Capturing the Impact of Public Narrative: Methodological Challenges Encountered and Opportunities Opened

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Abstract
Public narrative is a leadership practice of translating values into action. It links the three elements of self, us, and now: why I am called, why we are called, and why we are called to act now. Taught and learned for more than 15 years now through various learning environments (in-person or online courses, in-person or online workshops, etc.), the Narratives4Change research project (H2020, Nr. 841355) aimed at studying how public narrative is being used by individuals as a leadership practice within different domains of practice and across diverse cultural and geographical contexts, as well as what are the impacts achieved. An endeavor never carried before, capturing evidence of impact of public narrative going beyond the usage and transference posed several methodological challenges. To overcome them, we engaged in an on-going process of dialogue with researchers experienced in social impact analysis, and practitioners and leaders well experienced in using public narrative. Drawing on the work done in the framework of the Narratives4Change project, this article explains its methodological design, presenting and discussing two of the strategies adopted to capture the impact dimension, and how they were implemented. On the one hand, the communicative orientation of the mixed-methods research design of the project allowed researchers to empirically grasp the manifold agentic orientations that can be triggered by public narrative. On the other hand, how the Social Impact Open Repository criteria for social impact analysis was incorporated at the time of exploring and deepening into the social reality that was being observed sets us off on an “impact-oriented analytical mindset” that facilitated identifying evidence of impacts. Specific examples of how each of these strategies played out during the methodological design and implementation of the research are discussed, drawing lessons that can also inform the design of future research projects.

Keywords
mixed methods, narrative, qualitative evaluation, emancipatory research, social justice

Introduction
Public narrative is a leadership practice that has been taught for more than 15 years now by leadership, organizing and civil society professor Marshall Ganz at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). Beyond the Harvard scenario, public narrative is now being taught and learned in offline and online learning settings across the world, either in structured long-term courses similar to the ones taught at the HKS or in one-time (1–2 or 3 days) workshops run by practitioners, leaders, or other stakeholders coordinated through the international non-governmental organization The Leading Change Network.¹

Based on the understanding of the foundational role that narratives play in our lives as human beings, in interpreting and making sense of our individual and social reality, as well as in constructing our identities (Bruner, 1986), public narrative consists in using storytelling, intentionally, for the practice of public leadership. Far from being a fixed formula to give a speech, public narrative is a framework that links the

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three elements of the self, us, and now: why I am called, why we are called, and why we are called to act now (Ganz, 2010, p. 274). Understanding and experiencing leadership in this way rather than reducing it to a contrast between charismatic, prophetic, or enthusiastic attributes of a leader makes it a relational practice from beginning to end (Ganz & McKenna, 2018).

In this view, leadership is conceived as accepting the responsibility for enabling others to achieve their shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty. Narrative is the discursive way we use to access values that equip us with the needed courage to make choices under conditions of uncertainty, to exercise agency. Narratives can be turned into sources of learning, for the head (at the time of accessing emotions), helping to answer why am I called to lead, why are we called to lead, and why are we called to act now? (Ganz, 2010). Activating and enhancing individuals’ agentic capacities is thus underlying the whole notion of public narrative, as something it is supposed to contribute to in a relational and experiential way, with others. This is done drawing on shared values that are grounded in our past shared emotional experiences. By using storytelling and articulating a public narrative, values are translated into the motivation to act: transforming apathy into anger; isolation into solidarity; fear into shared hope; or inertia into urgency.

The theoretical understanding of human agency by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) is useful for capturing the manifold agentic orientations that can be triggered by public narrative, especially due to its projective character (the story that is narrated) when used in public leadership. These authors define agency as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 970). Each of these three constituent elements of human agency, habit—interaction; imagination—projectivity; and judgment—evaluation, allow analytically examining forms of action that are respectively oriented toward the past, future, and present, and enable thinking of how this occurs in those social realities created in multiple sites where public narrative is used. However, if an outstanding analytical question becomes in what ways public narrative can trigger or alter different forms of agentic action—for instance, observing changes in habit, imagination or judgment on others, and with others—the methodological challenge becomes how to capture, empirically, those new and emerging realities taking place at the grassroots level.

