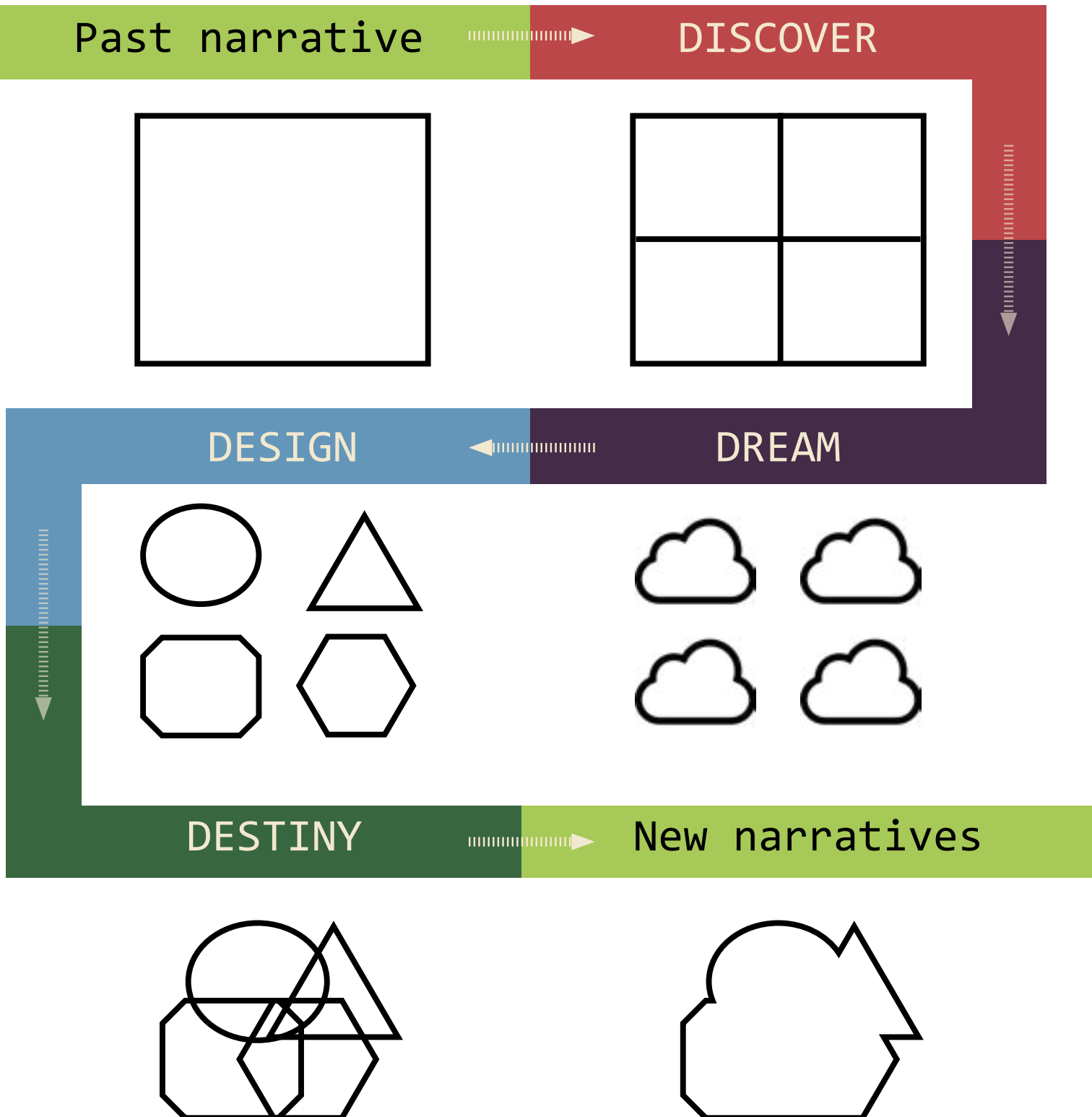


Narrative building

for future proof sites



This little manual is meant as an inspiration for enthusiasts who took up the challenge of transforming circular, climate and inclusivity goals in area development into a structured process with specific methods. This manual is specifically developed for areas with a strong but forgotten history and 'low' value.

