



Faculty of Design

2021

Participatory Narrative Inquiry: A methodology to understand complex systems and design interventions on multiple scales

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Suggested citation:

Tsvetkova, Zlatina (2021) Participatory Narrative Inquiry: A methodology to understand complex systems and design interventions on multiple scales. In: Proceedings of Relating Systems Thinking and Design (RSD10) 2021 Symposium, 2-6 Nov 2021, Delft, The Netherlands. Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/3824/>

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PARTICIPATORY NARRATIVE INQUIRY

A methodology to understand complex systems and design interventions on multiple scales

A workshop proposal for the the 10th Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium

Author and facilitator

Zlatina Tsvetkova, Learning Experience Designer at Digital Society School

Purpose and structure of the workshop

The intention of this workshop is to experiment with a new methodology called Participatory Narrative Inquiry and use it to support workshop participants in understanding tensions they experience in their own context and projects. Since the PNI methodology is created not for research purposes but for designing interventions and transformations in complex systems, the purpose of this workshop is to experience how the methodology works and how it can be applied in different contexts while using the stories of the participants to derive lessons and insights about dealing with tensions in complex systems.

The workshop is structured as a reflective dialogue where the participants will check in, collect stories about dealing with tensions in complex systems and then interpret them through a participatory dialogue in small groups. The workshop concludes with summarising the collective insights and considering application back in the context of participants. This structure reflects the three main stages of PNI - Story Collection, Sensemaking and Return.

Alignment with the RSD10 themes

PNI is a methodology based on the work of Cynthia F. Kurtz who recognised that communities and organisations are closely knit with their stories and those can reveal a lot about the trends and patterns that emerge in certain contexts. She was inspired by participatory action research and the way anthropology and sociology use stories to better understand cultures. She emphasises the importance of sensemaking as a participatory process - unlike scientific ap-

proaches, PNI requires most of the interpretation of the collected stories to be done by the community that experienced them and these interpretations to be used by the community itself.

The nature of this approach has a few benefits to working with systemic transformation and complexity:

- The process of story collection is participatory and therefore allows for diversity of perspectives and representation of different stakeholders. The more stories are collected, the better understanding of the system, its patterns and existing tensions.
- The process of sensemaking allows for breaks in scale within a PNI project - the stories are collected on individual level while sensemaking can be done on a group level and can be scaled up in multiple layers over time to reveal patterns and tendencies on different scales of the system.
- The Return part of the process is designed as an intervention and aims implementation back in the system. The lessons learned from the Sensemaking are looped back into the original context by the participants to create change, prototype ideas, reframe the original stories and potentially 'write a new ending.' This part of PNI makes it an intervention for systemic transformation rather than a research methodology.

The content of the conversations in this workshop is directly related to the theme of the symposium - we will talk about our experiences dealing with tensions in complex systems and what we can learn from them. The process of the workshop is an experience of a methodology that can be applied and experimented with in the participants' systemic design projects.

Duration of the workshop: 90 min

The workshop will be **online without limitation for the maximum number of participants.**

Support needed from the organisers

There will be an online form for collecting stories by the symposium participants regardless of them joining the workshop or not. The more stories we collect, the better. My request will be to share the form with all symposium participants in advance and invite them to share stories that we can use during the workshop.