This article is framed in the on-going research project Narratives4Change funded by the EU H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme (2019–2022). This is a 36 month research investigation consisting in two main phases: data collection and analysis in an outgoing phase (outside of Europe), and implementation of results in a return phase (in Europe). This way, the first 24 months of the project (outgoing phase) have been carried out at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS), and the last 12 months (return phase) will take place in Europe, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB, Barcelona, Spain). The main goal of the Narratives4Change project is to study how the public narrative framework is being used for the development of individual and collective leadership in different areas of action (e.g., advocacy/organizing in education, health, and politics) and cultural and geographical contexts, to better understand how it enables individuals’ agentic action and their capacity to develop agency in others, enhancing organizational capacity. Doing this will eventually inform a twofold objective: First, to better understand how the use of public narrative impacts on individuals’ interpersonal relationships by means of enabling agency and second, to explore how it impacts on creating new social realities. Drawing on the results obtained in the research phase at the HKS, that is, on the larger analysis of the public narrative framework, the project seeks to contribute with novel knowledge on how public narrative can be adapted to the European context. More specifically, Narratives4Change aims at findings ways to inform how to advance in better organizing the Roma women movement in Europe, and in Spain. This is a field on which both authors have been especially concerned during the last decade, collaborating and adding to the wealth of research with social impact on Roma people and the overcoming of inequalities led by the Center for Roma Studies at the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA, Spain) (Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Munté et al., 2020; Sordè et al., 2014). Thus, during the return phase of the project, the Narratives4Change investigation plans to capitalize the use of public narrative on the Roma women organizing in Europe (planned from June 2021 to May 2022), at the UAB.

While other scientific articles are being elaborated presenting and discussing empirical results already obtained during the outgoing phase of the project, this article aims at reflecting and discussing the methodological design of the investigation. That is, it focuses on its implementation and the process followed to be able to capture empirically not only how public narrative is being used across the different settings and contexts, but also the impacts achieved. Such impacts are understood in terms of both how agentic capacities have been expanded, and new “social creations” (Aiello & Joanpere, 2014) derived from the agentic action of those leaders and practitioners using it on the ground emerged. The empirical task that Narratives4Change sought to do had never been attempted before; for this reason, it is the goal of this article to first reflect on the methodological challenges and explain in which way they were overcome and second, to contribute with a specific example of how it can be possible to capture sites where social transformations are taking place in the field of leadership in the context of organizing, going beyond disciplinary fields, and using existing conceptual approaches (such as the “SIOR” criteria) (Aiello et al., 2020) in ways that make
it possible to imagine new and original ways of embracing such projects.

Public Narrative for Public Leadership

Public narrative is grounded on the narrative capacity of human beings to understand, interpret, and create our own social reality and the world we navigate with others (Bruner, 1991). As defined by Ganz (2010, 2011), public narrative is a leadership craft through which individuals can enable collective action by accessing, articulating and communicating the emotional content of shared values, which are the processes by which leaders enact their moral resources. At the core of this very understanding of public narrative is the fact that values are thus experienced emotionally (Nussbaum, 2001), as sources of ends worthy of action and the capacity of action. As explained by Ganz, narrative is therefore the discursive means individuals use to access values that equip them with the courage needed to make choices under conditions of uncertainty, in other words, to exercise agency (Ganz, 2010, p. 274). When crafting and articulating a public narrative, the three elements of self, us, and now are linked: why I am called, why we are called, and why we are called to act now?

In explicating where the self, us, and now framework is rooted, Ganz recuperates three questions posed by the 1st century Jewish scholar Rabbi Hillel the Elder: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for myself alone, what am I? And If not now, when? Each question tackles one element of the public narrative framework, self, us, and now. A “story of self” aims at enabling others to relate to the storyteller, by means of the sharing of those narrative moments in his life through which he can tell others the experiences that have shaped his calling for leading. In a “story of us,” the goal is to enable others to relate to each other. Thus, the story of us calls up experience of shared narrative moments that express values shared by those whom one is calling to join in a shared purpose and meaning. As occurs in the story of self, specific moments are also recalled in the story of us, but this time focused on the experiences of the group, aimed at shaping the shared social identity of the group (Steffens et al., 2014). In this regard, rather than being a categorical identity, processes of identity creation in the story of us are grounded on common experiences and shared values, those which are able to cause empathetic responses in the listener when being narrated (Keen, 2006). Finally, a “story of now” communicates the urgent challenge that requires action, the hope for that action, and the choice we are calling upon others to make (Figure 1). As Ganz puts it, the telling of a story of now is a departure from the story of self and the story of us, a story in which narrative moments in the past are used for present experience (Table 1).