This method is most prominently helpful for contaminated sites on which economically prosperous development is considered unfeasible and displays the image of the linear economy. This manual is loosely based on the 4D approach within Appreciative Inquiry and is an addition to traditional Living Lab methodologies. Its main addition is its core focus on narrative building by co-creating with local stakeholders.

In our co-creation session designs, we were greatly inspired by the toolkit for Arts-based Methods for Transformative Engagement. We are convinced that effective and sustainable transformational change can only happen by imagining, interacting and networking of local enthusiasts in combination with support from a more powerful inspirational stakeholder.

This booklet is written as an inspiration and first sketch of a process and not as a rigid protocol. This

manual was developed by four students working with the Living Lab methodology within the MSc MADE. This Living Lab focused on narrative building for the circular economy within the context of the largest contaminated site of the Netherlands, the Volgermeerpolder.

This manual was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that all tools and methods were developed for online environments. We are convinced our methods work even better in offline gatherings. It is important to note that this manual offers a creative guideline to help shape the process of a project and does not cover the process itself. In other words, one needs a development process or a Living Lab that this manual can be applied to.

The manual consists of 6 consecutive steps. As will become clear after reading, consecution will work both ways because iterating the steps is crucial. To retain enthusiasm and willingness to participate in the process it is important to continuously monitor the speed of progress. Each step is described less detailed than the previous one, because the steps are heavily interconnected. In addition to our step-wise approach, we added tools and tips for each step and the co-creation tools we have developed during our process.

1. DEFINE

Step 1 revolves around forming an initial group of enthusiasts to start up development at an area considered to be of low value, possibly within a Living Lab. This step is about setting the boundaries for the process. Together with an influential stakeholder (or maybe you are the influential stakeholder yourself or want to become one), find out why the old narrative is problematic and search for the rationale behind the status quo.

At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:

What are the reasons the status quo should be broken?

What is the rationale behind this?

Why is now the right moment to come into action?

3. DREAM

Step 3 is about exploring desirable futures for the place. This phase is crucial in opening up the current status quo. Individual competencies should be playfully combined in search of shared stories of the ideal future, bringing to light the collective aspirations of those involved. It is important to only think in positive and energizing futures, instead of 'doomsday scenarios', while also staying realistic enough to find starting points for future developments. Relating those stories to 'the now' can help to get the right type of stories. As a process developer you should analyse this step with great attention, since this phase transforms core values into positive dreams which should in the end lead into a new, realistic, story.

At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:

- *How do the dreams interrelate with the values from the Discovery phase?*
- *Which elements of dreams are interesting to explore further, why?*
- *Which new stakeholders, policy arrangements or characteristics were mentioned?*
- *Which further specifications or validations do you need to strengthen these dreams?*
- *Which 'underlying' motives, ideas and values came to the table?*

2. DISCOVER

Step 2 is about (further) strengthening the rationale behind the narrative building process. In this phase stakeholders search for strengths that form stable core values of the place. In addition, it is important to learn how those values are related to the external environment of the site. Stakeholders should 'reconnect' with the place and form a network with a positive attitude towards change. To achieve this, stakeholders should be connected and should meet to think about values and strengths, instead of problems.

At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:

- *Which values define the qualities of this place?*
- *Which elements or characteristics of the place are unique and outstanding?*
- *What positive images, stories or metaphors keep coming back and energize people to work with this place?*
- *Which stakeholders can be drivers for change, now and in the future?*
- *What are parameters most relevant to focus on?*

4. DESIGN

Step 4 encompasses the process of translating dreams into desirable futures. In this phase you derive elements or 'building blocks' for future stories from the Dream phase. Finding out the structure behind the commons dream is at the core of this phase. This also means finding out potential conflicts and modes of consensus. Next, these elements should be translated in more concrete story-based designs or steps that help bring about the needed change identified in the first phases.

