

CHECKLIST FOR BUILDING AN ENGAGING LOCAL NARRATIVE

1. Overlapping interests

A good story sets the tone for the local community and the local brand you want to build. Look for where the interests of the different stakeholders in the area may overlap: that is where you will find the main ingredients for your local story. Make sure everyone recognizes a piece of themselves: this is crucial for their engagement.

2. Existing qualities

It helps your transformation story if you can identify interesting existing local qualities or characteristics to build on. These can be spatial qualities, but also a certain culture or mentality. Be sensitive to what is already going on in the area. Joining forces makes your story more real - with real ambassadors.

3. Honest & specific

Be honest about the challenges in the area. Dare to be unconventional and specific and don't brush away all the sharp edges. Also dare to address the ugly - the elephant in the room. This makes you more credible and emphasizes the need to act together.

4. Active & productive

To mobilize local stakeholders, don't brand the area as a great place but brand the process of making the area a great place together. You campaign for change and invite people and organizations to participate. Your story is open and inviting, but also very active and productive.

5. Multi-faceted

Make sure your story has something for everyone, so you can reach, engage and activate everyone. Your core story for the area transformation is consistent, but it has many different aspects - like facets of a diamond - that match the different interests on the short, medium and long term.

6. Cheerful & catchy

In an existing area, sometimes you have to shake things up first. Your story must be catchy enough to capture attention and spark the imagination about how the area can be different from now. Translate your long-term (abstract) goals into a recognizable, relatable and personal story that calls for immediate action. Do not hesitate to use humor, self-irony and exaggeration. Metaphors can also help you here.

7. Consistent

By being consistent in your message, tone of voice and presentation you build up recognition, trust and campaign power. Over time, your core values and ideas will take root in the community and become part of it. Of course this means that you also have to be consistent in your own behavior. Practice what you preach.

8. Open & dynamic

Be dynamic and adaptive over time. Initially, be open and spontaneous, a bit do-it-yourself rather than too slick. An expensive and polished marketing campaign will elicit a more consumerist response while you want to invite people in as partners. Start light and free like a bubble that seems to belong to no one yet is inviting and open to all. People can still interpret it themselves and put their own spin on it. This is how you build shared ownership.