroots and individual activists through to members of international NGOs and networks – as well as for the narrative and communications workers collaborating with these movements. Participants in these spaces began a process of imagination, co-design and co-creation around a network that would enable them to voice their message more powerfully and would enable them to build relationships with each other, surface and share learning, and collaborate.

The process has been creative, emergent, radical and experimental – a world of Imaginariums, Campfires, Happy Hours and 5x5x5 experiments. We've had hundreds of conversations with actors from around the world, held multiple gatherings and have supported experimental projects to test the ideas that have emerged from these gatherings. We've been guided at every stage by our values, especially that movements themselves should lead the development of this infrastructure.

This report tries to synthesise and share back what we've heard and seen across this process. It's intended to raise up and disseminate the analysis from movements, activists and narrative practitioners about their visions for this ecosystem, as well as the opportunities and challenges they encounter in bringing these to life. We believe that the depth and breadth of our process gives valuable insights directly from the actors in this ecosystem that can often be overlooked – particularly those within movements and especially those working outside of larger civil society organisations or beyond the Global North. We see these perspectives as an important resource for anyone that is part of, or collaborating with, this ecosystem and hope that it can help guide their strategies, like it has ours.

These vital perspectives of actors are shared in the second part of the document, which explores the key messages and ideas articulated by different groupings of actors within the ecosystem; for example, from those in movements working to shift narratives and from those infrastructure organisations who have been working to build the power of movements. In order to make sense of these groupings and the wider ecosystem, some definitions must first be set out, which takes place in the first section. While this is important, it does veer towards the conceptual and is necessarily shaped by our analysis. Whilst the greatest reward is to be had by the reader of both sections, we encourage the less patient reader to cut straight to section two to learn what the narrative ecosystem itself is saying.

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Introduction

This section sets out the intended purpose of this document and its parameters.

A. What we're trying to do

This document paints a picture of the ecosystem of actors[1] who are working to build narrative power in movements, as well as of the movements themselves. The picture shows different groupings - or kinds of actors - within this ecosystem and the relationships and interconnections between them. It seeks to include actors within movements who we believe are at the heart of narratives work, and not only those practitioners who are helping to develop and disseminate narratives. It takes a cross-movement perspective: reflecting the breadth of our process as well as the widespread appetite for collaboration across movements around narratives. It also seeks to take a global perspective, looking outside any particular country.

Most importantly, it highlights what practitioners and members of movements are themselves saying about the contexts in which they are operating and what they need. This is a perspective that we believe is too often missing from analysis of this ecosystem.

This picture is, ultimately, based around a vision of what a healthy, just and successful ecosystem for narratives work could be.

> **This is one where the key actors have strong relationships; are able to align their efforts when they need to; are resourced for the long run; and where they are able to share and benefit from the learning that they are collectively generating.**

This is an ecosystem where, in the words of the generous visionaries at ReFrame,

> **"[movements are] not only end-product consumers of narrative; they are essential creators and drivers of narrative change"[2].**

We hope that this document will be an insightful resource to anyone thinking about the power of narratives to support social change, and to those who are developing strategies to build powerful narratives. In particular, we hope that it will help to ensure that this ecosystem – which has shown powerful potential and yet remains so unequal and fragmented – has the resources and relationships it needs to create a better world.

We ourselves have used the insights from this report to guide the strategy of the Global Narrative Hive. These insights will inform the Hive's efforts to bridge between different actors where they exist; support them to share knowledge and to create synergies and alliances; and enable the integration of new actors into this ecosystem where they are not yet present. The Global Narrative Hive will continue to hold and be guided by this view of the ecosystem. We nevertheless recognise that this will take work by many different actors and we hope that this mapping helps provides some direction to how that may happen.

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[1] 'Actors' is used to describe all who are playing a role in this ecosystem – it includes individuals, networks, NGOs, for-profit consultancies, and news platforms.
[2] ReFrame, 'Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power', Medium (17 July 2019) < https://medium.com/@ThisisReFrame/part-1-creating-an-ecosystem-for-narrative-power188083-df5751 > [last accessed 6 September 2023], para 39.

B. How this report was created

This report lifts up the main themes from hundreds of conversations with members of civil society movements, and the narrative and communications workers supporting them, that took place during the co-creation process from which the Global Narrative Hive emerged.

The majority of these conversations took place between June 2021 and the end of 2022 – sometimes one-to-one and, at other times, in the context of larger online gatherings. These gatherings involved whole- and small-group discussion in which participants were invited to develop and document their conclusions about what support and infrastructure they and their communities need to build stronger narratives.

The report synthesises the key messages that we heard through these conversations. We've chosen not to quote any of the participants directly - in part given the many people involved in the process, but also in recognition that a significant number face threats because of their identity and work and do not want to have their profiles raised. Part I of the report seeks to make sense of the ecosystem, building on the analysis of the many researchers and strategists who have undertaken to map and categorise narratives work. Their work is referenced throughout the document and we give thanks for their valuable insights. More expansive thanks are given at the end of the document, especially to those who participated in the co-design process. We hope they will 'see' themselves in the findings and find value in this report.

C. What this report isn't

The document is presented to the world recognising its limitations. Any effort to take a cross-movement and cross-regional broad view is going to omit important context and perspectives (especially at the individual level, when the number of voices runs into the hundreds). Our intention has been to raise up the themes and ideas that have emanated most strongly and collectively.

Additionally. this is not intended to be a comprehensive directory or list of the different actors. Some of the types of actors in the document are illustrated with the names of specific organisations. However, the potential breadth of actors in this field may mean that such a directory can obscure broader conclusions about the ecosystem; it also can draw attention away from the key questions about the kinds of actors that aren't being included or aren't active in this ecosystem which, as will be seen, reflects some critical imbalance and inequities in the field[3].

Our process has initially been rooted in the movements and practitioners from, or working with, LGBTQIA+, Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health, and broader feminist movements. This is the origin of the majority of examples in the document[4]. What the ecosystem looks like varies from movement to movement – for example, the environmental sector seems to have a much heavier representation of actors working on futures than others. Nevertheless, the core functions and relationships that a successful narrative ecosystem requires seem to be very similar across movements and so the categories that have been developed should apply regardless.

Any categorisation is bound to run the risk of over-simplification at times and there are many actors that fit within more than one of the categories proposed – for example, groups carrying out multiple functions. The

intention is not to achieve perfect detail or precision, however, but to provide a sufficient view of the ecosystem and the language to discuss it, so that we can begin to identify gaps and areas of need.

Finally, there are several types of actors that are not included in this mapping. The first are the target audiences that the movements described here are seeking to reach or influence through narrative strategies, whether segments of public opinion or decision-makers. These have been excluded as the focus of the mapping is on the infrastructure required to reach them.

Secondly, trade unions and political parties are not included in this mapping, however, it's important to recognise their oftentimes role as the generators and vectors of narratives within movements. This role and their connections to movements and narrative infrastructure is an important area to explore but, for practical reasons, is beyond the scope of this report. Similarly, the power of brands to disseminate narratives is a critical factor but corporate actors are not included in this mapping. Thirdly, this mapping does not look at those actors who are themselves putting out hostile and negative narratives of the kind that the groups and individuals in this ecosystem are seeking to transcend. This is a critical part of the 'jigsaw' but one which others (including Ipas and Political Research Associates, among others) have done incredible work to document[5].

With these limitations in mind, we nevertheless hope that this document can help make sense of this ecosystem and aid understanding of its strengths, potential, needs and challenges.

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[3] We've taken the decision to not pursue this in the knowledge that our friends at the International Resource on Impact Storytelling (IRIS) are launching the Narrative Directory – a tool to help activists, civic innovators, independent storytellers and others to locate one another. At time of publication, NarrativeDirectory.org contains a small selection of relevant organisations in the narrative change for social justice space, and our two offers should be seen as complementary

[4] As well as (for reasons described below) from movements working in the USA for social, racial and economic justice.

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[5] For a particularly strong example of this work, we recommend reading: Elevate Children Funders Group and the Global Philanthropy Project, 'Manufacturing Moral Panic: Weaponizing Children to Undermine Gender Justice and Human Rights' (March 2021) <https://bettercarenetwork. org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Manufacturing-Moral-Panic-Report.pdf> [last accessed: 6 September 2023].