- At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:
- *How do the designs interrelate with the dream from the Dream phase?*
- *What are the main conflicts and points of consensus in the future stories?*
- *Which specific aspects of future stories spark the most energy among key stakeholders?*
- *How can strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of future stories be translated into reflections and actionable steps?*

5. DESTINY

Step 5 aims to set the scene for actual change and development. Still, this is an 'ongoing' phase; dialogues, decisions, developments and learning will proceed after this phase. The previous phases intended to let people 'read' the place in a new way. A way which realizes new relationships and networks, opens up the status quo and in the end has an effect on actions and decisions by stakeholders. Hopefully, it has sparked a recursive process in which the stakeholders continue to use the new, positive, narrative as a starting point for developments. Therefore, the Destiny phase is not about putting together a roadmap, action plan or steering committee, but is focused on embedding the individual learnings and stories in the 'real' development process of the site.

At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:

- *How does the destiny of the process interrelate with designs from the Design phase?*
- *Which changes of perspective have happened during the process?*
- *What are strong future stories and steps that spark energy and enhance change-making?*
- *Which network of stakeholders can be a driver of change?*
- *Which stories need future discussion and specification?*
- *How do you embed your results into future steps?*

Sources

Seventh Generation Thinking
http://wgbis.ces.iisc.ernet.in/biodiversity/sdev/seventh_gen.pdf

Arts-based methods for Transformative Engagement: A Toolkit
<https://www.sustainableplaceshaping.net/arts-based-toolkit/>

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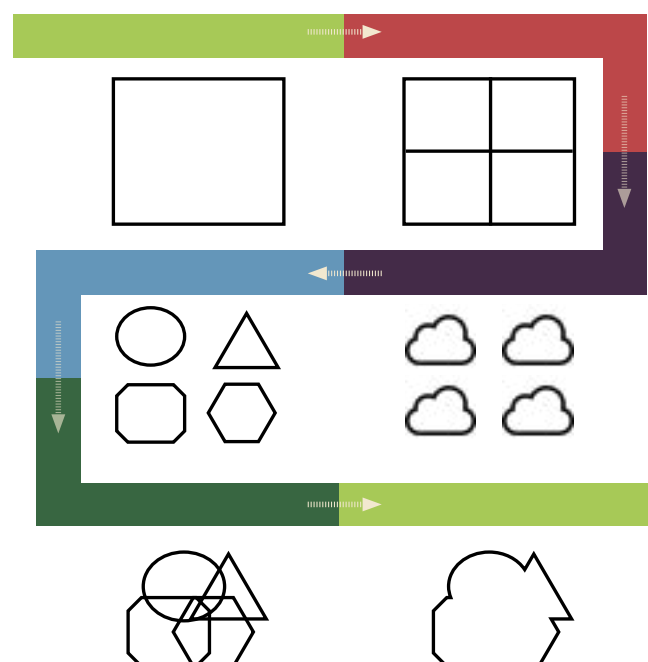
MSc MADE Living Labs 2021
<https://www.madelivinglabs.com/2021>

6. DEFINE

Step 6 is not an actual step. This is a phase which symbolizes a bridge from the process you have just walked through to a potential new process or project. This is a phase of consolidating your results and 'zooming out' to see the full picture through time, for example by using 'Seventh generation thinking'. In this phase you need to discover which blanks need to be filled, re-evaluate your group of key stakeholders and see whether more project-based approaches are beneficial to continue development. This is also a moment to reflect and find out whether story building has been beneficial to your initial problem.

At the end of this phase you should be able to answer the following questions:

- *Which aspects need further research?*
- *Which steps need to be reiterated?*
- *How do stakeholders evaluate and perceive this process?*
- *Which signs of recursive learning are present?*
- *To what extent has this process been actionable, inspiring, inclusive and transferable?*
- *How do these dreams work out for future generations?*



Tools and tips

1. Open interviews

Inform and informally speak to a few key stakeholders. It depends on the specific context where those key stakeholders are located: business, government, civil society or research. You should not involve them yet in your process. Start the process with a diverse and multi-disciplinary group of people without any attachment to the area, a fresh look, but with sufficient knowledge on circularity and area development. In this step you can do the following activities: Site visits, informal conversations, start a student project, relate global challenges to regional identities and challenges, develop a knowledge bank for this area.