In all, public narrative is being used for public leadership in diverse cultural and geographical contexts across the globe. Since 2009, hundreds of training and workshops on public narrative and organizing have been done by Prof. Ganz and his network of collaborators through The Leading Change Network, in in-person and online settings. However, there has not been any systematic research which has explored how public narrative is being used worldwide, and beyond this, how organizers, practitioners, leaders and others who have learned and might be using it are making sense of this framework when using it in their practice as leaders, and thus potentially creating new social realities. This was the endeavor embraced by the Narratives4change project.

Capturing Impact Beyond Usage: Point of Departure and Sought Horizons in the Narratives4Change Project

As any research project, along the implementation of the Narratives4Change investigation several analytical and methodological challenges have been encountered. On the one hand, identifying the core concepts that were under inquiry in this research, considering its interdisciplinary nature. In this way, approaching the study of public narrative and deepening how it contributed to human agency and its use in different contexts required from including insights from the field of sociology, leadership studies and management, political science, and social psychology. On the other hand, the challenge was methodological. The power dimension in the field of organizing is central to it, and thus, it is central for public narrative when used embedded in organizing. However, how to empirically capture shifts in power due to the use of public narrative, to understand its impacts, is much more complex.

As mentioned in the introduction, other publications are being elaborated and in the process of being published, which

![Figure 1. The Three Elements of Public Narrative.](image-url)
Table 1. What Is Public Narrative: Self, Us and Now.

| A story of self | Why were you called to motivate others to join you in this action? What stories can you share that will enable others to “get you.” How can you enable others to experience sources the values that move you not only to act, but to lead? |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A story of us    | To what values, experiences, or aspirations of your community will you appeal when you call on them to join you in action? What stories do you share that can express these values? Describe this “us” in two or three sentences. |
| A story of now   | What urgent challenge do you hope to inspire others to take action on? What is your vision of successful action? What choice will you call on members of your community to make if they are to meet this challenge successfully? How can they act together to achieve this outcome? And how can they begin now, at this moment? |

Source: Marshall Ganz, 2009. What Is Public Narrative: Self, Us and Now. (Public Narrative Worksheet). Working paper.

explain some of the preliminary results obtained by the Narratives4Change project. These research articles expose in detail the theoretical framework on which the project is embedded, something not attempted to be done here. In this article, we focus on the methodological design and implementation of the project. For this reason, it is worth explaining some of the works that were revised when asking ourselves how to approach the study of the impact of public narrative, in a broad way, and which eventually informed the way in which the analytical framework of the project was defined.

In a talk done by Ganz at the Global Affiliates Gathering in Serbia, he reflected on the terms in which those working in public narrative and organizing can think about the impact of the work they do. Drawing on the contributions of psychologist Richard Hackman and his extensive research on work design and team effectiveness (Hackman, 2002, 2011), Ganz pointed out that one corner to approach impact is in terms of Hackman’s tripartite evaluation of organizational outcomes. This way, three questions can guide this analysis. First, did we achieve the change in the world we set out to achieve? For instance, a new law was passed; abuse was stopped; a credit union launched; an election was won; etc. Second, did we strengthen our capacity as a constituency, community, organization, or team to work effectively together? Linked to this, new and better methods were learned, better ways of collaborating emerged, among other. And third, did we grow, learn, and develop as individuals, especially with respect to our leadership practice, number of trained leaders, depth of skill, etc?

Another insight offered by Ganz when reflecting about how to capture the impact of public narrative as embedded in organizing is considering the work of political scientist Steven Lukes about the “Three faces of power” (1976). According to Lukes, power is not something that is solely objective and tangible, but also imbricated, hidden, and invisible, within individuals’ interpersonal relationships. Understanding how power operates, especially in what Lukes considers its second (hidden) and third (invisible) face, is of utmost relevance for the practice of organizing. This not only involves having a more nuanced comprehension of power relations and how they permeate the different social realms, but also constructing relationships in which individuals are able to capture each other’s worldviews, to challenge and lately transform them. This way, impact can be thought, again, asking three questions. First, did we solve the immediate problem? Second, did we change conditions responsible for the problem? And third, did we restructure power in such a way that those whose voices could not be heard can be heard now? Hence, impact, and therefore, change, is viewed in three different dimensions: the individual, the community, and the institutional one.