01.
CATEGORISATIONS AND CONCEPTS

This first section exists primarily to map out the different parts of the ecosystem around narrative power and movements and their interrelationships. This is done to help understand the different perspectives shared in the second section and, especially, to make sense of what the diverse sets of actors want and need. Unlike the second section, this is more conceptual and based on an outside perspective – its sole purpose is to ensure that the distinct perspectives of key actors are not lost or conflated.

A. How do we define 'narratives'?

Executive summary: The term 'narratives' has specific interpretations within different academic disciplines and fields; this mapping focuses on narratives within the context of social movements working to create sustainable change. Many people engaged in narratives work do not recognise it as such due to unfamiliarity with the terminology and we have sought to overcome this barrier in our mapping process. Conversely, 'narratives' has recently become a buzzword, leading it to be occasionally and inaccurately conflated with strategic communications.

At the Global Narrative Hive, we see narratives as a collection of stories connected by a set of common values and a shared understanding of the world. They are usually told over and over again through different voices and channels in our societies, in a way in which they slowly but surely become perceived as 'common sense'. Narratives are a form of 'invisible power': they allow power to recreate itself, shape whose voices and stories we assume are worth listening to, and lead people to think that the world is the way it's supposed to be.

> Hegemonic narratives can thus neutralise attempts to change the norms that delegitimise, marginalise or disempower people. Conversely, developing narratives intentionally and strategically enables movements to shift what is considered acceptable and right, and to promote the values and vision they want to see.

This is the definition that we use, but there are many other ways of seeing narratives and contexts in which they are being deployed. Part of the challenge in describing the ecosystem of actors within movements, who are trying to advance or change narratives, is around these different definitions and divergent understandings of what narratives work is and who is engaging in it. We've sought to look beyond a narrow definition of only those who describe themselves as engaged in narratives work, to instead include in this mapping everyone that might be needed, so that movements can shift culture and mindsets.

Some of the main definitional issues are described below:

Different fields, different approaches

One obvious reason for confusion is the spread of the concept of narratives from literary theory into other fields, including social sciences. As described by Hagström and Gustafsson, "disciplines such as political science, psychology, legal theory, gender studies, social work, organizational theory, anthropology and medical sociology have all quietly appropriated narrative as a concept and theory"[6].

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[6] Linus Hagström & Karl Gustafsson, 'Narrative power: how storytelling shapes East Asian international politics', Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 32:4 (2019), p. 389.

Within each of these fields, the concept of narratives has its own meaning and is thought about with different purposes in mind.

In this document, we are focusing on the ways in which narratives are used by movements to promote and achieve durable social change. We are not referring to other disciplines with their own vernacular. However, it's worth flagging two particular fields where there is an overlap with the work of social movements.

The first is the field of international relations and, in particular, the way that narratives are discussed and promoted in relation to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, transitional justice and – most recently – countering extreme polarisation in societies. There are a number of initiatives talking about narratives as a relational tool – a way of bringing together different groups across perceived political, social and religious differences by developing more inclusive stories. Groups like the Institute for Integrated Transitions or the Narrative Engagement Across Difference project are looking at narrative as a strategy for building community and relationships. This is in contrast to the movements we are talking to, who are primarily using narratives as a tool to influence and shift audiences. There is, however, a blurring between these approaches, especially when it comes to building collaboration and coalitions across social movements. Nonetheless, it is important to be clear on the purpose for which groups are utilising narratives.

The second field is in the area of narrative therapy or practice, a form of counselling. Again, there is occasional confusion between narrative strategies being used by movements to generate change and this therapeutic approach, especially where it is being used in group settings or individually by activists to address trauma.

Breadth and blurring

The use of the word 'narrative' among civil society has only become widespread recently and is still mainly used within English-speaking civil society or by the funders, international organisations and networks that are operating at the 'grass tops' of civil society[7]. In some regions, the use of the word 'narrative' is contested and rejected[8]. There are also many actors – especially within grassroots movements – whose work strongly connects to narrative practice but who don't (consciously or unconsciously) self-identify as engaged in 'narratives' work. In the words of the feminist creative activist Ishtar Lakhani:

> "I didn't know I was doing narratives work until I was told I was".

Beyond this, narratives that are successful in shifting attitudes call on skills and the involvement of actors from other movements who might not see themselves as working on narratives.

As ReFrame points out, narratives work is deeply connected to meaning-making and is in "dynamic relationship to other concepts such as frame, hegemony, meta-stories, myth, common sense, etc"[9]. Groups and individuals who have been working in and around these issues are, therefore, part of the ecosystem described below. These include actors working in fields like culture change, depolarisation, disinformation, futures, and beyond. The same applies to actors that play a role in supporting movements – like funders or networks – for whom long term narrative work is essential but who often don't perceive themselves as connected to the narratives ecosystem.

Narratives, deep narratives, strategic communications, organisational communications – complementary or distinct?

As noted by Brett Davidson and Rashad Robinson, narratives has become a buzzword and is therein becoming used in a way that risks losing meaning and precision.

This is especially so where it is used to describe organisational communications or strategic communications work, and not narrative strategy. Ruth Taylor notes a particular distinction in the UK between 'narrative change' as part of the strategic communications toolkit and 'deep narrative change' work:

> "[narrative change] is often equated with the practice of strategic communications, such as framing. This work is, more often than not, about the pursuit of specific, often short term goals, such as policy change, supporter acquisition or even an election win."[10]

'Deep narratives' are those that sit beneath those kinds of specific narratives and that drive our values and attitudes towards them. Taylor notes that this distinction is less common in the USA, quoting Bridget Antoinette Evans of the Pop Culture Collaborative, in writing that "strategic communications (whereby we craft messages for dissemination), in essence amount to 'squeezing drops of justice into an ocean largely composed of unjust ideas'. Narrative change on the other hand, comprises 'supporting a field of practitioners to holistically transform these narrative waters'"[11]. Narrative change in this definition is therefore similar to what is being called 'deep narrative' work in the UK.

A recent report looking at the landscape of funding for narratives in the USA, notes the tensions between strategic communications and narrative strategies – but also puts forward the idea that these fields are essential for one another. It states that:

> "Narrative strategies simply won't take off if they're not reading the strategic communications room. Strategic communications will always be limited by its inability to change or at least contest the dominant ideas shaping the society."[12]

This difference of approach would explain the numerous examples of new narratives on different issues being put forward without apparent consideration of questions like the audiences that they are seeking to influence, how these audiences can be reached, and what kinds of stories will move them: in other words, the fundamentals of strategic communications. Conversely, strategic communications efforts are often focused on short-term wins for issues that are unconnected to (or even sometimes in opposition to) efforts to transform underlying narratives.

Other experts - like Mónica Roa of PUENTES – do not see strategic communications as having a monopoly on strategic practices around audiences, messages, messengers and channels. In this view, the difference between the world of narratives and the world of strategic communications is that the former is focused on changing culture, while the latter is seeking legal and policy change.

These different conceptualisations of narrative change highlight the importance for this field, as stated in 'Funding Narrative', of "figuring out how these two pieces of the ecosystem [strategic communications and narrative change] fit together"[13]. Where might they be complementary and where might they be in tension with one another?

How we've approached this

This map seeks to look beyond these issues around definition to include (as much as it can) anyone who should be a part of the 'holistic transformation' that Bridget Antoinette Evans describes: storytellers, content creators, journalists, technologists, researchers, social media influencers. What matters for us isn't to document only those who are knowingly engaged in 'true' narratives work but rather to identify everyone who is needed for this work to succeed and for the ecosystem to be a healthy one.

7 As will be seen, this has significant consequences, with narrative practice and the needs of the field defined primarily by practice in the USA and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom.
8 For example, some movements in Latin America strongly reject the term 'narratives' in preference for 'discourse'.
9 ReFrame, 'Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power', para. 7.