3. Future headlines

Form a diverse group of stakeholders with an open mind and a direct relationship to the place. At least invite your key stakeholders. In this step you can use our Future Headlines tool, in addition many other cool tools exist on the internet to support this phase, such as 'inviting non-human stakeholders'. For this phase it is very important that you show your participants the goal of the phase, to prevent thinking in problems and open up thinking in possibilities. Your tool, which you hopefully design yourself, should enhance this.

5. Timeline

This booklet was a part of our own destiny phase. Although the Destiny phase is not about creating roadmaps and pilots, but about embedding learnings and stories, we still think it is important to create tangible products, because stakeholders need tangibility to be able to use the stories made in earlier phases. In addition, this can be a practical way to show your results to external partners and increase visibility and scalability of your process. Besides this booklet, we also focused on creating a concrete manifestation of our stories, to find out what the exact added value was of this process in contrast to continuing with the status quo kind of working.

2. Value mapping

Gather your group of key stakeholders. Make sure this group is diverse and knowledgeable about the area. In this step you can do value mapping, expert interviews, open conversations, visits to comparable sites and additional literature research. The value mapping tool we designed is appended to this manual, but we encourage you to design your own tools! Also, do not involve too many stakeholders, as some stakeholders might only have the energy to participate one or two times, and you might need their input more in later stages.

4. Making a play

Invite some new stakeholders, who might have a future stake at the place. In non-corona situations, practice based methods, such as rapid prototyping and design fictioning can be very useful tools. It is important to show the involved stakeholders how the story design principles link to the dreams made in the previous phase. We developed the online 'making a play' method for this phase, as we think that a play is a concrete manifestation of a dream and can be a practical way to find actionable steps that relate to a bigger story or idea.

6. End

This phase is completely dependent on how you worked through the previous phases. The tools you use can be about feedback and evaluation or about inviting 'stakeholders from the future', to evaluate your final story on 'future-proofness'. As you have been working on this place for a while now, it is also important to keep yourself fresh, and to not become a part of the next, unsustainable, status quo. Therefore, this step should be a trigger to reiterate the cycle. Or start a completely new one. As long as creating sustainable positive impact, inclusivity and imagination are at the core of your development process, it's up to you.

Value-mapping

This exercise is based on method 23 from the Arts-Based Transformative Toolkit: “Silent Conversations”. This method is used to inquire about a topic or issue while enabling ideation from the participants. The purpose of the method is to “collaboratively, but silently, map the collective thinking (concepts, feelings, associations) of a group, focussing on a specific topic or issue”. Stakeholders are invited to map out the core qualities, positive values, associations and feelings of the area in silence. This method serves two goals: first, it helps provoke a constructive mindset in stakeholders by having them focus on the qualities of a place, second, the session helps distil the unique strengths and values associated with the place, which can serve as building blocks for dreaming about the future of an area for future sessions, which will be elaborated in the Dream phase. The assignment is done in silence, enabling a deeper state of reflection and also prevents more outspoken contributors from dominating. We hosted this session via ZOOM and used the creative platform MIRO for the “Silent Conversations”. To stimulate participants to

engage in the act of inquiry itself, we grouped the assets in ‘Values’, ‘Objects’, ‘Qualities’ and ‘Flows’ by colour of the post-its, Participants could (but were not forced) to use the groups to brainstorm about keywords related to the area. The participants were asked to do this on three scale levels: local, national and continental/global. The aim of this was to force participants to see the Volgermeer in a broader or more diverse light than their own perspective on the area and think of the value of the area in different contexts. Participants can see each other’s contributions, possibly creating silent collaboration. We provided the following instructions to the participants:

Without speaking, think about what makes the Volgermeer unique to you within the context of different scale levels. Per scale level you can paste 2 sticky notes with a keyword at the relevant block. Think about: values, objects, flows and qualities. Be as specific as possible! After pasting you even have time to read other sticky notes. Afterwards, we will briefly discuss the results.

