

The background features a black and white line drawing of a workshop or meeting. A whiteboard is covered in sketches and Russian text. On the left, a person is seated, looking down. The whiteboard contains various phrases such as 'ДАВАЙ ТЕМПЕ, СЕРЕГА! БЫСТРОЕ', 'КАК ЭТО', 'КАК ЭТО ВОООБЩЕ ВОЗМОЖНО?', 'СЕРЕГА, ТЫ МНЕ МОГАТЬ БУДЕШЬ?', 'ПЕТЕРБУРГЕ', and 'ПОМОГАТЬ БУ...'.

Storytelling for Participatory Exchange

Overview of Methodology



ISOCARP INSTITUTE
Centre for Urban Excellence



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Introduction

At the ISOCARP Institute we recognise that the nature of development is changing in many places across the world. Diverse voices are increasingly heard in decision-making spaces, as shifts in the values and structures that form our societies continue to occur. New approaches to governance are emerging to facilitate this, with the aim to work towards more balanced socioeconomic systems and built environments. These approaches seek to actively engage a broader range of communities, both in the identification of development challenges and the design of solutions to solve them. However, finding effective strategies to do this can be complex, and many of our existing participatory processes fall short in their capacity to understand the range of experiences and perspectives in our populations. Implementing effective citizen participation that leads to positive changes in our living environments means **creating spaces that allow us to listen to and learn from each other**. We can do this using storytelling.

Storytelling offers a means to authentically and effectively engage with citizens. It is a fundamentally human mode of communication where the goal is to understand each other better through the creation of **shared imaginaries**. Stories have the power to change our opinions and our interpreted realities, depending on who is telling the story, how they are telling it and who is listening. By utilising storytelling in participatory processes, we can provide deeper insights for decision making that reflect the experiences and perspectives of citizens and use these to ignite change in our living environments.

Through our applied project work and network of urban experts, we have developed a new methodology for citizen participation that uses storytelling to better understand the perspectives and desires of populations. The methodology is straightforward to deploy, enjoyable for participants and effective in producing actionable insights for decision making. It can be used in a variety of projects for exploratory analysis and co-creative solution design and combined with other tools and methods. In this booklet we outline the structure, value and deployment of our methodology of **storytelling for participatory exchange**.



The Methodology in a Nutshell

Our methodology enables citizens to express their perspectives on their living environment and their desires for the future by telling imaginary stories that reflect their real life experiences. It uses **AI-powered visualisation software** to make the stories of citizens come to life in real time in a workshop setting. Storytelling for participatory exchange means:

1 Citizens
Telling
Stories

2 Reflecting
Their
Experiences

3 In
Their
Settings

The methodology is designed to be deployed by local governments, researchers and practitioners through a **four phase process** facilitated by the ISOCARP Institute. While creating an enjoyable experience for participants, it also uses **literary and sentiment analysis** to explore the perspectives of citizens on both cognitively (what they say) and affectively (how they feel). This enables us to produce **data-based, actionable insights** for decision makers.

Good storytelling is all about relatability. This means that stories need to speak the language of the storytellers and the audience. Our AI-powered digital platform makes telling stories easy for participants in a range of languages. Similarly, our analytical process allows us to **speak the language of decision making** and feed into existing processes.

Stories matter





The Four Phases

Our methodology has been carefully designed with four phases, to ensure that its deployment is as representative as possible while generating **actionable insights for decision makers**.

1. Scoping

In the scoping phase, we work with those implementing the methodology, exploring the topics and challenges that citizens will tell stories about. This involves **setting objectives** for the participatory process as well as **defining who should be at the table** and outlining strategies to invite participants.

2. Workshopping

The main component of the methodology sees storytelling workshops held with citizens, using our **AI-powered platform**. The platform guides participants through a unique story building process where they create **imaginary stories that reflect the challenges they have experienced in their real lives**, and their ideas for the future. The AI software allows for participants to immediately view their creations, discuss and share their stories with others.

3. Analysing

Our analytical processes uses literary and sentiment analysis to understand the issues, ideas and roles within the stories that participants tell. By analysing their text entries on the AI-powered platform, we explore the **metaphors created between the real and imaginary**. By grouping sentiments across participants, we produce data-based, graphical insights.

4. Deploying

At the end of the process, two outputs are created, the **data-based analytical report** of participant perspectives, sentiments and desires for the future, and the **AI-generated visualisations** themselves. We deploy these outputs by connecting to a number of stakeholders, utilising analytical insights to create actionable recommendations and visualisations of stories for promotion, exhibition, and to drive collective action.



Creating Value

The storytelling for participatory exchange methodology is more than just a participatory process. Its value is anchored in its ability to combine explorations of citizen perspectives with deep dives into the **emotive significance of their experiences**. By using storytelling as a mode of communicating, it allows participants to utilise both the **cognitive** (logical, evidential, analytical) and **affective** (emotional, moral, social) parts of their brain. By using literary and sentiment analysis we are able to produce insights that reflect both the cognitive and affective, drawing conclusions from what was said as well as emotive factors such as importance, urgency and responsibility.

Our methodology is able to deal with a number of pitfalls that reduce the impact of other participatory processes. The core of the methodology, creating stories to represent personal perspectives and experiences, addresses participatory fatigue by presenting an enjoyable and constructive activity for participants. It allows for complex situations to be approached through imaginaries, navigating barriers for those less willing and able to participate. It is a complete process, deployed early in citizen participation projects, and able to produce actionable outcomes for those deploying it. Our methodology:

Addresses
participatory
fatigue

Engages
less heard
voices

Provides
Constructive
output

Combats
complexity

Navigates
barriers to
engagement

Deploys
early in
processes



Applying the Methodology

We have designed the methodology to be able to be applied in a range of contexts, and to address a number of topics. It is best deployed alongside an ongoing development project that focuses on making changes to the living environment of populations (structurally or socially). It may also be applied as a scoping activity with communities, to understand the challenges they face in their living environments and the ideas they have to solve them. The methodology is most relevant for local/regional governments, research organisations and practitioners exploring new ideas and projects, however **anyone is open to use it.**

In Development

Applied development projects can greatly benefit from the application of storytelling for participatory exchange. We recommend to deploy this methodology early in the design process, to understand how projects can approach the existing challenges of communities, address stakeholder relationships and **align with residents' desires for the future.** Reach out to find out how you can use the methodology in one of your projects!

In Research

Research projects exploring innovations that impact liveability and living environments can utilise our methodology to high impact. The quick pace of its deployment as well as its flexibility in adapting to different contexts and topics, means it can be used early in research projects, to **generate guiding insights and produce early outputs with communities.** It quickly builds relationships between practitioners and communities and is able to be used multiple times during projects, to visualise impact and change.





Get in touch

Stories are never static. We understand that any approach to citizen participation must be open to new developments. That is why we want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea of where this methodology could be applied?

Are you interested in working with us to see what stories can be produced in your city?

Are you working in similar areas and want to share ideas?

To learn more and explore opportunities to collaborate contact Samir Amin: amin@isocarp-institute.org and Alice Jelmini: jelmini@isocarp-institute.org.

Visit our website to learn more about the ISOCARP Institute and our work:



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www.isocarp-institute.org.



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