Works developed from a social psychology and community psychology approach were also of help at the time of developing the analytical framework of the project. The work done by Speer and colleagues (Peterson et al., 2006; Speer, 2008; Speer and Peterson, 2000) and their contributions on how to conceptualize power and empowerment as both a theoretical and practical vehicle in community psychology were revised. Speer attempts to develop a framework for judging and assessing the impact of community interventions on the cognitive understanding of power, offering relevant aspects to be taken into account at the time of approaching impact. He offers three categories that present a starting point in the development of what he calls an epistemic form of psychopolitical validity. First, instruments of power, that is, drawing on existing sociological theory contributions (Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 1974), the ways in which social power is expressed. Second, the sources through which power is accessed. This refers to the basis or foundation that enables individuals or groups to employ an instrument of power (Speer, 2008, p. 203). As Speer mentions, following Galbraith (1983), there are three sources through which power may be accessed: personality, property, and organization. And third, the role of conflict. This incorporates the organizing perspective found in the work and teachings of Saul Alinsky or Paulo Freire in which in order to restore power, conflict is a strategy for agitation, and thus, an inevitable component in the development of power. This third view speaks not to the source of power or to the mechanism through which it is expressed, but to strategies required to develop power (Speer, p. 203). In all, in his view, empowerment should be understood as the process by which individuals, organizations, and communities develop power. Understanding and studying these phenomena is a complex task, for which incorporating psychopolitical validity into research endeavors is of relevance.

Also from the social psychology perspective, but from the angle of leadership studies, the contributions done by the social
identity theory of the group were informative for the construction of the analytical framework of the Narratives4Change project. Such framework draws on the works of social psychologist Henri Tajfel and symbolic interactionist Peter Berger about social identity and the new psychology of leadership (Haslam, Reicher, Platow, 2020). This strand of literature set the ground for paying more attention to the process of leadership effectiveness as a phenomenon rooted in a sense of shared group membership rather than an individual one. Accordingly, the social identity approach considers that in order to discern what lies behind leadership processes and its development, analyses need to be framed within the context of a specific group, team or organization (Tumer & Haslam, 2001). Differing from individual-centric approaches, under this understanding, the leader and the followers are seen as members of the same entity, and thus, the leader and followers are linked and bound within a collective identity group. Reicher et al. (2005) and Steffens et al. (2014) have advanced toward this intersubjective relationship, explaining that leadership is not solely the representation of the group, but it is also achieved when individuals craft, embed and foster a shared identity among followers. In line with our own understanding of leadership, these works reveal that the first stage of influence is one in which leaders act as “entrepreneurs of identity” while creating at the same time a sense of collective group identity that is shared among followers (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Reicher et al., 2005). In our attempt to go deeper and understand how these authors proposed to capture the “us” dimension of leadership, and what they defined as the social identity aspect of leadership, we reviewed the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) scale developed by them (Steffens et al., 2014) and how they used it in the ILI-Global project in which 20 countries participated (van Dick et al., 2018). This guided the way in which we defined our own items in one of the sections of the questionnaire protocol, related to the experience using public narrative in general, and how users considered that each of the elements of the public narrative framework (story of self, story of us, and story of now) were being useful.

Last and more recently, the field of social impact of research analysis offered a different perspective at the time of building the analytical framework, which was that of connecting the academic dimension and its impact on society (Flecha et al., 2015). This is related with on-going research collaborations of both authors of this article, our understanding of the final mission of academic and scientific knowledge, and what our own role as social scientists and “public sociologist” should be (Buraowy, 2005): that scientific knowledge serves and informs the needs of different publics, going beyond the boundaries of academic institutions (Soler-Gallart, 2017). The demand that science and the creation of new knowledge respond not only to achieve scientific and academic indicators (e.g., number of scientific publications) but also provide solid evidence from which responses to the current social challenges can be derived (Cabrera et al., 2020; Pulido et al., 2020; Varga, 2020) calls the attention of academics in general and of the social sciences and humanities in particular (Schulz, 2016; Watts, 2017).

Pioneered by European scholars such as Flecha and Soler, who have been leading a sociological project which is both public and dialogic-oriented for more than 25 years now (Flecha & Soler, 2014), the current study of social impact of research aims at seeking ways of putting scientific knowledge available to the public, including it in the very process of knowledge creation and evaluation. An example of this is the framework developed under the European-funded IMPACT-EV project (7th FP, 2014–2017) which designed a system for selecting, monitoring, evaluating and comparing the impacts and outcomes of European social sciences and humanities research. Under the IMPACT-EV approach, social impact has been defined as a broader concept that includes social improvements achieved because of implementing the results of a particular research project or study, representing positive steps toward the fulfilment of those officially defined social goals, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, or similar regional targets (Reale et al., 2017). This understanding of the social impact of research is connected to the creation of the Social Impact Open Repository (SIOR),3 the first open repository worldwide that displays, cites, and stores the social impact of research results (Oliver et al., 2020).