MIRO Example



Future Headlines

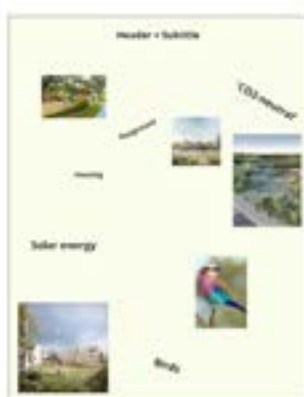
We aimed to strengthen positive ideation and disruptive thinking by letting participants do the 'Future Headlines' exercise. Here, participants are invited to project themselves into a future time and, based on the collectively identified strengths, imagine a positive story regarding renewal or transformation of the area that is worth celebrating. In groups, the assignment asks them to come up with a cover story from a newspaper reporting on the area's big imaginary success in 100 years from now. This exercise aims to clarify and personalize possibilities and aspirations for the future of a place and should help determine the shared core values and assets, while also analysing the differences and diversity of perspectives. After the assignment, the results are discussed plenary. The shared commons creates a set of parameters, including the key features and concepts of the future of a place, that can serve as input for the Design phase. The fictional newspaper aspect of the exercise can help participants to think out of the box, and the headline aspect helps to identify what stakeholders identify as a "successful transformation". In our Living Lab, stakeholders already participated in the 'Silent Conversation' method, gearing them towards having a positive mindset and thinking in terms of strengths. We recommend to engage in a similar activity before starting to collectively dream. We hosted this session via ZOOM and used the creative platform

MIRO for the "Future headlines".

The assignment 'Future Headlines' originates from "Collage Making" (p.42) and "Predict Future Headlines" from the Arts-Based Transformative Toolkit. In our exercise, participants are asked to complement their headlines with supporting pictures, to create a collage or mood board. We provided the following instructions to the participants:

The year is 2095, the Volgermeer has now been open for over 80 years. On the occasion of this anniversary, a national newspaper dedicated the front page to the success of the Volgermeer. Discuss in your group what is the story of this front page (and from what perspective) and come up with a newspaper headline with possible subtitles to match. This exercise is about thinking about what 'success' means and what positive things could happen in the next 80 years. Also consider the previous assignment. Include 5 keywords in your newspaper article that describe / represent the story. Optionally add images via Pinterest / Google / etc. to visualize the perspective. This can be done simply by copying and pasting. Think realistically, including environment, function and use. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? Who else (plants, animals, people) are present in the area? Who is responsible for the area? (management, legal, financial) What activities are taking place? What is the function of the area?

MIRO Example



Making

Developing stories that communicate future scenarios, their challenges, synergies and potentials and in their style invite participants to empathise with the proposed “way of seeing” the scenarios, can be a powerful tool in shaping perceptions and supporting change. We took this notion of powerful stories for change to develop ‘Making a Play’ which is loosely based on the method “Storytelling” from the Arts-Based Transformative Toolkit, the commonly known SWOT-analysis and two other assignments which we have developed ourselves. We hosted this session via ZOOM and used the creative platform MIRO.

