The Stories We Tell

Designing values-oriented narratives

"Stories are the secret reservoirs of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations. Nations and peoples are largely the stories they tell themselves."

-Ben Okri

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This booklet was made as a supplement for the presentation of our thesis "The Stories We Tell: Designing Values-Oriented Narratives of Radical Change Initiatives Towards Sustainability" at the 25th Anniversary Congress of the Vereniging Basisinkomen. It includes extracts from our thesis, which can be accessed, in its full version at http://bth.diva-portal.org.

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Table of Content

Glossary

Activation of Values: Cognitive process in which the use of certain words, images, metaphors etc. stimulates a particular value or sets of values in the mind of the individual communicated to.

Communication: Activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior. Communication is any act by which one person gives to or receives information from another person about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states.
Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes.

Frames: Are both mental structures that order our ideas and communicative tools, which evoke these structures and shape our perceptions and interpretations over time. They are cognitive devices that allow us to understand the world, and they are constructs that activate and strengthen particular values. Values are abstract concepts, but they are made more concrete by an understanding of frames, and the way in which frames serve as vehicles to strengthen particular values in society. SA: can this be written in simplified way?

Framing: Is the specific way of communicating a certain issue by making use of existing frames within the individual or society. This can be done consciously or unconsciously. By using certain words e.g. someone can try to activate existing frames and therefore make the information easier to access for a particular audience.

Narrative: "narrative" derives from the Latin narrare, meaning "telling", and gnarus, which means, "being acquainted with something", "having knowledge of something".

Priming: It refers to activating particular representations or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task. In experiments with values, priming has been used to activate certain values within the participant in order to test how they influence behavior.

Values: Values represent our guiding principles: our broadest motivations, influencing the attitudes we hold and how we act. They represent a strong guiding force, shaping our attitudes and behavior over the course of our lives.

Values Circumflex: A graphic model of values developed by Shalom H. Schwartz. The circumflex contains 10 broad domains of values, representing a list of 64 different personal values. These domains are organized around two cross axis, of which the poles are opposite to one another.

Values-oriented narrative: A narrative that is designed based on people´s values.

Sustainability and an Unconditional Basic Income

In our thesis we have used a science-based definition of sustainability, which has been developed during the passed 25 years. The definition is part of a strategic framework called The Framework of Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) (Broman & Robèrt, 2015) and it consists of 8 sustainability principles. These principles, three ecological and five social principles, create the boundaries within which all societal systems and processes needs to fit in order to sustain the socio-ecological system within the limits of the planet.

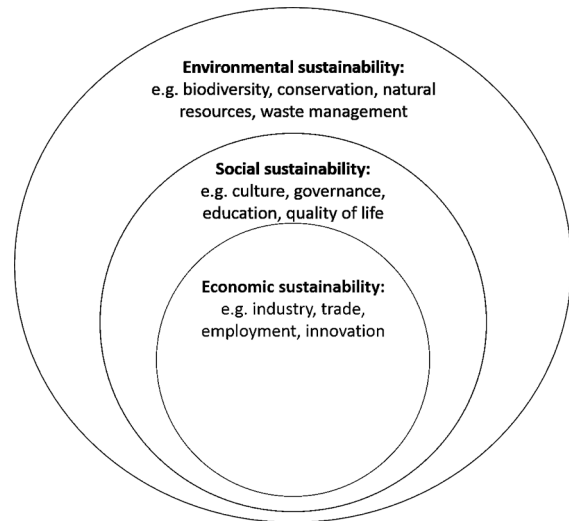*In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing …*

1. … concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust.
2. … concentrations of substances produced by society
3. … degradation by physical means

and in a sustainable society, people are not subject to systematic barriers to …

4. … health
5. … influence
6. … competence
7. … impartiality
8. … meaning-making.

In short, and following the model of inter-related systems (see below), the sustainability principles offers the boundaries within which human designed systems, i.e. our economic system, needs to operate in order not to violate our social and ecological systems. Compliance with the social sustainability principles contributes to building trust and a stronger social web in society.