10 Ruth Taylor, 'Transforming Narrative Waters: Growing the practice of deep narrative change in the UK' (December 2021)
<https://ruthtaylordotorg.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/transforming-narrative-waters.pdf> [last accessed 6 September 2023], p. 12.
11 Ibid, p. 12.
12 Mik Moore and Rinku Sen, 'Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework by the Convergence Partnership' (September 2022)
<https://kresge.org/wp-content/uploads/Funding-Narrative-Change_v2.pdf> [last accessed 6 September 2023], p. 25.
13 Ibid, p. 25.

B. Who are the actors in this ecosystem?

Executive summary: Many diverse groups of actors together make up the ecosystem of narratives work. This mapping has broadly categorised them into three groups – narrative actors, movement actors, and funders. Narrative actors provide knowledge, content and channels that can be used by movements in the form of narratives; movement actors seek change through collective action; funders are external bodies that provide resources for this work to take place.

Drawing on the definition from Liz Manne:

> "Narrative strategy is the practice of sharing connected stories to forge, spread, and reinforce beneficial narratives and counter harmful ones. These stories must be aligned to have a cumulative impact. And to be effective, they must take us on a journey from where we are today to a better future, revealing a new way the world can and should work." [14]

The ecosystem described below therefore includes all those working to develop and disseminate these narratives. However, it also includes those who are supporting movements to engage in this work – e.g. movement support groups, convenors, networks, and funders. Much of the analysis on the narratives field that exists at present is about what narrative practitioners (particularly in the USA) need. There has been much less attention paid to the fundamental and multi-faceted efforts needed to build narrative power, so that movements are engaged in and leading this work themselves. As mentioned in the introduction, this analysis is based on a vision of a healthy, just and successful ecosystem for narrative change in which movements are the "essential creators and drivers of narrative change."[15]

Our categories have been developed to make sense of the perspectives shared in the second section of this document and to help understand the distinct needs and asks from different parts of the narrative ecosystem. The categories that we're using are positioned in three overarching groupings. This is an admittedly imprecise distinction, given that there are narrative practitioners who are from, or closely connected to, the movements that they work with. There are also actors who are performing multiple roles and cut across these categories – for example, groups like PUENTES, ReFrame and Komons.

Nevertheless, these categories are put forward as a way of helping to understand the relationships between actors across the ecosystem.

Narrative Actors

Individuals and groups involved in bringing knowledge, relationships and capabilities that can (or could) be used by movements to learn about, generate and disseminate narratives.

Movement Actors

Individuals, initiatives, organisations and networks that are seeking change through collective action. The movements that we have been working with are working for rights, freedom, equality, dignity, peace, democracy and the planet.

Funders

The actors working to provide resources to the different parts of the ecosystem. Some of these could be considered as part of movements but have been separated out given the distinct characteristics and role they might play.

These categories are described in more detail below.

Narrative Actors

Narrative actors can be grouped in three different ways:

- Role they are playing in the ecosystem (e.g. researcher, power-builder, consultant).

- Technical field that they are working in (e.g. whether they are working on narratives or in aligned fields to do with strategic communications, arts, culture, depolarisation and bridging work, opposition research, futures and beyond).

- Movement or movements that they are part of, or are supporting.

Our categorisation focuses on the first approach – grouping narrative actors by the role they are playing in the ecosystem.

We have then subcategorised this grouping into "Builders" (those who are involved in generating knowledge, guidance or building power of movements around narratives and supporting the development of narratives) and "Creators and Broadcasters" (those that are involved in supporting the dissemination of these narratives)[16].

I. Builders

- Researchers and Analysts
- Strategists
- Power-builders and trainers
- Convenors and network-builders

II. Creators and Broadcasters

- Campaigners (including digital campaigners)
- Storytellers
- Creatives
- Journalists and media platforms

As described later in this document[17], the role of actors who are working to connect and translate across different parts of this ecosystem is especially important given its fragmentation – particularly those actors that operate as bridges between movements and experts. These bridging actors – or 'integrators' – are working in diverse ways but are deeply connected to, or from, the movements that they are collaborating with: they translate strategy and research into a way that it can be used by movements; they train and build power; they sometimes fund work; and they also bring new knowledge and approaches into the field for use by movements.

14 Liz Manne et al, 'Narrative Strategy: The Basics' (January 2022) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6001b70b59882814f5d98d43/t/622 798c2a30582425338c3ef/1646762181816/Narrative_Strategy_The_Basics.pdf> [last accessed: 6 September 2023].
15 ReFrame, 'Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power', p. 4.

16 This is adapted from groupings in the Narrative Initiative's 'Towards New Gravity' report with additional inspiration from Márquez Rhyne, James Savage, Mónica Roa and Brett Davidson.
17 See page 18, under the sub-section 'Why this fragmentation matters and the role of 'integrators''.

There is further description of the two subcategories below, with examples drawn from the field of narrative practice.

I. Builders

Researchers and Analysts

Groups or individuals investigating and disseminating learning that can be used to build stronger, more effective narratives, including from fields like behavioural science and neuroscience. Examples include academics like George Lakoff or the Narrative Praxis Group, consultancies like Frameworks Institute or ASO Communications, and non-profit groups like MindWorks. It also includes groups undertaking public opinion research and polling to understand attitudes, values and the reach of messaging, such as Komons. There is a distinction between researchers – particularly academics – who are producing knowledge that may not be accessible to movements, and groups like Komons who are engaged with movements and act as a bridge between research and practice.

Strategists

These are actors who support movements to develop narrative strategies and campaigns (often based on the knowledge generated by the researchers). Examples of these are groups like PUENTES, who (among other things) have been helping to develop campaigns for reproductive rights in Latin America, or La Intersección, who help design collective narrative strategies against hate speech in Spain with a range of different movements.

Other examples include Comms Hub which carries out research and supports the development of campaigns in a variety of European countries. In the environmental sector, the Global Strategic Communications Council plays a major role globally providing similar support. There are also consultancies in this space such as Liz Manne Strategy in the US or WiseOwl in the Philippines.

Power-builders and trainers

These are actors who equip movements with the skills and knowledge to deploy narrative strategies. There are a range of approaches in this sector that move across a spectrum from long-term and highly focused interventions through to shorter-term and more dispersed efforts to build capacity, such as trainings and creation of toolkits. Varieties of organisation include:

- Groups like ReFrame and Common Cause Foundation who are focused on mentorship and long-term efforts to build power within movements around narrative strategies.

- Actors working to expand the range of support available to sectors through 'training of trainer' programmes, like Thomas Coombes and Hope-based communications.

- Groups directly providing trainings to activists and developing toolkits for them, e.g. Sogi Campaigns.

At the furthest end of this spectrum, in terms of engagement, are groups like Hive Mind Community which provides online training spaces for civil society, including training on how to build positive narratives.

There are numerous important actors who combine the role of building skills with undertaking research and analysis, such as PUENTES or the Winning Narratives Centres, run by the International Planned Parenthood Federation. As with the researchers and analysts, another key distinction here is between groups that are aligned and working closely with different movements, and trainers who have technical skills but may not have that connection, thus potentially failing to fully appreciate the context in which movements are working.

Another constellation of actors within this group are those that provide trainings for movements on how to engage with the kinds of 'broadcasters' described below, or who broker relationships with them. Examples of this include groups like Heard Agency in the UK who bring together media professionals with members of movements around whose stories they are working. Narrative Initiative gives examples of organisations playing this bridging role in the creative sector including Color of Change's Change Hollywood project and Doc Society's work with impact producers.

Convenors and Network-builders

There are a range of different actors who are seeking to build connections between practitioners in this space, with the intent of sharing knowledge and learning around narratives and strategic communications. Some of these are focused on particular professional fields (for example, the Global Narratives Community on Slack convened by Thomas Coombes, primarily comprised of communications professionals) or on shifting narratives in a particular country (for example, the Inter-Narratives Community[18] which holds space in the UK for people working on narrative

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[18] Formerly known as the Reset Narrative Community.

change), or on a particular movement.

Some of these are large initiatives like the Radical Communicators Network (RadComms) which holds space for communicators from across a range of movements in the US as a way of building narrative power. Others are small and informal like the 'Narrative Avengers' group which is convened on WhatsApp.