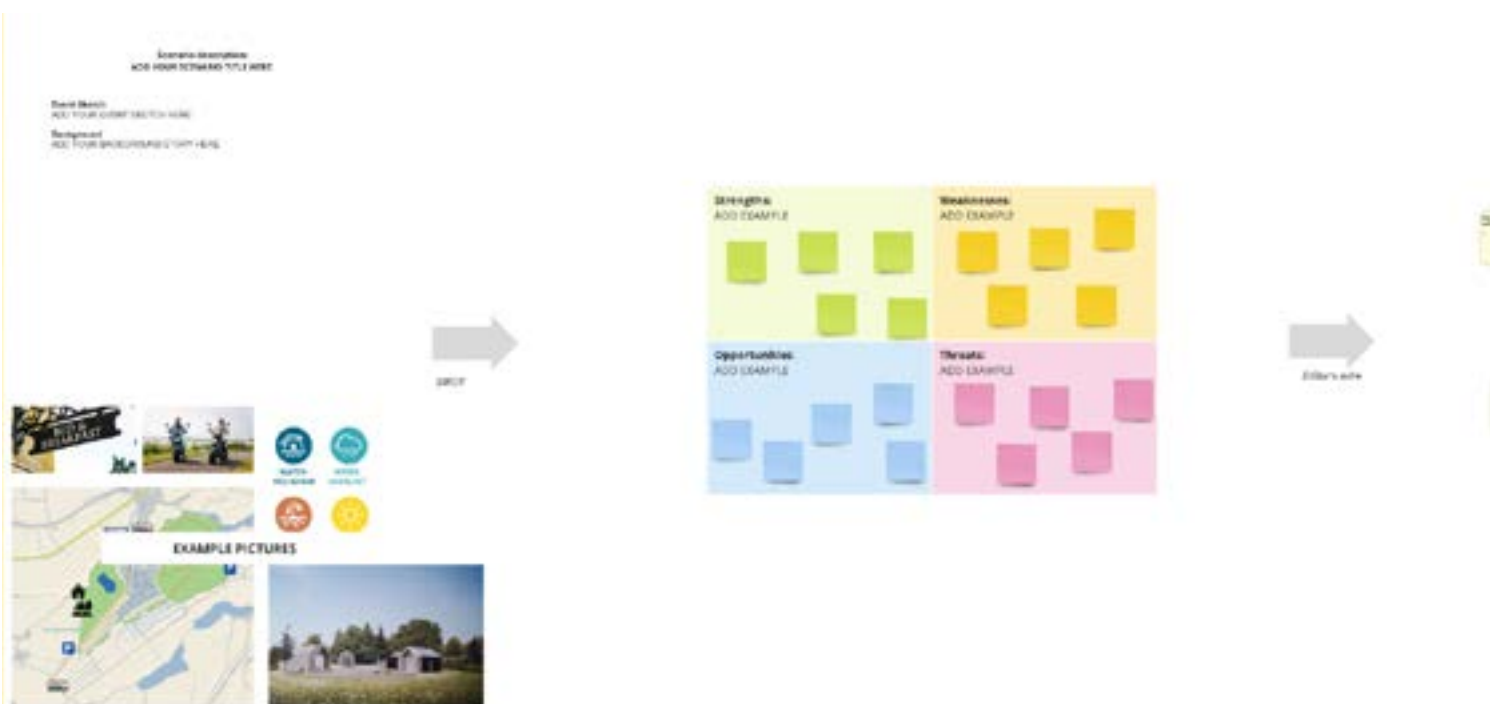
In the co-creation session “Making a Play” participants are given a fictional story to read, followed by three consecutive assignments in which they first take on the role of Editor, discussing, tinkering with, and making adjustments to the story. They then take on the role of Author and write the opening scene. The goal is to evoke a specific mindset that helps discuss the various transformative paths in order to finally arrive at improved future stories, followed by concretized first steps to be taken by involved parties to realize the specific story. Therefore, writing the ‘right’ story and designing good co-creations sessions are crucial for the success of this phase and we have put great effort and time in developing those methodologies ourselves. The stories are a sketch of the future in which the most

important building blocks of the “Future Headlines” assignment are extrapolated and enlarged to form transformational paths of the area.

The different stories participants read in separate groups consist of a context, an “event sketch” and supporting visuals. The context provides background information and the specific elements of the storyline, whereas the event sketch positions the reader into a character that interacts with the specific area, in our case the Volgermeer, so he or she can empathize well and envision what the consequences of a specific development path are. Pictures are provided to, again, stimulate empathy and enhance a participants capacity to relate to the storyline. The stories are provocative and lack nuance to get a discussion going and to stimulate participants to reflect and discuss their personal responses to the proposed transformational path. The exercises were explained by the moderator of the group.

After reading and clarifying storylines, participants are asked to unravel the strengths and weaknesses of the story and think about trends in society that may influence the story’s chances of becoming a hit or a total failure, by means of a SWOT-analysis. The SWOT is a well-known method and easy to understand and therefore a low-key and powerful tool to identify

MIRO



a play

desirable and undesirable aspects of a future story, but also to identify opportunities for improvement. This tool forces participants to think realistically about the implications of certain transformational paths. Local ownership may sound very admirable, but how well does this aspect perform in terms of economic strength, safety or continuity? And if unsatisfactory, what measures could help improve this aspect?