The radical idea of an unconditional basic income - radical in the sense of aiming for a change OF the system and not within the system- is in many aspects interesting from a sustainability point of view, especially in regards to the five social principles – health, influence, competence, impartiality and meaning. Further research on how and to what extent the implementation of an unconditional basic income would contribute to creating a more sustainable society would be very interesting. This is given earlier reported outcomes from different experiments regarding for instance less use of alcohol, less violence, a feeling of being able to have greater influence, starting to build confidence in your own competence of changing your everyday conditions, greater economic justice and reports of having a deeper sense of meaning and freedom.
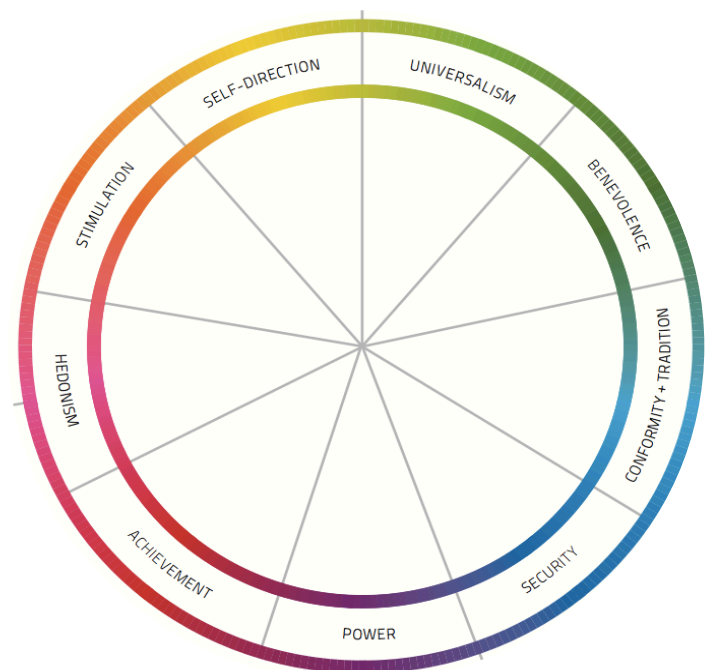
Communication, Narratives and Values

"People are not 'blank slates' receiving information (…) and interpreting it at face value" (Wolf and Moser 2011, 550), Instead we interpret such information through biased narratives that are forged by values, past experiences, tolerance to uncertainty, etc. (Nisbet 2009; Wolf and Moser 2011).

These narratives are the stories we tell ourselves as a way to make sense of the world, give reality coherence and meaning and to help guide action (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Scott and Marshall 2009; Springett 2003). They can be defined as *"interpretive storylines that set a specific train of thought in motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done about it"* (Nisbet 2009, 15). So, when we receive information we pay attention to the story and how it is aligned with our own deeply held sense of self (Herrick and Pratt 2013; McNall and Basile 2013).

What is more, our initial interpretations of what is wrong or right are often 'irrational', automatic, fast, visceral and not always conscious (Kahneman 2012; Moore 2007; Zwaan 1999). Thus the way information is narrated becomes of extreme importance as it can be rejected quickly just if the way it is explained is not aligned enough with the listener's narrative (Moser and Dilling 2011; Scott and Marshall 2009;Van de Velde et al. 2010).
In practical terms it means that we need to build a narrative that speaks to the values of our audience. That is done by activating those values in the mind of the individual communicated to, through use of certain words, images, metaphors etc..

Research (Schwartz, 2003; 2012) has showen that people have 10 basic values: universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation and self-direction (see Appendix 1 for definitions) which can be seen as our broadest motivations, influencing the attitudes we hold and how we act. While everyone shares the same values the importance of each of them varies among individuals.

Schwartz's Values Circumflex (Holmes et al. 2011)

An interesting aspect of these 10 values is that they can be compatible and/or conflicting in relation to each other. This is shown in the Figure above: the closer they are to each other in the circumference the more compatible they are, the more opposite they are the more conflicting. Finally, due to cognitive dissonance, similar values can be activated at the same time whereas it is harder for opposing values to do   so.

A misalignment between the values of the narrative of the EUBI and the values of the people in the European Union

The narrative of the UBI

The narrative of the UBI paints a scenario of systematic social injustices and lack of caring for others. It highlights the structural problems of our society and points reasons why we need to do something about the current situation. An UBI has many advantages such as leading to a decrease in poverty allow individuals to be more independent and creative.