In all, these analytical insights contributed to constructing our own analytical framework and developing the methodological design of the research.

The Narratives4Change Research: Diving Deeper in Its Methodological Design and Implementation

The analytical framework of the Narratives4Change project for phase one (outgoing phase) was defined in the following way:

Once the analytical framework was constructed, the details of the research strategy were agreed and defined. The on-going conversations between the researchers involved in the Narratives4Change project and coaches, leaders, and grassroots organizers with extensive experience in the use of public narrative were crucial in designing the research scheme. To answer the aims of the investigation defined in the Narratives4Change project, the research design had to investigate and inquiry on the different ways in which the framework was being used across settings and geographical and cultural contexts, while also gathering evidence of the impact it was having in these different social realities. To that end, gathering qualitative insights about the very experiences of how users were making sense of it across these different contexts was set as a priority. In addition, another aspect that needed to be looked at was the potential transferability of the framework to sites where the agency of actors is constrained due to structural conditions, and from a gendered perspective. This is especially relevant considering that during the “return” phase of the
The research included two interlinked studies. First, an online questionnaire aimed at mapping and capturing how the public narrative was being used, and evidence of its impacts. Second, three case studies of campaigns organized or supported either by civic organizations or public institutions that have used public narrative in their implementation.

Once this was decided, two methodological strategies would enhance better capturing the impacts of the framework while putting in place the research itself. First, conducting it in view of the communicative approach (Gomez et al., 2011), and as a key aspect of this, designing and implementing the research including the “researched subjects” (users of public narrative) in an active, dialogical and reflective way throughout the entire research process. And second,
implementing the research considering the criteria offered by the social impact open repository (SIOR) framework as a guiding outline for social impact analysis: connection to any of the areas related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); percentage of improvement achieved in relation to the starting situation; transferability of the impact (actions implemented in more than one contexts); evidence of impact (publication by scientific journals or by governmental or non-governmental official bodies); and sustainability through time.

Acknowledging upfront that the SIOR offers guiding criteria for the social impact analysis and assessment of research investigations (Oliver et al., 2020), incorporating such criteria at the time of exploring and digging deeper into the social reality that we were observing set us off on an impact-oriented analytical mindset that facilitated identifying evidence of impacts of the framework wherever it was being used.

For the public narrative impact questionnaire, its design process started in September 2019 and ran until February 2020, building on these previous months of getting to understand the deeper meaning of public narrative. Capturing the impact of the public narrative framework by means of using a survey faced two main challenges. First, how to be able to properly obtain evidence of impacts of the framework wherever it was being used and adapted, obtaining evidence of impacts and not just of transference. The second challenge faced was how to properly define and enclose the different domains of usage in which public narrative is being used, as in many cases these are not clear-cut and distinguishable domains. Both challenges faced in the survey design were solved after a process of discussion in which we considered both the insights and reflections of coaches and practitioners familiar with public narrative, as well as other scholars and researchers who provided valuable advice in the design process—insights on social impact analysis, survey methodology, and the practice of public narrative.

The SIOR framework for the impact analysis guided the orientation of the whole questionnaire, which allowed us to look at these criteria in light of our own research endeavors. Doing this led us to ask ourselves questions such as the following: would we track in which specific fields public narrative was being used? In which ways could we connect this with the broader UN SDGs? What type of evidence of the impacts can we ask users to provide? (written examples, links of websites, web links of printed reports, links to other audiovisual materials?) How should we ask about the aspect of transferability for each of the domains of usage defined in the questionnaire protocol? Would it be enough by asking if users have “trained others,” and thus assume that if this was done, the framework was being transferred and learned? Was it feasible to ask if anything changed because of the use of public narrative? Posing these types of questions to ourselves helped us to imagine the way questions needed to be framed, keeping them simple, and always bearing in mind that the main aim of the questionnaire was not to gather in-depth information but rather to map where and how public narrative was being used, and the evidence of potential impacts.