II. Creatives and Broadcasters

Campaigners

These are platforms or organisations that work to get campaigns out including online campaigning initiatives like 350.org, All Out and Avaaz. There is a fine line between campaign organisations within movements and these kinds of platforms, which provide support to movements in developing and disseminating campaigns. Most of these platforms would not view themselves as being involved in narrative change work; however, even campaigns working on short-term campaigns should be thinking about the deeper narratives they are trying to promote, which will create a more supportive context for their work in the long-term.

Creators and Broadcasters

As the Narrative Initiative describes:

> "Influencing mass audiences through music, film and TV, videogames, comedy, sports and faith is critical to shifting values and changing public discourse. Visual artists, documentarians and celebrities can play outsized roles in conveying particular messages that inject and legitimize values and diversity of thought into culture with broad appeal and distribution"[19].

Journalists and media platforms

Journalists are obviously an important vector for influencing attitudes and dispersing narratives. There are a range of actors and initiatives in this space to support reporting by movements and, also, to increase connections between movements and news outlets.

There are also notable examples of platforms created by movements – especially those whose voices have been excluded from traditional media. These are groups like LatFem, a digital native feminist media outlet that came out of the Ni una menos movement in Argentina and which engages in journalism from a feminist perspective across Latin America, or TransLash which uses the power of journalism and narrative to present trans-affirming content and resources.

Storytellers and ambassadors

These are the individuals that disseminate and amplify narratives, ranging from the high-profile and celebrity through to individuals working within their communities. As Rashad Robinson powerfully describes:

> "We need actual human beings serving as our main vehicle for achieving narrative change—people equipped, talented, motivated and networked to effectively spread new and compelling stories throughout their networks and sub-cultures, as well as spreading the values and thought models they contain, in order to move those ideas into a "normative" position in society"[20].

Movement Actors

This categorisation of movement actors includes both formal organisations (INGOs and NGOs) as well as other entities including social movements and actors operating online to shift values. Unlike the 'Builders' described above, they aren't categorised by their function – it's our view that all of them have a critical role to play in narratives work – but they are distinguished from each other on the basis of their structure and position within civil society.

The subcategories used are:
- NGOs
- Networks
- Social movements

- Grassroots actors
- 'Free radicals'

These are described briefly below with examples drawn primarily from the LGBTQIA+ and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) movements. As well as region and structure, another important distinction in this field is the extent to which they are engaged in narrative practice.

I. NGOs

This includes international, national and local level NGOs. Examples of groups working in the areas of narratives at the international level include Ipas' efforts to document the strategies of anti-rights actors and identify responses.

II. Networks

This includes both regional and international networks of organisations and groups. An example of an organisation working to challenge narratives is Liberties.EU, the network of civil liberties organisations in the European Union, which has created a toolkit for its members on how to develop better narratives against authoritarianism. ILGA-Europe is also doing important work to support its members to mobilise and respond to discursive and other tactics used by anti-rights actors. Other key examples of networks working in the area of gender justice include Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and Resurj, to name but a few.

III. Social movements

These are working both internationally and domestically, both online and physically, but not through formalised organisations. There are many examples of these like The Milk Tea Alliance, an online protest movement consisting of netizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Myanmar (Burma), Ni una menos that campaigns against gender-based violence across Latin America, and Black Lives Matter which rose up against racism and inequality in the USA and then globally.

[19] Narrative Initiative, 'Towards New Gravity: Charting a Course for the Narrative Initiative' (May 2017) <https://narrativeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TowardNewGravity-June2017.pdf> [last accessed: 6 September 2023], p. 7.

[20] Rashad Robinson, 'Changing Our Narrative About Narrative: The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power', Other & Belonging Institute (18 April 2018) <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/changing-our-narrative-about-narrative> [last accessed: 6 September 2023].

IV. Grassroots groups

Parts of social movements but operating at the local level to generate change. This could also include community groups, operating informally.

V. 'Free Radicals'

These are individuals operating outside of formal civil society to shift culture. This includes both artists and other creatives but also people working online as influencers, who are able to engage wide audiences, generate conversations and influence values through the affordances of modern technology. Some of them see themselves explicitly as activists, whilst others may be aligned in terms of values but see themselves as shifting narratives in a less directional way.

Funders

Generally, most funding for this ecosystem is emanating from private foundations with long-term rights-oriented visions. As with the rest of the ecosystem, the largest number of funders are based in – and supporting work in – the USA around economic justice, migrants, women's and LGBTQIA+ rights. There is also a cohort of UK funders working to support narratives work.

There are a range of entry points for funders into this work: some are supporting individual campaigns; some are supporting capacity within the organisations that they fund to engage in narratives work; while others fund the kind of infrastructure organisations described above to build narrative power. Many come to this work through cultural change or storytelling work, or through an interest in strategic communications. Funding tends to be focused on specific issue areas and movements, in ways that are not aligned with the larger goal of shifting 'deep narratives' or broader cross-movement narratives.

Notable examples of private foundations working internationally around narratives include Ford Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy, Oak Foundation, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Foundation for a Just Society, Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF). There are also regional funders like The Asia Foundation, which have invested in building the capacity of their grantee partners to engage in narratives work. There are grassroots funds like UHAI East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative that have also supported their partners in the same way. Fund for Global Human Rights has been supporting its partner organisations in multiple locations to experiment around the use of narratives for many years, particularly aimed at challenging authoritarianism and attacks on activism.

There are a number of donor collaboratives that are also focused on supporting narratives work by movements internationally. For example, in the area of countering anti-rights actors seeking to rollback LGBTQIA+ and sexual and reproductive rights, there is Nebula Fund: a newly-formed collaborative fund which supports movements advancing gender justice and LGBTQIA+ rights to expand their narrative power.

Other important examples include the International Resource for Impact and Storytelling (IRIS), which aims to support philanthropy interested in strengthening civil society through narrative strategies and moving image storytelling. While working with funders, it is also engaging with civil society and providing knowledge and convening capability for groups working in this area.

There is the work of Africa No Filter, which supports storytellers and organisations "to shift stereotypical narratives of Africa" by combining grantmaking with research, community building and advocacy. The Pop Culture Collaborative in the US also supports the growth of the pop culture for social change field in order to "transform the narrative landscape in America around people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Indigenous peoples, especially those who are women, queer, transgender and/or disabled".

Finally – looking beyond philanthropy – there are a number of narrative practitioners that support experimentation and application of research by movement members through the use of micro-grants. Examples include PUENTES and the New Media Advocacy Project.

02.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE ECOSYSTEM

This section presents observations about the state of the entire ecosystem and on the relationships between the different parts of it.

Before looking at the different groupings of actors and what they are saying, it's possible to take a step back and make some general observations about the ecosystem as a whole and the quality of the relationships within it. These are summarised as follows:

Unevenness between the US and the rest of the world:

This is a notably uneven field with the mass of practice, theory and resources focused on the USA. Taylor describes that:

> "in an increasingly developing sector in the US, numerous narrative change frameworks and methodologies have been incubated, tested and applied. However, the UK is seemingly slightly behind in its understanding and utilisation of narrative as a cornerstone to building progressive power."[21]

The UK is, however, relatively advantaged compared to many other parts of the world. There is clearly a need for resources, infrastructure and power-building to enable movement actors in the rest of the world to engage in narrative practice. At the same time, experience and expertise that exists outside of the Global North (even if it doesn't self-define itself as narratives work) should be surfaced, better recognised and disseminated. Otherwise, there is a risk of defining narrative practice based solely on what works within the social and political context of the USA.

> As well as potentially creating a colonial dynamic – where expertise is seen to be held in the Global North to be spread to the rest of the world – this imbalance also associates narratives work with a particular Global North context, in a way that may make movements less likely to see its relevance for their work.

Unevenness across civil society:

In as much as the word 'narrative' is a buzzword, it is used primarily by the 'grass tops' of civil society, including funders, INGOs and large national organisations. When it comes to the grassroots, there is less understanding or recognition of the term, even if the underlying ideas and concepts are familiar.

This gap is reflected in the weight of activity around narratives. Although it's hard to say that any area in this field is overresourced, there is a disproportionate focus on research and analysis. A recent report looking at the funding of narrative change in the USA reports in the words of respondents that there is "not enough support to grassroots/organizing groups who need more to build narrative power."[22] While there are notable examples of groups working to build power at the grassroots (like ReFrame), this is nothing like what is needed. Again, no matter how great this unevenness is in the USA, it feels that much greater elsewhere in the world.