Accordingly, the story of the EUBI emerges as a story about not only mankind's fate, but also the fate of each and every one of us. It draws from our common history and points out the systemic problems we face and the need to create an emancipatory system, allowing individuals to be free and fulfil their potential.

A misalignment between the values of the narrative of basic income and the values of the people in the European Union

Comparing how the 10 values are ranked by the narrative of the initiative and by the population we can observe a misalignment. Looking at the order of importance, we can see some similarities and some differences. For the Europeans, the most important values are Benevolence (1st), Universalism (2nd), Security (3rd) and Self-direction (4th). The EUBI narrative activates those values in a somewhat different way. Benevolence comes in 5th, Universalism 1st, Security matches and also comes in 3rd and Self-direction comes in 2nd.

Misalignment #1: This means that the order of the values' rankings is not the same between the initiative and the population.

When looking into the relation among values for the initiative and for the population, another important observation emerges. Data shows that the narrative is not balanced in terms of the distribution among the values and, most likely, also not within the values at the sub-values level. The population of the European Union appears to have, in general, a more balanced stance.

Misalignment #2: Some values, in particular Benevolence and Security, are not activated to the degree of the importance given by the citizens of the European Union. The conclusion made is that the level of activation of the values within the narrative seems not to correspond to how important they are for individuals.

A final remark regards the sub-values. The ESS questionnaire does not measure all the sub-values, so a more robust conclusion is not possible. Yet, the evidence available appears to point in the direction of balance between the sub-values in terms of the population. The findings from the narrative analysis, for instance within the value of Universalism, seem to indicate that the initiative has a focus on certain sub-values while neglecting others. Thus, leading to imbalance among sub-values, which is contrasting with the balance among sub-values from the population of the European Union.

Misalignment #3: Misalignment #2 also appears to be valid within each value at the sub-value level. While the evidence is weaker here, we still argue that there is a possible misalignment at the level of the sub-value.

A new narrative for the EUBI

A better overall design

Under the lens of the Guidelines (see Appendix B), the identified misalignment can be explained and improved. A new narrative should:

- Be intentional and depart from how the audience imagines a future with basic income;
- Take into consideration the system we live in. Remember that an UBI is "radical" and thus is extra important that it fits peoples narratives;
- Activate the value of Benevolence at the same extent that Universalism and Self-Direction;

- Use the words associated with each value the to build a narrative;
- Not focusing on criticizing the current system but focusing on how a future with an UBI would look like.

A possible new narrative

The narrative of the EUBI could paint a future of caring for yourself, your family and friends and society at large. It would mean to put attention to what you genuinely want to do, how you can spend time with and take care of the ones you love and how you can contribute to the world in a meaningful way.

Theoretical underpinning and literature suggestions

Our thesis departs from the theoretical blocks described bellow. To which of them we suggest some literature in case you become curious about the topic and/or wish to deepen your knowledge.

Sustainable development

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Appendix A

Following, you find a list of the 10 basic values and respective sub-values *(Holmes et al. 2011).*

Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature
- Broadminded: Tolerant of different ideas and beliefs
- Unity with nature: Fitting into nature
- A world of beauty: Beauty of nature and the arts
- A world of peace: Free of war and conflict
- Wisdom: A mature understanding of life
- Equality: Equal opportunities for all
- Protecting the environment: Preserving nature
- Inner harmony: At peace with myself
- Social justice: Correcting injustice, care for the weak

Benevolence: preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
- A spiritual life: Emphasis on spiritual not material matters
- Forgiving: Willing to pardon others
- Honest: Genuine, sincere
- Helpful: Working for the welfare of others
- Mature love: Deep emotional and spiritual intimacy
- True friendship: Close, supportive friends
- Meaning in life: A purpose in life
- Loyal: Faithful to my friends, group
- Responsible: Dependable, reliable

Conformity: restrain of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
- Self-discipline: Self restraint, resistance to temptation
- Politeness: Courtesy, good manners
- Honoring of elders: Showing respect
- Obedient: Dutiful, meeting obligations

