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Develop Stories, Develop Communities: Narrative Practice to Analyze and Engage in Urban Conflict

Nanke Verloo

Introduction

[To be a practitioner in conflict is not only to listen] but to receive their emotions, too. You not only have to give back their words but you also give back their emotions—the intention of what they are saying. If you can do that, then they feel that you can really understand them. [I show them that I understand] by changing the words [...], sometimes it's your body language but also by using different words, by showing that [...] you understand the story behind the words. It is a big mistake [to assume that professionalism is to put away all the emotions]. The most important thing [...] of the professional attitudes of people all over the world is [to not be] afraid of your own emotions. If you are not afraid of your emotions, for example anger, then you can listen very well to the emotion of the other person. Because, if [...] someone is very angry or emotional, if you [as a professional] are afraid of your own emotions, then you can't hear it. (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009)

When conflicts arise, emotions come into play. Planning is change, and in that process it is inevitable that not everyone agrees about future plans. A chapter on using narrative to understand and deal with planning conflicts must therefore start by recognizing the importance of emotions. The professional in the above quote explains that he had to face the fear of his own emotions in order to allow himself to listen and really hear the stories of people he worked with. The account of his practice during a long-lasting controversy in the city of The Hague, Netherlands reveals how emotions run through our ability to understand the story of the 'other' in moments of urban conflict. However, this quote also shows how difficult it is to describe how to deal with emotions. Emotions are tacit and intuitive, hence a good response demands sensitivity.

But how can we critically reflect on tacit sensitivity? The practitioner explains that he gives back his emotional understanding of ‘the story behind the words’ through body language, but he is not able to make his embodied performance tangible. He says something about giving back ‘words,’ but is not able to reveal how he uses words to show his understanding. This chapter discusses a *narrative practice* approach to conflict and contentious planning processes that engages emotions through a bottom-up understanding of the stories of different parties.

The residents who convey their emotions to the practitioner are part of a group that was systematically marginalized in the context of a new town development. Coming from a so-called ‘folk neighborhood’ in The Hague, they had tried to reconstruct the effervescent community life they were used to in the past. In the new town, however, they shared their street with people who had a very different lifestyle and who were not in favor of spontaneous parties in the front yard, nor were they happy with a self-organized community center. Soon after the new town development was finished, the group had to close their self-organized, self-managed and self-regulated community center to make way for a professional facility. Ever since they lost their ‘club,’ they tried to recapture their role as community organizers, but failed to do so in a long-lasting controversy that included professional welfare workers, police officers and policy practitioners who limited the involvement of the group in the professional center. At the point the practitioner who is quoted above came into play, the parties had experienced seven years of escalating contention and frustration.

This case, and every other process of change, reveals that change consists of an element of grieving, letting go of what was in the past. In this case that meant letting go of nostalgic memories of a youth in the old neighborhood and weekly parties in the ‘club.’ In the field of planning, we often focus our attention on the process of change and the anticipated future, thereby tending to ignore feelings of grief and loss. We frame a bright future of what is yet to be, a future with limited space for the memories of a woman’s first kiss behind the corner of that remote playground. The local and tacit stories of people whose communities are changing are usually difficult to engage in speaking about city planning or neighborhood development. They may seem too mundane and everyday to be taken into account, or do not fit the language of development on a larger scale. Despite the ambition of policy practitioners and planners to engage a diverse set of people in the decision-making process, many urban conflicts occur out of a failure to do so. Particular groups are excluded from taking part in the deliberative process because they do not speak the language of policy nor apply the usual repertoire of political action. In those cases conflict results in a deepening of the experience of marginality and tensions tend to escalate. A narrative practice therefore seeks to engage a variety of speech-acts, repertoires of participation, stories and emotions.

The practitioner, whose work is of great inspiration to the narrative practice proposed in this chapter, argues for an approach that engages everyday stories of people and their tacit emotions. Therefore it is first necessary to rethink an approach to emotions that allows for engaging groups on the basis of their distinct and tacit story. However, how do we understand and include stories in the process of planning? Stories reveal how people make sense of the situation at hand. Thus to understand the dynamics of conflict, we need insights into the way stories divert and overlap, where we see contradictions and space for deliberation. Are there stories that are not told in the process, and how could we engage with these stories? What would it mean for the field of conflict and planning if we allow emotions to become part of the planning process? And how do stories allow for that to happen? How can planners reflect on unintended processes of exclusion? In other words, to develop stories is to develop communities, but how do we engage in stories that allow for a community of change?