This is undoubtedly linked to – but not completely due to – wider issues around diversity and inclusion within the communities of narrative practitioners. Both Rashad Robinson and Ruth Taylor highlight the lack of diversity among those working on narratives in the USA and the UK, and a lack of representation from the communities at the heart of this work.

> Issues of marginalisation and minoritisation show up in this mapping: raising questions of how this can be addressed and, particularly, how can communities of practitioners be developed that are inclusive from the very beginning?

[21] Ruth Taylor, 'Transforming Narrative Waters', p. 7.
[22] Mik Moore and Rinku Sen, 'Funding Narrative Change', p. 13.

Unevenness and disconnection between research and practice:

The focus has been on research and efforts to develop narratives, rather than on implementation and the necessary work to enable movements to bring these narratives to life. One interviewee in the same US report asserts that: "Foundations are spending too much money and time on intellectually 'getting it,' strategy, research, etcetera, and not enough time on experimenting and the doing of narrative".[23]

> To use an agricultural metaphor, the current system is focused on generating and cascading seeds of knowledge, but overlooking the soil where it is hoped that this will flourish.

Disconnection everywhere:

As well as being unequal, this is also a remarkably fragmented system with siloes and separation appearing across multiple dimensions, including:

- **Between movements** – there are a proliferation of efforts around narratives in relation to specific issue areas but fewer attempts to share learning, intelligence and generate narratives that advance the agendas of multiple movements.

- **Across regions** – there is a real appetite to learn from practice in different regions (especially from examples in the Global South and East, by actors who are also from there). For example, there is enormous interest from groups in Asia and Africa in the models and learning from the 'Green Wave' in South America but few spaces to access these. Moreover, given the way that anti-rights actors are operating transnationally, it is harder for intelligence on these to be shared or collaboration in the development and implementation of strategies against them.

- **Across language divides** – part of this disconnect across regions is to do with the challenge of operating in different languages. Furthermore, the majority of resources available on narratives are in English and, to a lesser extent, in Spanish. Actors operating outside of those languages (especially in non-colonial languages) have far fewer opportunities to access this knowledge and these resources. This is connected to the wider lack of investment in building the power of grassroots movements and results in a community of practice that is not informed by practice from outside the 'anglosphere'.

- **Between research and practice** – one of the most notable disconnects is the chasm between knowledge producers (particularly researchers and academics), who possess insights that would help build stronger narratives, and the movements that could most benefit from this information.

- **Between formal and informal civil society** – given how important 'free radicals' are in the field of narratives, there is a notable lack of relationships between these individuals and organisations working to the same ends. This is largely a generational disconnect, with the former tending to be younger and the latter from older generations.

Why this fragmentation matters and the role of 'integrators':

None of these disconnections and siloes are unique to the narrative space – there are a variety of profound reasons why movements and NGOs struggle to build cross-movement action. This negatively impacts the narratives field in multiple ways; for example, knowledge and learning that could be important or inspiring for different actors stays locked up in one part of the ecosystem and is not put into practice.

However, one of the most important consequences of this fragmentation is the way that it prevents the ecosystem

from working together to shift deeper narratives that underpin attitudes across a range of issues, of – in the words of Bridget Antoinette Evans – seeking to "holistically transform these narrative waters"[24].

> It is also in notable contrast to the antagonistic actors working against the movements described – for example, anti-rights actors who are working transnationally and across different issue areas.

Given these disconnects, the role of entities that act as 'integrators' and who work to bridge these divides across communities is so important. Of special importance are those who work to bridge the gap between researchers and movements. A healthy ecosystem is dependent on these bridging organisations but there are not enough of such actors.

Another notable absence in the ecosystem appears to be in actors in the narrative space working to build relationships across movements. There are examples in the US (e.g. RadComms) and efforts elsewhere including between LGBTQIA+ and SRHR movements responding to the challenges posed by the anti-gender movements; for example, the work being supported by Nebula Fund. However, more of these cross-movement collaborations are vital to strengthen narratives.

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[24] Ruth Taylor, 'Transforming Narrative Waters', p. 12.

[23] Ibid, p. 13.
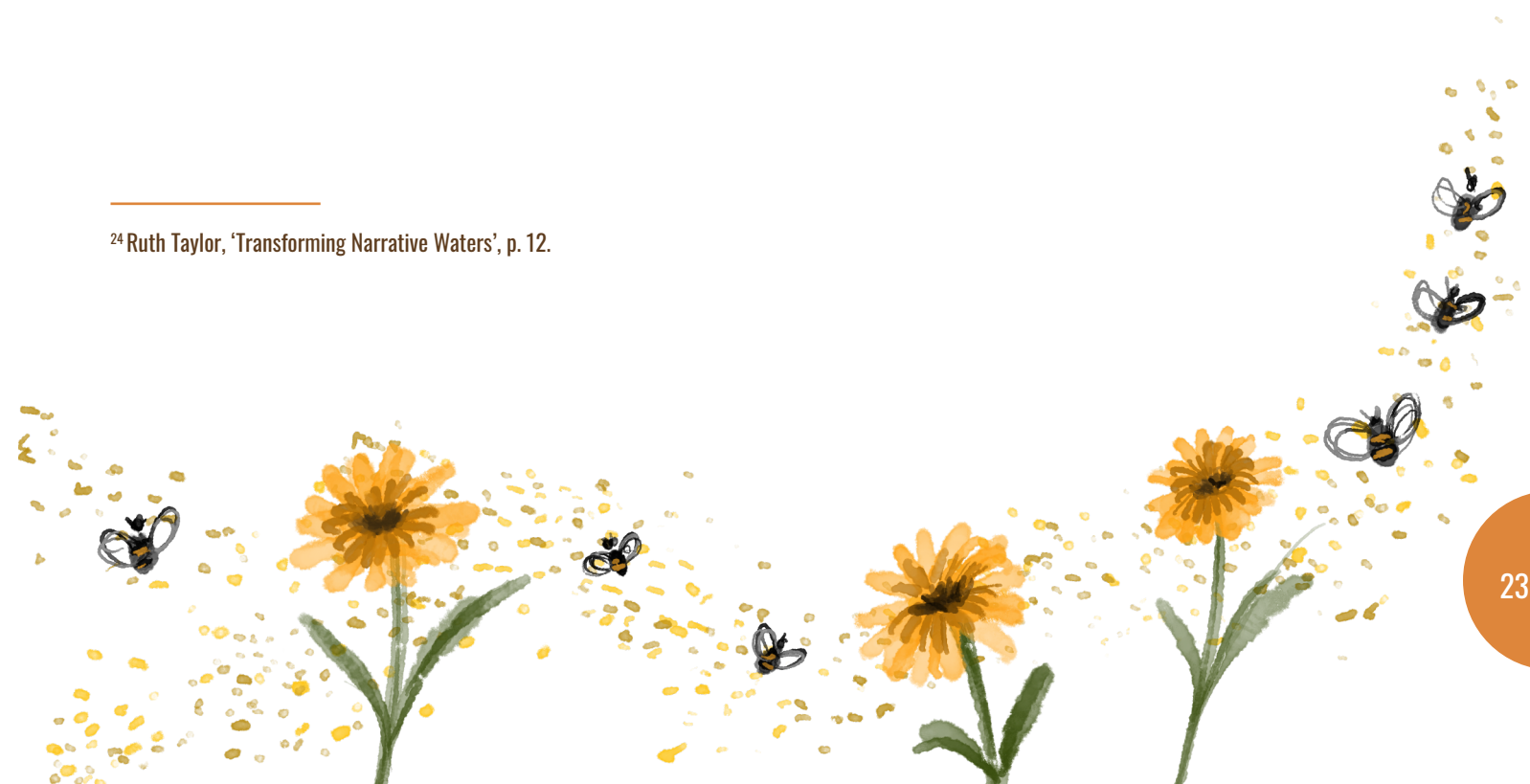
03.