Tradition: respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religions provide the self
- Humble: Modest
- Detachment: From worldly concerns
- Devout: Holding to religious faith and belief
- Respect for tradition: Preservation of time honored customs
- Moderate: Avoiding extreme feelings & actions
- Accepting my portion in life: Submitting to life's circumstances

Security: safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of oneself
- Healthy: Not being sick physically or mentally
- Family security: Safety for loved ones
- Social order: Stability of society
- Clean: Neat, tidy
- Reciprocation of favors: Avoidance of indebtedness
- Sense of belonging: Feeling that others care about me
- National security: Protection of my nation from enemies

Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
- Social recognition: Respect, approval of others
- Authority: The right to lead or command
- Preserving my public image: Protecting my 'face
- Wealth: Material possessions, money
- Social power: Control over others, dominance

Achievement: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
- Intelligent: Logical thinking
- Capable: Competent, effective, efficient
- Successful: Achieving goals
- Ambitious: Hard working, aspiring
- Influential: Having an impact on people and events

Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratifications for oneself

- Pleasure: Gratification of desires
- Self-indulgent: Doing pleasant things
- Enjoying life: Enjoying food, sex, leisure, etc.

Stimulation: excitement, novelty and challenge in life

- An exciting life: Stimulating experiences
- A varied life: Filled with challenge, novelty and change
- Daring: Seeking adventure, risk

Self-direction: independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring

- Freedom: Freedom of action and thought
- Independent: Self reliant, self sufficient
- Curious: Interested in everything, exploring
- Creativity: Uniqueness, imagination
- Choosing own goals: Selecting own purposes
- Privacy: The right to have a private sphere
- Self-respect: Belief in one's own worth

Appendix B

Guidelines

Narrative Content (Social Structures, Futures, Characters, "plot", Causes, etc.)

1. When crafting a narrative be mindful of the scene, the roles and goals of the story. Narratives are, to a large extent, about change. They are culturally dependent and help people to connect.
2. Be conscious that the described future is relevant and takes into consideration the phenomenon of individual perceptions and negotiated shared meaning. The complex process of creating shared meaning needs to be intentional and cannot be underestimated.
3. Current societal structures, e.g. growth paradigm that keep companies focused more on quantitative growth than qualitative growth, hinder opportunities for new behavior. The new narrative needs to take this into consideration when pointing to future solutions.
4. Reality is a social construct influenced by the individual experience. Giving people the possibility to express and address that experience when constructing a narrative for a future reality gives meaning. How we construct meaning can change how we act.
5. Use simple imagery and metaphors and provide enough relevant information applicable to your audience. Be sure to include causality, without it people can experience cognitive dissonance that will hinder the process of communication.
6. Language is one of the key elements of how humans construct reality and actions. It also has the potential of expressing traditions and feelings and is socially constructed. Moreover, the unique linguistic choices within one language need also to be acknowledged.

Motivational Content (Values and Goals)

7. Work with the Schwartz values model, as this circular structure provides guidance on the relationship of our universal values. Values should be activated in groups of similar ones (bleed-over and see-saw effects) when activating one value the interconnectedness of all values needs to be taken into consideration.
8. The relation between the values of your initiative, and the dominant values in society needs to be taken into consideration. The common pan-cultural-hierarchy and/or the specific value hierarchy for your audience could give guidance on this. In order to avoid contrary effects, that are not intended, one needs to make sure that the values addressed in the narrative are relevant to the audience.
9. Words play an important role when activating values. Values have certain words and concepts associated with them that can be utilized for designing a narrative*.
10. Aim for activating the intrinsic goals (of your audience), especially related to community feeling. Extrinsic goals could still be activated to some extent but be aware of the trade-offs.
11. Priming one value promotes behavior consistent with that value and weakens opposing values/behavior.

Connecting with Frames (constructed reality, deep frames, surface frames etc.)

12. Relate to everyday language, practices and the wider world (surface frames) in order to address and activate deeper morals and worldviews connected with values (deep frames). Connecting with deep frames should be prioritized.
13. In whatever way you address a concept or word, the frame linked to it will be activated. This goes as well when negating a frame.

* Value Word list: Common Cause Handbook pg. 68-69,
    http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/Common%20Cause20Handbook(2).pdf ;
Common Cause for Nature pg 37,
    http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/ Common%20Cause%20for%20Nature%20-%

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