Engaging Emotions

To talk about the role of emotions in an academic discussion is difficult, but our linguistic repertoire also falls short in practice. Sociologists have tackled this problem by theorizing emotions in several ways. Arlie Hochschild offers the insight that emotions are not only tacit and uncontrollable but that people seek to manage emotions through ‘feeling rules’ that are embedded in or deviate from a social structure (Hochschild 1979). James Jasper (2011) rethinks social movement theory and offers a typology of emotional processes. He concludes that emotions are a core part of actions and decisions that should be taken into account to understand how they shape interactions and choices (Jasper 2011: 14). These studies provide insights into the way societies shape appropriate emotions in certain circumstances and what the results or risks of emotions are in processes of change. These are very valuable insights for sociologists who seek to analyze social interactions, but in a narrative practice, evaluating the moral, appropriate or effective meaning of emotions is tricky.

The quote from the practitioner reveals how important acknowledgment is in a process of conflict management and resolution. The practitioner recognizes that emotions run through conflict and offer insights into people’s experiences, but instead of problematizing them he proposes that they demand recognition. Instead of theorizing, his practice is to repeat the exact language of parties to “make them feel you truly understand.” Through the repetition of language and the embodiments of his own emotions, he includes emotions in the story of planning without giving a normative evaluation. At the same time his repetition and embodiment is a sensitive response.

Since the mid-2000s, planning analysts have paid more attention to the role of emotions in the planning process. As they argue, the planning process is more influenced by cognitive relationships; and emotional ideas shape people's beliefs and judgments about future plans (Hoch 2006). The field of planning has overlooked how emotions and feelings shape the plans people make individually as urban dwellers or urban planners (LeBaron in Hoch 2006: 380). Hoch suggests that planners should look at the way emotions shape communication that informs and persuades people about proposed plans, and how emotions shape the expectations and criteria for future planning methods (Hoch 2006). From this perspective, however, emotions are once again evaluated. This time the evaluation is to allow planners to organize a better process of planning. The story of planning and the planning process remains at the heart of the analysis. The quote from the practitioner suggests an opposite perspective. He makes the tacit emotions of residents central to the process of acknowledging each distinct story.

Thus, a narrative perspective allows for a discussion about emotions without making them an abstraction. Without making emotions into abstract analytic tools, they allow for an insight into interests and judgments (Nussbaum 2003). Emotions then simply surface in the stories of people and reveal much about their intentions, grievances and worries. At the same time emotions can serve as a tool to engage people in a deliberative process simply because if we care, we act. Like scholars of planning and sociology, narrative practice requires us to make sense of stories through analyzing emotions, but it is also responsive to the emotions of people as practitioners try to engage and embody them, and most importantly acknowledge them by making them part of the future story of planning.

Narratives and Planning

Before moving to consider the use of stories in planning theory, we need to discuss how to understand the notions of 'story' and 'narrative.' As with many analytic tools, there is no agreed-upon definition of narrative in the social sciences. The use of narratives to understand social life has moved from more structuralist analysis (Labov and Waletzky 1967) that focused on a linguistic perspective and allowed for an evaluation of temporal and syntactic clauses, to a more constructivist understanding. Nowadays most narrative scholars use the latter perspective, which understands narrative as a sequence of events with a beginning, a middle and an end that have internal coherence which unfolds in time and space and features characters that are related to one another (Polkinghorne 1987; MacIntyre 1990; Bruner 1991, 2004; Porter Abbott 2008; Czarniawska 2010). Most of these scholars make a distinction

between story and narrative. Porter Abbott explains that stories are sequences of events in action and the descriptions thereof, while narratives are the distinct way of conveying these stories into an analytic representation (Porter Abbott 2008: 19). The stories that people share about their experiences of conflict are often descriptions of sequences of events. Narrative scholars would argue that they turn into a narrative when these stories become 'emplotted,' when they become analytical reflections on the stories. This distinction is useful for our analytic vocabulary. When we speak of stories, we speak of the different storylines parties in conflict use to make sense of the situation. When we speak of a narrative, it is the reconstruction of these storylines into a narrative in which we add meaning; for example, the narrative of planning adds meaning as it brings many stories together into a shared whole and an emplotted future. As we will see later, the construction of one all-encompassing narrative is problematic in the narrative practice I propose.