The Communicative Design of the Mixed-Methods Research

The Narratives4Change project incorporated a communicative orientation when being designed and implemented. The communicative methodology emerges from the dialogic turn of social sciences and society (Soler-Gallart, 2017), which implied changes in the understanding of reality at both the ontological and epistemological level, as well as in the way in which social reality is scientifically analyzed. This way, the basis of the communicative approach is the dialogic relation between the researcher and the researched subject, the first one contributing with the knowledge from the scientific community, and the latter, with their interpretations from the common sense of their lifeworlds (Habermas, 1984). Research subjects are key actors during the entire research process, actively included throughout the research journey, which makes it transformative and impact-oriented.

Thus, one of the very first steps agreed at the early beginning of the project was to identify a pool of practitioners, leaders, former teacher fellows of Prof. Ganz at the HKS who were trained and well experienced in the use of public narrative. Such individuals were sought to start explaining and discussing the idea of the project, and drafting through this dialogue the case studies design, and the survey protocol design, were achieved. Different rounds of online and offline conversations were held with practitioners and grassroots-leaders based across the US, at the UK, Germany, Mexico, Serbia, India, Jordan, Japan, or Pakistan. The aim was to get to know how they themselves were making sense of the public narrative framework, in what ways they were using public narrative, how they were facilitating its learning, and what the impacts observed in their own work as leader and coaches using this leadership practice were. Deepening in these conversations with leaders on the ground helped us to frame the research questions, and which type of impacts were going to be expected, as well as the potential challenges that we could encounter at the time of implementing the investigation.

It was clear at the beginning that we wanted to look at the impact of public narrative from a sociological perspective, but how to define the different dimensions of impacts, how to distinguish analytically among them, or even where to set boundaries were aspects that needed yet to be decided. Examples shared by practitioners and leaders made clear the need to frame the questions in both the questionnaire protocol and in the qualitative fieldwork in a way that we could give enough space and time for users themselves to speak and share their own experiences using public narrative. Having these very details in mind made real the communicative premise of the importance of considering the interpretation of the research subjects during the entire research process, starting from the very design of the research, as well as interpreting subjects’ insights in their contexts.

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Eventually, the protocol was divided in different sections according to the domains of usage (as defined in the analytical framework, see Table 2). While for each section of usage specific examples were asked to be provided, the section related to “campaigns” was designed drawing criteria from the SIOR framework. We asked for the name of the campaign, the organization that sponsored the campaign (asking for a web link), the impacts achieved related to a list of 19 defined fields—most of which are related to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)—evidence of the mentioned impacts (links to websites), as well as a question about the replicability of the impact.

Designing the questionnaire seeded the ground for a smoother design of the case studies. While talking with colleagues, we observed which cases were already showing potential evidence of impact. In this very process of getting to know, through informal conversations with leaders and practitioners on the ground, how public narrative was being used “out there,” several reflections emerged on the need to put in place standardized processes that could be used and shared among all those using public narrative, and which allow capturing the evidence of impact in a more systematic way. For instance, two of the most mentioned issues were about the need to better organize data on the profile of those learning public narrative across the world, as well as how to create standardized categories and a shared database to store all this information, foreseeing future impact evaluations. These conversations, together with early data obtained in the piloting of the survey, informed the final selection of the cases to be studied.

Accordingly, extensive data gathered in the online questionnaire was complimented with three case studies. Two of them have already been carried out, and the third one is being carried out at the time of writing this article. Three were the main criteria for their selection. First, having some previous evidence of their impact when using public narrative. Second, cases that make it possible to be studied in light of the field of gender, education, or health. And third, geographical and cultural diversity. The three chosen cases were the following: the case of the “Stand Up with the Teachers” campaign (QMM) in Jordan, led by female teachers employed in private schools, and supported by the Ahel organization; the case of the “Drive Michigan Forward” campaign, led by a coalition of organizations in Michigan, in which the grassroots-based organization “We The People” has played a central role for articulating it; and the use of public narrative in the “Maternity Voices Partnership” program supported and facilitated by the organization Horizons-NHS in England.