WHAT THE NARRATIVE ECOSYSTEM IS SAYING

This section describes what the different categories of actors have said over the Global Narrative Hive's process of engagement, co-design, and imagination about their context, needs and priorities in the narratives ecosystem. It first presents observations that occurred across multiple groupings of actors, before looking at the feedback from each specific grouping (e.g. narrative actors, movement actors and the subcategories within these groups).

Looking again at the ecosystem as a whole, there were certain key themes articulated by actors throughout the different parts of it. These were as follows:

- A powerful desire to find ways to work on narratives across different movements, in other words to 'build common cause'. This was motivated by a sense that movements were experiencing attacks from the same source, being challenged by the same systemic issues, had a shared broad world view, or because they saw this collaborative approach as necessary to advance a deeper narrative.

- A need to bring people into a community and facilitate space, time and healing to help build relationships between those within the community and those seeking to support the community externally. This was seen as fundamental for the building of common cause to happen successfully. This kind of process and community-focus was also seen as important to allow for the exchange of learning and expertise in a meaningful way that avoided a 'colonising' mode of capacity-building.

- A strong interest in the role of futures, as well as planting narrative 'seeds' that could be harvested in the future, in the way that anti-rights actors were seen to be effectively utilising.

- There was a widespread recognition that movements were having to react defensively to crises with short-term strategies and that this needed to be balanced with the building of longer-term visions.[25]

- In tandem, there was an interest and desire to explore and potentially adopt new tools, new platforms and new tactics. On the part of the narrative practitioners, there is a wish to stay connected to the cutting edge of research and to have the capacity to explore new opportunities for influence as they emerge. On the movement side, there was a sense they were constantly having to play 'catch up'; that antagonists were quicker to test and then adopt the potential of new tools and platforms, and then reap the benefits of being an early adopter. There was recognition that younger activists and actors operating outside of formal civil society were better able to do this, but that the disconnects between them and the rest of civil society movements (as described above) limited wider learning and innovation.

- A desire for better measurement and evidence about narratives, particularly to be able to show 'what works'. This was identified by those on the 'Building' side as necessary to help improve the practices that they engage in and recommend, and to learn which approaches should be prioritised in different contexts. Such evidence was also seen as a way of 'making the case for' narrative strategies, by showing that it could be more effective than traditional ways of communicating. On the movement side, there was particular interest in this improved monitoring as a way of helping to navigate disagreements between those seeking to mobilise their base and those seeking to build broader public support from outside of their base.

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25 The positive aspects of engaging in visioning or futures practices around narratives is endorsed by a recent literature review by the Narrative Engagement Across Difference initiative, which states that: "Long-term utopian thinking increases people's intention to participate in collective action and encourages higher level cognitive thinking. Additionally, the positive framing of messages (positive stories about the future) often can expand the category of 'we,' altering the boundaries of the in-group, and making the 'we' more inclusive... this is a very powerful strategy for developing collaborative relations, as it constitutes, or creates the relational knowledge needed to do things with others". See: Dr. Sara Cobb, Dr. Jale Sultanli, Dr. Alison Castel, 'Collaborating Across Difference to Reduce Authoritarianism: A Literature Review' (March 2023) The Horizons Project, <https://3k7b01.a2cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Collaborating-Across-Differences-to-Reduce-Authoritarianism.pdf>, p. 36 [last accessed: 6 September 2023].

Finally, there is recognition across the ecosystem of the challenges in building movements' power to lead narratives work. Many actors working to build power have experience of adapting their methodologies based on seeing training fail to take hold firsthand. One common example cited is where individuals from movements participate in trainings but find themselves unable to put that into practice, often because their wider group or its leadership have not seen the value of narratives work. Such actors have subsequently adapted and innovated in their models; for example, by prioritising models of accompaniment and mentorship, and by ensuring engagement across organisations, especially with leadership. There is appetite to explore with, and learn from, each other about new methodologies and tactics to build power.

Beyond this, it is clear that the adoption of narrative strategies represents a profound shift in movements' operations. The factors preventing that shift are not only a question of knowledge but also of skill and mindsets at both an individual and organisational level, influenced by key factors such as resources, culture and leadership.

The role of funders is also a critical one in allowing organisations to:

- Experiment and adopt new approaches;

- Think long-term;

- Support narrative initiatives that are multi-issue;

- Assess the impact of communications efforts not solely on short-term and limited metrics[26] but on

the broader contribution they make to advancing a narrative.

This all sits within a societal context where many activists are being threatened and almost everyone is feeling that they are living through multiple crises. This has several impacts on the narratives space; for example, activist communities who are already marginalised and discriminated against risk being exposed to attacks both online and in real life if they become more visible and vocal. A call for more support in the form of care and security for those working to shift narratives was raised repeatedly throughout this process.

More generally,

> the effects of threat, crisis and precarity on organisations and individuals are known to inhibit innovation and collaboration with others. At the same time as trying to tackle these crises, how can we better understand these factors and design strategies to build knowledge, advance practice and shift culture whilst being mindful of these threats and designing around them? What conditions and support can be created to allow for learning, collaboration and experimentation in these circumstances?

I. Needs Articulated And Observed Among Narrative Actors

Findings from the categories of narrative actors are described below.

Among 'Builders':

There was a desire to create stronger communities of practice that cut across regions, movements and geographies – building on the examples of initiatives like RadComms in the USA, and Inter-Narratives Community in the UK – which would link existing communities and networks of those working on narratives.

- This was particularly articulated by those working as 'integrators', who operate as a bridge between researchers, analysts and movements. There is a strong appetite from these groups to find a space that allows for the sustained sharing of learning and experience garnered by peers, which could also act as a place from which research is commissioned, and experiments around new tools and approaches could be instigated.

- There are particular areas of enquiry and interest around: ways to access up-to-date academic research and evidence from myriad fields (e.g. neuroscience)

[26] For example, the number of mentions an organisation receives on social media.

that could inform more effective strategies; new tools and platforms; and better methodologies to evaluate narrative change strategy. It was seen as important that the space should facilitate the practical application of research and experimentation around learning.

• Areas of peer learning that these 'integrators' were interested in exploring included strategies to advance narratives during elections and, as described in detail above, methodologies around how to better build power in movements.

• There is awareness that this is a narrow community which reflects the limitations within the ecosystem of narrative practice – e.g. predominantly Global North-based and often lacking diversity and representation from the communities most affected by negative narratives. There is a desire to find ways to expand this community to become more inclusive and representative.

• Respondents from this grouping also identified a gap in the field for more organisations or individuals who can provide support to NGOs that are looking to develop narratives. These are organisations or individuals that have technical skills but also have knowledge and/ or are from the movements from which support is being asked, or are aligned in terms of values. Several members of this community talked about how they were being approached with more requests to assist organisations than they were able to meet and did not have other consultants or advisors to refer them onto.

Among Researchers and Analysts:

• Overall, there is a keen desire to find ways to unlock research and analysis from within specific organisations or within specific countries – there is a strong feeling from across the ecosystem that, at present, this research does not travel far across geographies and into movements where it could be used. As described below, translation of these into other languages is an important request that would help to facilitate this reach.

• There was also a desire (described above) to find ways to support putting this research into practice. The use of 'micro-grants' to allow civil society to experiment around implementing the findings of research was seen in a few places, including by PUENTES and New Media Advocacy Project with their communities.

• There is also a desire for a broader mechanism or opportunities for academic research to connect with practitioners to help them define their research agendas but also to provide greater examples and insights from practice.

• Similarly, there was a call to diversify where research is carried out, with calls for research to be led by academics from the Global South and East, and not only by those in the Global North.

Related to Creators and Broadcasters:

This is an area for further investigation, as their specific views have not been comprehensively reflected or covered in the mapping process. However, two key themes that emerged in relation to this group were:

- An overall challenge around bringing Creators and Broadcasters into alignment with the wider ecosystem, particularly to ensure that the narratives that they are using and disseminating align with those being advised and built elsewhere. The role of groups like Hackeo Cultural or the Pop Culture Collaborative to bridge to these actors and generate that alignment seem especially important.

- The need, as described earlier, for further diversification to include other channels such as influencers and brands.

II. Needs Articulated And Observed Among Movement Actors

The different movement actors in this ecosystem can be mapped along a spectrum from those that have the knowledge, interest, relationships and other resources to engage in narratives work, through to those that do not possess these and are not presently engaging in work on narratives.