Stories are understood as enacted (MacIntyre 1990), which makes them rich sources of insight into experiences and social interactions. Furthermore, stories are understood as forms of communication (Fisher 1984, 1987) as people tell stories to share thoughts, reveal emotions and convince others of ideas. Stories, however, do more than display emotions, ideas and interests; the stories people construct to make sense of a situation guide their future behavior and judgments. Stories in themselves have the ability to not only describe what is, but also to guide what ought to be (Rein and Schön 1977). Thus both stories and narratives shape meaning and provide insights into what the narrator finds important and unimportant. Bruner therefore argued that there is a mimesis between life and narrative; "the mimesis between life and narrative is a two way affair, narratives imitate life and vice versa" (Bruner 2004: 692). Thus the construction of a narrative of planning based on stories of experience taps back into social reality as it creates meaning, excludes other meanings and, as we will see in the account of the practitioner, excludes or includes people from taking part in the process of change. It would not come as a surprise to say that we must therefore be very careful with the meanings we want our narratives about planning to convey.

Since the 'narrative turn,' planners have moved to using stories about planning processes to describe emotions, feelings and contention in groups and individuals (Forester 1989, 1999; Fischer and Forester 1993; Mandelbaum 1991; Throgmorton 1996, 2003; Marris 1997; Sandercock 2011). These studies give interesting perspectives on how storytelling is part of the planning process and analyze emotions as they play a role in contention about future plans. In the field of planning we can roughly identify two ways in which planners have used a narrative approach. The first uses storytelling as a means to engage people in the deliberative process. Forester (2006, 2009) and Sandercock (2011) argue that storytelling is a democratic and inclusive practice that

enhances the process of planning. Here storytelling is understood as a tool to engage different people in community participation and facilitate a space for people to share their stories and listen to others. Forester argues that ritualized storytelling and listening could be used as a means to reconcile deep conflicts and can offer hope where hope had seemed lost (Forester 1999: 78). He gives an account of talking circles where people were encouraged to share what places, neighborhoods or sites mean to them. In this approach storytelling is an important part of planning practice that seeks to engage different parties and people. Merlijn van Hulst clarified this approach as a model for planning (2012), in which storytelling is explicitly used as a method for the planning process.

The second approach uses narrative to construct a persuasive story of planning itself. According to Van Hulst this is a process of planning in which planning practice itself is much like storytelling (Van Hulst 2012: 302). This second approach is developed in the work of Throgmorton (1996, 2003) who argues that planning is persuasive storytelling about the future. He argues that planners are authors of a text that can be read and interpreted in diverse and conflicting ways (Throgmorton 2003: 127). The planning text has to emplot a possible flow of future actions that will be filled with believable characters who act within a setting. In order to shape the reader's attention and move the key antagonists around, the narrative should envelop conflict, crisis and resolution (*ibid.*). Moreover, Throgmorton recognizes that the persuasive story is constitutive of communities, characters and culture. Thus the narrative of planning shapes meaning by telling the readers and listeners what is important and what is not (*ibid.*: 128). Consequently, planning narratives shape the possibility for the engagement of specific groups and guide the repertoire of deliberation, as well as providing for including emotions. Throgmorton argues that we must therefore expand the language of planning and include the language of emotions (*ibid.*).

One could see how the two approaches reinforce one another. The former suggests a practice that allows people to participate in planning; the latter reflects on that process and allows the text of planning to become a narrative with an agreeable plotment about the future. Both approaches, however, keep the planner in a central position. Let us move back to the case of the new town to grasp how storytelling and narrative are used there. The practitioner started out with storytelling as a way to engage the different experiences of people in the neighborhood. In line with Sandercock's argument, storytelling was his way to start the process of conflict resolution. He met with each separate group to get an insight into their distinct story of the controversy. He explained:

[It was important] to hear the different stories from different people about what was going on in their opinion so I could develop an idea about what

was going on, what the intention was, what the inside people thought. I didn't know the policemen, I didn't know the youth workers, I didn't know the management, it was a completely new situation for me. The first weeks were spent making new contacts, talking about the situation, the incidents. (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009)

These conversations enabled the practitioner to grasp the stories of different parties, as Forester and Sandercock argue. However, these conversations also revealed that not all stories are of equal value to the story of planning. The practitioner was confronted with the emotional story of residents who felt as if they were excluded from the process of decision-making between the welfare organization and the local authorities. The story of the residents coming from the old neighborhood revealed emotions like anger, frustration and sadness about the loss of their club. These emotions, however, did not surface in the more formal story of welfare practitioners. Their repertoire to engage in deliberation about the community activities was embedded in a formal language that would frame community organizing as a 'pedagogical responsibility' with an 'accountable organization' and a structure for 'voluntary workers' who wanted to help. On the other hand, the story of residents described the practical activities they used to organize. Their stories recalled the 'fun they had during Friday night bingo and karaoke in the club.' They understood their role not as 'volunteers' but as 'organizers,' and organizing activities was dependent on everyone who had a good idea and wanted to 'just go for it.' Over the course of the conflict, the different stories that parties used to make sense of the situation, the self and others came into interaction with one another. For example, during conversations with professionals, residents would raise their voices and portray their anger. The professionals were willing to discuss the matter but only in a way they called 'civil,' as a result they started avoiding having discussions with residents. One can see how the meaning of community organizing is different in each account and how the contradicting stories shape different behavioral patterns that deepen the contradiction and eventually result in the exclusion of the group of residents.