Standing on an “Impact-Oriented Analytical Mindset” at the Time of Collecting Data

The public narrative impact questionnaire was finally launched online in 2020, distributed counting on the collaboration of contact points who were key actors at the time of ensuring that especially those who have learned public narrative through workshops were also included. A total of 1111 responses were collected, and to our surprise, plenty of written examples were shared. From the results obtained, we observed that those using public narrative are residing across more than 40 different countries, the top five countries being: the USA, Canada, UK, India, and Mexico. More than 50% of them reported that they use public narrative within the workplace (internally, with co-workers); at the workplace, externally, to engage with others; and within the private sphere, that is, with friends and family. Similarly, almost 50% of respondents explained that they use public narrative to motivate participation in the public sphere (in a civic association, professional association, trade union, political campaign, social movement, or other forms of public engagement). The lower reported proportion of usage is for the domain of campaigns: 26% of survey respondents reported having used public narrative in a campaign. This might be attributed to the fact that while most of us have the chance to use it in our work or social lives, not all of us are involved in campaigns.

Asking for specific examples in each section of usage within the protocol allowed participants to explain in their own words in what ways they were making sense of the framework. To our surprise, multiple qualitative examples were shared, as well as links including YouTube videos showcasing moments in which public narrative was being used at large events such as conferences, assemblies, or other public events.

For the qualitative data collection, in each case study, main informants were key to give context of what the situation was, equipping the researcher with the historical context and data that needed to be considered to grasp the broader impact of public narrative in that very context. In turn, having in mind the data obtained in the questionnaire, the SIOR guiding criteria, and the communicative methodological lenses equipped us to capture those sites in which public narrative was having impact, both in creating new specific social realities, as well as on extending users agentic capacities.

For instance, during the data collection phase in the case of the Stand Up with the Teachers campaign in Jordan, many teachers explained how sharing personal stories helped them to make commitments with each other, to act and reject accepting being paid through informal ways. The sense of empowerment they gained by joining the campaign, and sharing their narratives, organizing themselves as a team, not only moved many of them to accept the responsibility to take the leadership, but also impacted their families. Many of the teachers explained they are using public narratives now with their husbands, their children, or their mothers in law, at the time of solving conflicts, or setting new rules, explaining why it is important for them. On a societal dimension, it was observed that the public perception in Jordan of female teachers working in private education has changed. They are no longer seen as passive actors, but as an organized collective of workers, capable of working with a strategy and in a
structured way, and pursuing a change in the agenda. In September 2018, the then Ministry of Education passed a regulation demanded by the campaign which included provisions making the private schools licensing and relicensing conditions upon the transfer of salaries through the banks. Since then, the campaign has continued organizing and struggling for the de facto implementation of the regulation (Aiello, 2020).

Although in a different socioeconomic and cultural reality, similar narratives were observed in the case of the Drive Michigan Forward campaign. The use of public narrative served as way to articulate and put together a coalition of very diverse organizations which, although working with an agenda that pursues the compliment of human rights of undocumented migrants, have different organizational traditions (from grassroots-based, to large-scale, national organizations) and approaches. Although the campaign has not yet achieved its final goal (restore the driving licenses for undocumented migrants in Michigan), what is different in this case is that the work that the Drive Michigan Forward coalition is doing is deeply based on building sustainable relationships of trust and solidarity among Michiganders, in a context of deep political polarization, systematic racism, and in a region where black and brown people have been hardly hit by the COVID-19. Meanwhile, whereas the use of public narrative started being used to explain how migrants needed to be able to drive with a license, those relationships built set the basis to put together networks of collaboration to react and organize back in March, when COVID-19 emerged, and to put in place mechanisms for help and assistance for those most in need. Therefore, although the context of Michigan is different from the one of Jordan, similarities among both cases have been observed along the way. Public narrative has served as a way to build long-lasting relationships of trust, helping to revitalize the democratic infrastructure, and setting in turn the basis for a solid organizational structure. Another aspect identified has been how in this organizing process, the dominant narrative about why it is important that migrants are granted a driving license has slowly shifted, from being that of cost-benefit-centered (e.g., potential taxes that are not being paid), toward being human rights centered (e.g., all of us can recall a situation in which a loved one needs to rush into the hospital late at night, and you need to drive him). Although there is no certainty if the campaign is going to succeed or not, those organizations working on this agenda are able to transmit a solid message of hope, through specific stories with names, taking place in a city which is of everybody.