There is no correlation here between size or budget and level of engagement; it's not the case that larger, better resourced, or Global North-based NGOs are more likely to be engaged in strategy working with narratives. On the contrary – and for the reasons described above –

> many of these larger organisations find it harder to adapt their tactics, as they are more invested in their traditional methodologies and also are often driven by a need to be conspicuous and to prove their impact (particularly to donors). This leads to a tendency to communicate in a way that focuses on press attention and having their contribution to a campaign clearly acknowledged.

Therefore, regardless of size, the needs amongst movement actors differ based on whether they are already exploring this work; are interested and enthusiastic about exploring narrative strategies but do not possess the knowledge or means to use them; or they remain sceptical and unpersuaded by narrative strategies. There are diverging views, particularly from the 'Builders', as to whether it is worth attempting to shift actors who are in the latter group. Given the size and reach of larger organisations and networks – and how the narratives that they are unconsciously promoting can sometimes compete or even work against the narratives that their wider movements are seeking to promote – some feel that they must not be overlooked in favour of the first two groups.

Some of the needs articulated across the different movements were:

Among larger NGOs and networks:

- A strong and widespread interest in finding ways to build shared narratives or visions. There is recognition of the challenge of bridging across movements as well as an awareness that this needs to be a slow process of building trust, mutual understanding and shared analysis that could (and potentially might not) flower into a deeper collaboration.

  Rushing towards the goal of collaboration or being overly directive about the outcomes is perceived as something that could be counter-productive. The creation of open spaces that bring together actors across different movements and the centring of healing processes was seen as a key tool in getting to this ultimate goal.

- There is a significant interest in futures, not only as a way of looking beyond short-term communication methods and reactive campaigning, but also as a way of generating conversations and thinking that lifts people's attention beyond the issues that they are immediately dealing with - allowing them to find commonalities with actors from other movements. The idea of creating an architecture that allows for generating such imagination was mentioned repeatedly.

- At the same time, these actors are seeking ways to respond to immediate challenges through narratives: to counter or disable the narratives put out by antagonists, or in relation to a particular crisis or opportunity. An obvious example of this was in relation to the narratives being put out by anti-rights actors. There were numerous questions about what type of infrastructure could allow for responses to hostile narratives that cut across different movements, without being purely reactive but which instead anticipated and addressing emerging threats,
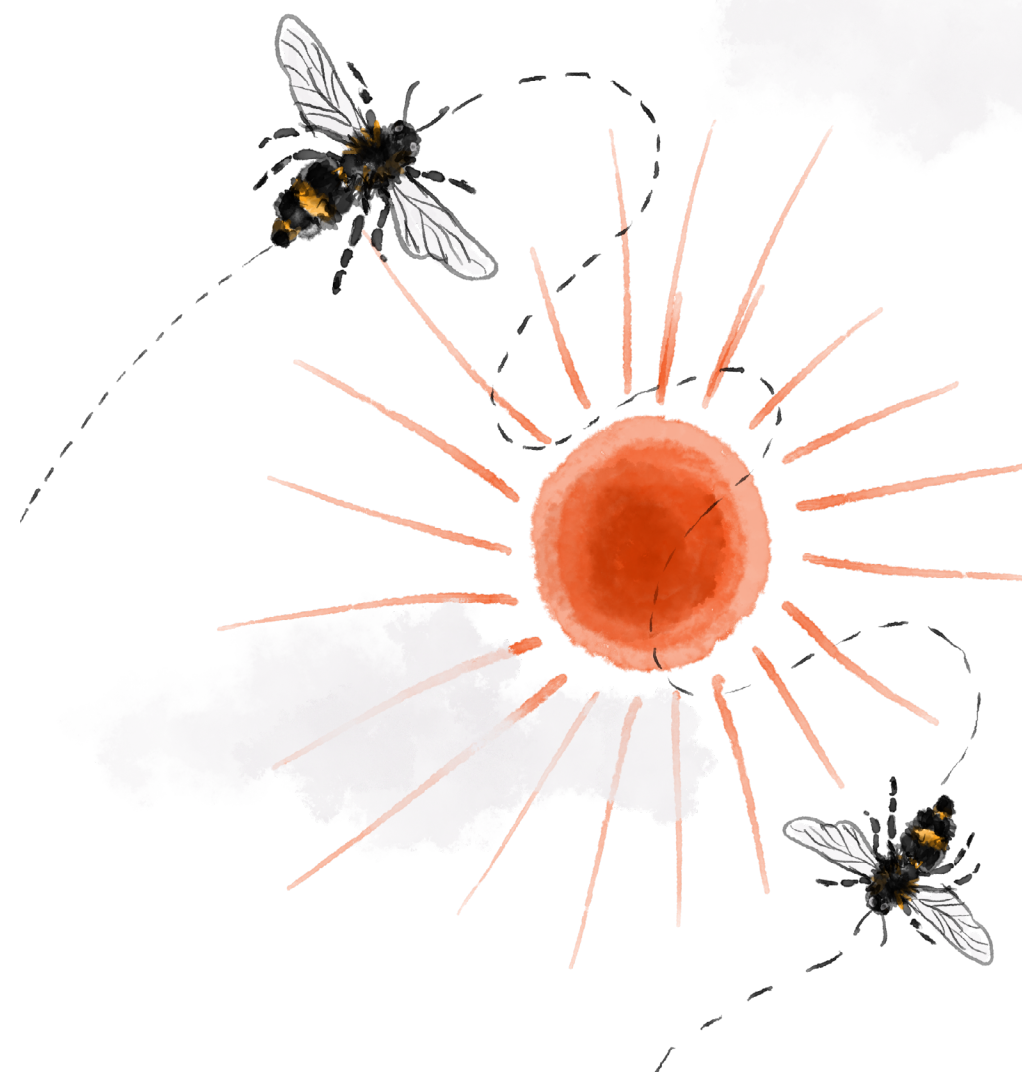
For 'narrative enthusiasts':

For actors – whether in large NGOs or working at the grassroots – who are interested in or committed to using narratives already, there were some obvious themes that emerged from conversations. There are strong resonances with the findings from ILGA-Europe's survey of its members in Europe and Central Asia around their needs related to communications.[27] These included:

- Opportunities for accompaniment and mentorship from those that are experienced in narratives work – for example, to be able to access those with knowledge for guidance on the development and implementation of their projects.

- Connectedly, a curated, safe and secure online space for sharing knowledge, expertise and practice in an 'alive' way; in other words, not a 'clearing house' for toolkits, guides and evaluations but something that is conversational and allows for exchange of ideas.

- Such an online space could meet the strong appetite to learn from other movements and groups in other regions that have developed effective campaigns. The success of the 'Green Wave' across Latin America was of strong interest to respondents working for gender justice in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, for example. There is also interest in learning about new tactics – for example, the use of comedy to shift norms – as well as learnings from the kinds of academic disciplines identified by narrative practitioners (for example, on neuroscience). There was also strong interest in finding ways to engage Gen Z as influencers and multipliers of messages.

- Opportunities to experiment around narratives for those new to it – to 'dip their toes' into this work. We know, from the experiments that were part of our co-design and co-creation process, that there are actors working at the grassroots or outside of the formal civil society that traditional funding mechanisms are not reaching and for whom this was an important opportunity to gain entry to this field of practice. Mention was also made of the creation of 'Labs' as another potential way to enable such experimentation, as well as the call to funders above to provide funding that allows for such experimental work by activists. Another critical factor around access to the field is the issue of language. As described above, there is an absence of materials available in languages other than English and, to some extent, Spanish.

> **There are particular difficulties for groups and activists working in non-colonial languages. As well as limiting the spread of knowledge, this has serious implications for the field in terms of who gets to participate in the community of practice, and by inhibiting the flow of examples and practice from outside the 'anglosphere' that could enrich the field of knowledge around narratives.**

- It's important to highlight that, as we carried out conversations and the co-design process, we were moving through a period of multiple overlapping crises – including a global pandemic, financial meltdowns and inflation, wars, attacks on minorities, ecological degradation and political turmoil. Movement actors – already overstretched – found themselves having to navigate the multiple demands put upon them during the pandemic. What's more, the rightful desire by funders and INGOs to shift power and move to more participatory models of strategy development and grant-making represented another ball to juggle. Building bridges and collaborating with other movements is yet another expectation being put on their shoulders.