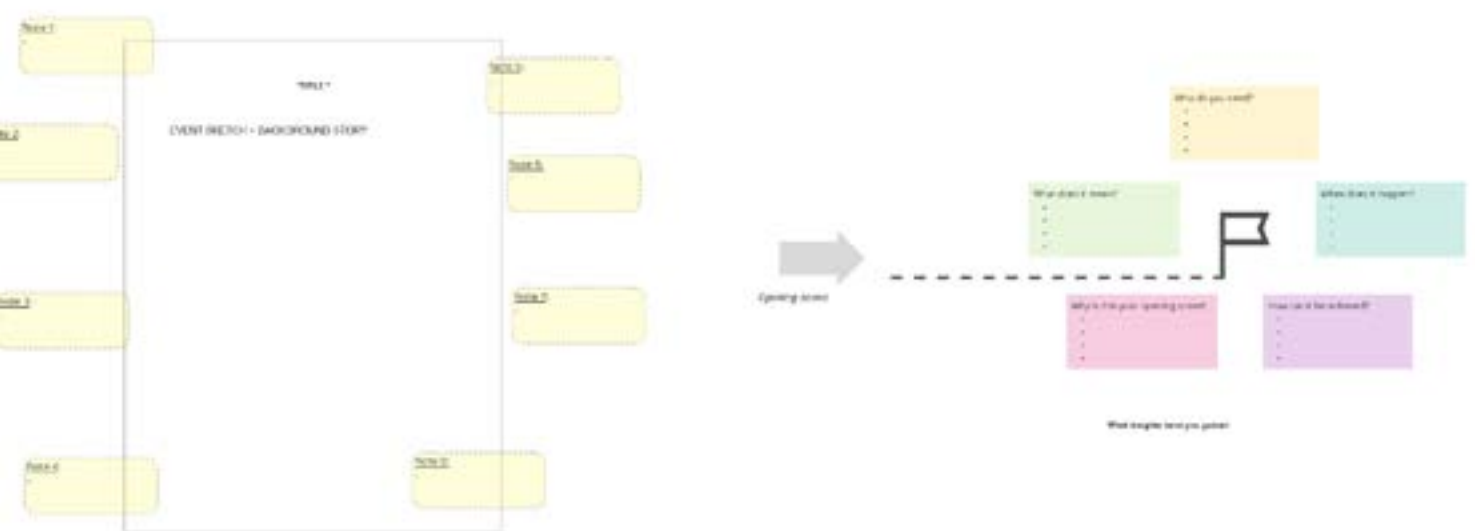
The SWOT creates a deeper understanding of the implications of the elements of the future story and provides insights into what measures could be taken to make the scenario more desirable. In the 'Editor's Note', participants write down concrete improvements in the side note of the story, that further strengthen the story and make it a desirable one.

After, participants write the opening scene of the play. This way, participants are forced to make to specify their choices and think about how long-term visions start by current small steps. The outcome of this session is discussed plenary and the most desirable outcomes are polled and further discussed. This way, the stories have become co-created and adapted stories for futures of the area and an insight into the considerations and preferences of the stakeholders. Each story also offers a starting point for establishing a first step on the transformational path towards the

proposed circular futures, such as a pilot or a first get-together. These first steps help to find out in the Destiny phase what is needed to transform those steps into actual developments.

Ideally, the participants mix is a combination of the stakeholders involved in earlier phases, as this phase aims to converge the previous input into concrete choices to be made. In addition, the group formation during the co-creation should be people who have different perspectives and interests, but are still able to make quick decisions and think in a concrete way. The amount of groups and participants you invite should fit your challenge and capacities and resources to monitor the session and discussion.

Example



5.4 Volger comic

The comic book we created was presented at the online MADE Living Lab exhibition on March 22nd, 2021. The exhibition space can be seen on the following website: <https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/5160879/small-steps-big-dreams>. The comic book is shown below, but the full version including videos can be seen on: <https://issuu.com/volgermeer/docs/stripfinal>.