Last, in the fieldwork that is being conducted with chairs of the Maternity Voices Partnership program, in one of the focus groups celebrated online with three women from across England, we observed how being asked about how they have used public narrative in their practice, and the impact it has had, not only made them reflect on it; it also triggered a dialogue among them about other potential areas on which public narrative can be further facilitated. Talia and Anne, two of the participants who barely knew each other, explained how they themselves are using public narrative to engage with maternity services users and the families with whom they work, and how midwives and obstetricians would also benefit from learning public narrative. They shared how, especially during COVID-19, midwives are struggling to keep on top of their work, and to properly attend the needs of the families. This creates a situation where midwives are often perceived as the other, while in many times, they have to navigate the maternity system under big constraints, underpaid, and understaffed. What our data is suggesting in this case, is that public narrative can serve as an effective resource for Maternity Voices Partnership chairs at the time of doing their work as leaders, when navigating and negotiating interpersonal and hierarchical relationships with other stakeholders of the maternity services, and when engaging with service users and families. It was observed how it helped to make sense of what their shared purpose as a team is, enhancing team building and bonding, and eventually impacting on their sense of belonging to the bigger mission embodied by the program. In this focus, group participants end the conversation saying Thank You to researchers for helping through the questions posed through an egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue to order their own ideas, better think on how they were already using what they have learned in the public narrative learning session, and for convening that site where they were already talking about how to improve the service they were doing as volunteers working with families.

Concluding Remarks

Research methods are not static but rather a dynamic process which allows the incorporation of the demands of the publics (Denzin, 2019), and in the present, to advance toward social impact-oriented research (Flecha et al., 2015; Oliver et al., 2020). This way, the case discussed in this article presents and discusses the analytical and methodological challenges encountered at the time of capturing impact, and how they were overcome.

At least, three lessons can be learned from the Narratives4Change methodological process at the time of capturing the impacts of public narrative. First, the fact of not subduing the very research endeavor to the methodological process. Many times, research methods are interpreted as constraining ambitious research projects because of the complexity of properly capturing and analyzing social reality (citation needed). However, the impact analysis, in this case of the public narrative framework, shows that drawing from existing general frameworks can illuminate the research methodological design, serving as useful and guiding criteria in the process of research methodological design.

Second, and linked to the first one, the existence of standardized and broad frameworks for social impact analysis such as the ones provided by SIOR are of relevance as they guide the impact analysis task (Aiello et al., 2020). These very frameworks do not show in a detailed way how the analytical
process should be done, but they rather offer a conceptual framework that allows us to think broadly how to identify and analyze if a specific research, tool, or in this case, leadership pedagogy, is having impact: is it being used in diverse societal areas? Is there evidence of these impacts? In those sites where it is being used, is it sustainable? Has it been transferred to new realities? As explained above, having in mind these criteria during the design and implementation of the project served as an outline at the time of inquiring in each of the domains of impact.

And third, what we have called in this article reading social reality standing on an “impact-oriented analytical mindset.” Adding this very understanding of the research task drives us to look for methodological strategies that capture those sites where impact is taking place (Pulido et al., 2018, 2020; Sordé et al., 2020; Tellado et al., 2020). In the Narratives4Change investigation, it was the relevance, for instance, of constantly asking for examples, and for evidence where to triangulate that investigation, it was the relevance, for instance, of constantly asking for examples, and for evidence where to triangulate that information. Besides, adopting this impact-oriented analytical mindset modifies our methodological strategies, as it pushes us to either incorporate or drop specific steps during the research process considering if they are going to get us closer or farther away from capturing evidence of impacts. The use of the communicative approach and always considering the voices of researched subjects, to dialogue, debate, contrast, and share views with them, was a way in this research of grasping impact, while also thinking in new ways of how to continue generating these alternatives on the ground.

In all, we hope that these reflections are of help for all those that embrace similar challenges, understanding and trusting on the potential transformative role that methodological approaches can have.

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Notes
1. See The Leading Change Network (https://leadingchangenetwork.org/about/#our-story).
2. Unpublished notes: Understanding Impact—GA Serbia Notes, written by Vladica Jovanovic based on a talk by Marshall Ganz at the Global Affiliates Gathering in Serbia March 2015.
3. For more information, see SIOR website: http://sior.ub.edu/jsipui/
4. For more information, see: https://ahel.org/en-about-us/
5. For more information about the Drive Michigan Forward campaign: https://www.drivemichiganforward.com/ and We The People Michigan: https://www.wethepeoplemi.com/
6. For more information, see Maternity Voices Partnership http://nationalmaternityvoices.org.uk/about-us/purpose-values/; Horizons NHS: http://horizonsnhs.com/about-meet-the-team/

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