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27 ILGA-Europe, 'Communicating for Change' (February 2021) <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/communicating-for-change/ > [last accessed 6 September 2023].

In this context, movement actors highlighted the importance of spaces and processes that are energising and inviting, as well as ensuring that these efforts are compensated and not expected to be voluntary contributions. This is a challenge of which any spaces of the kinds described above should be mindful.

- Broader questions of care and security for narrative workers surfaced throughout the process. Many of these activists and practitioners are from communities that are under attack and operating in contexts where the space for activism is constrained. There was strong interest in finding ways to ensure that they can carry out their work safely and in a way that promotes care.

III. Reflections On Resourcing

Funders were not a focus group within the co-design process. There were, however, a lot of suggestions from the different narrative and movement actors about what is needed from funders, including:

- A call for progressive funders to genuinely fund progressively: to support multi-year, flexible funding across a range of approaches, allowing for experimentation and breaking out of the siloes in which they operate.

- Calls for funders to invest seriously in narratives work as a strategy for achieving positive change, equal to their investment in other tactics such as policy or litigation work. In particular, there is a call to address the gaps in availability of resources for groups and actors beyond capital-based organisations and the other 'grass tops' of civil society.

- To move beyond a focus on research and analysis (particularly audience research) to fund infrastructure organisations that build power and strengthen other channels which allow for the distribution of narratives.

- To support work that promotes care and security among narrative workers.

Finally, from the conversations with funders that have taken place, it's clear that there is a desire to learn more about narrative strategies, and also to get a more complete picture of the narratives landscape and its actors - including of groups working at the local level that funders could support.

04.

SEEDING AND NOURISHING CHANGE

Together, the participants in this research have articulated a vision of a future narratives ecosystem where the actors have strong relationships, are able to align their efforts, are equipped for the long run, and where they are able to share and benefit from the learning that they are collectively generating. It is impossible to prescribe precise or universal calls to action to realise the transition to this vision. Each movement and local or national context has very specific needs that cannot fully be reflected in this way. Furthermore, and despite our best efforts to do justice to the conversations we have had, we recognise that our synthesis is informed by our own position in the ecosystem.

Instead, we have sought to identify a set of key intentions, based on the needs raised repeatedly across our conversations, which we hope can be adopted by all those who are in a position to support this journey to a more just and effective narratives ecosystem. We also offer a number of examples suggesting how Builders and Funders in particular can contribute to these goals.

1. Raise up the narrative power of movements and practitioners, especially those who are disconnected, marginalised or not recognised for reasons of race, ethnicity, age, geography, language, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, caste or class.

There are important critiques that have been emerging over the last few years about the importance of shifting power within civil society and philanthropy – there is a need to develop and transform the ecosystem for narrative power in the same way.

Refer back to: pages 24, 26, 35, 37

'Builders' can:

- Expand and deepen efforts to build the narrative power of the parts of movements that are described above, in ways that leave those movements in a position to lead this work themselves into the future. This includes working in a way that is genuinely in service to movements, based on models of accompaniment and exchange, and recognising agency and context.

- Explore how to contribute to the expansion of this community of power-builders so that it becomes more diverse and includes individuals from the communities and movements they are working for.

- Share learning with one another on how to build this kind of people-led narrative power.

- Join the Global Narratives Hive - we are seeking to support Builders in making these changes by convening cross-movement spaces for discussion and knowledge-sharing.

Funders can:

- Support the long-term building of narrative power in movements, especially among those parts of movements that are disconnected, marginalised or underrepresented. Approach this in a way that genuinely shifts power, is in service to these movements, and is based on a model of accompaniment.[28]

- Invest in those power-builders that are working as integrators, who are closely connected to movements and working through methods of accompaniment. Moreover, to support the expansion of this community so that it includes a greater number of more diverse actors, particularly those from the communities and regions that they are working with.

- Give movements the kinds of unrestricted resources they need to experiment, create and learn by doing, rather than focusing solely or predominantly on strategy and analysis.

- Recognise that building this kind of narrative power - and work to shift 'deep narratives' - is fundamental for movements. Rather than focus exclusively on short-term initiatives seeking to counter 'narrative crises', funders should commit to funding movements' narratives work over the long-term and at the scale required.

2. Break out from our siloes. Unlock the dissemination of learning between different communities of actors in the ecosystem and enable peer-to-peer exchange to build common cause across movements.

There is a widespread recognition that the challenges movements are facing, and the world that we are trying to build, are deeply connected and require solidarity and cooperation to realise. This is especially true for work related to narratives. Movements are inspired by seeing what others are doing and there is a deep appetite to learn from and collaborate with those working on other causes. Furthermore, there are skills and knowledges held by communications workers, researchers, artists and other allies that are of value to movement actors and these connections and learning opportunities can be strengthened.

Builders can:

- Work with movements to document the narrative work they are engaged in and share this in a way that is accessible (in terms of format, languages etc), allowing lessons from that learning to be put into practice by others. The Global Narratives Hive can support with translation in the interests of language justice.

- Create and participate in spaces and events that enable peer-to-peer learning across movements and regions, provides opportunities for collective-sensemaking, and that disintermediates the flow of knowledge throughout the ecosystem. This is also something that the Hive aims to facilitate.

Funders can:

- Support movements so that they have the resources, time and freedom to learn based on the learning priorities they have identified for themselves.

- Support open-ended spaces and processes that enable the creation of authentic relationships between actors and across movements – this would form a valuable basis for sharing of learning and collaboration. Exercises in collective sense-making, visioning and imagination are important ways to generate shared understanding and, also, to create future narratives around which different movements can coalesce.

- Resource spaces that enable learning to be shared on a peer-to-peer basis.

- Support processes and spaces that allow for learning to be communicated across different domains. This includes investment in translation into different languages but also in 'bridging' work, so that learning produced from different regions, movements and technical fields can be understood.

- Support those within the ecosystem acting as bridges and integrators. Focusing on these nodes of connection will facilitate a more effective flow of knowledge between researchers and those in the field, and between different movements and across regions.

- Examine funding processes and programmes to identify how they may be disincentivizing cross-movement work and take steps to address these barriers.[29]

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[28] See Rhonda Shlangen et al, 'Transformative Shifts: From Capacity to Movement Power', American Jewish World Service (April 2023) <https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Transformative-Shifts_From-Capacity-to-Movement-Power_2023_EN.pdf> [last accessed 8 September 2023].

[29] Some of the ways they could do this are suggested by IRIS in their article: Brett Davidson, 'Blurring the Boundaries', IRIS (2 February 2023) <https://storyforimpact.io/blog/new-thinking-narrative-change> [last accessed: 8 September 2023].

3. Recognise the challenging context that movements are facing and provide the support and conditions needed to enable relationship building, learning, adoption of new approaches, and engagement in longer-term narrative building.

It is vital that movements are not only able to engage in defensive 'countering' work but also to proactively engage in broader strategy. The support needed includes opportunities to heal, to imagine, to experiment, to collaborate and, especially, the resources to do so.

Refer back to: pages 26, 36 and 37.

'Builders' can:

Create processes and spaces that are open-ended, informed by the context of movements, and which centre healing and relationship-building.

Funders can:

• Again, take a long-term and generous approach that is in service to movements.

• Centre healing and care in the work that they are supporting, and recognise the value of open spaces and retreats that enable learning and relationship-building.

• Provide resources and compensation to facilitate this so that movements are able to engage in this work in a way that does not add yet more demands on them.

• The Global Narratives Hive will be guided by the findings of this report and seeks to support actors within the narratives ecosystem to work collaboratively and sustainably towards these changes. We welcome new members to the Hive and would love to hear from you.

With Thanks To

> As individuals, they've been extraordinary in their generosity, creativity and bravery. Collectively, they have been unstoppable and have exemplified the values of mutual care and cross-movement solidarity that our emerging network aspires to model into the future. Although we have to keep their names in the dark given the risks they face for their activism, we want our appreciation to them to shine out.

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