The language of welfare workers excluded informal descriptions of activities as their role and their word choices emphasize their formal responsibility. When we assume that saying something is doing something (Austin 1962: 12), we can see how the use of formal language to communicate with the residents did something to the relationship. Austin would call this speech act an 'illocutionary force' because the use of formal language is a conventional speech act that has an effect on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience and the speaker (Austin 1962: 115). In this case the effect is an experience of exclusion from the decision-making process in the center. The storyline of the

residents that showed emotions of mourning about the loss of their activities did not get acknowledged in the storyline of the professionals. When the practitioner spoke with the residents, in hindsight he recalls their anger: “[They were] angry about the way they were treated, they were angry about the way that the children were treated” (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009). He explains that the residents used sarcasm, humor and emotional outbursts to counter the formal story of the professionals, but that these elements of their story only reinvigorated their informal and thereby ‘voluntary’ and ‘unprofessional’ status in the community. As he explained in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, his purpose was not to only be responsive to these emotions: “Only when I gave back their emotion and crossed the line of formal communication, was I able to make a connection with them” (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009). Furthermore he suggests embodying emotions and acknowledging them in the way he makes them part of his account of the narrative of conflict.

The account of the new town reveals how some stories do not find a way into the deliberation process because they convey a different language, plot or repertoire of communication. It suggests that the intention of narrative scholars like Throgmorton, Sandercock and Forester to give room to emotions during meetings does not mean that these emotions always get acknowledged, nor that they become part of the narrative of planning in conflict. A response to this problem is Jane Mansbridge’s proposition to include everyday talk in the deliberative system (Mansbridge 1999). She rethinks the Habermasian perfect speech-acts of deliberation and argues that personal, not public, everyday talk should also be understood as political (ibid.: 214). Her argument provides an interesting insight into the use of every language in the deliberative process that, in her account, acknowledges structural power relations that influence any interaction, but allows for a sense of the agency of actors in deliberation (ibid.: 224). She argues that “the criterion of equality in deliberation should be modified to mandate equal opportunity to affect the outcome; mutual respect; and equal power only when threats of sanction and the use of force come into play” (ibid.: 225). Thus including everyday talk in the deliberative process could provide a way to engage in the language of residents and give way to their emotions. However, what remains after this powerful pursuit is the translation of everyday talk into a planning document, not engagement of emotions in the practice of planning. Scholars have convincingly shown how policy or other bureaucratic documents squeeze out the life juice and thereby position themselves as authoritarian (Finnegan 1998; Sandercock 2011). In such cases the policy or planning document only partially reflects the process of storytelling that residents and practitioners were engaged in.

Emery Roe (1989, 1994) proposed an alternative to this discrepancy. He argued that policy narratives should entail a meta-narrative that includes the stories of different parties. His meta-narrative does not focus on the facts but on the divergent stories people tell. Roe's theory on narrative in public policy is very valuable for the study of conflict because it recognizes that all policies are in themselves moral stories. Roe speaks about the necessity of a meta-narrative in highly polarized policy narratives where, as in cases of planning conflict, values and interests are fundamentally divided so that they paralyze decision-making (Roe 1994: 4). He argues that in such cases "the best alternative is to forgo searching for consensus and common ground in favor of a meta-narrative that turns this polarization in another story altogether" (ibid: 4). Although Roe is attentive to "objectively weaker arguments" that are the result of an unequal distribution of power relations that "work themselves out through stories, through their asymmetries, and through getting people to change their story" (Roe 1989: 266), the meta-narrative he proposes could be understood as a 'shared' narrative with which all parties can identify and—as he argues—find common ground.

It is exactly in that 'shared' approach where the approach to narrative practice opposes a meta-narrative. A meta-narrative implies a summary of the narratives of different parties. A summary means that one narrative reveals common grounds and differences, but the way differences and power relations are constructed remains unclear. The case study reveals that when people utter specific words or show their emotions, they position themselves through an interaction. Power relations are thus constructed in a discursive and often unconscious way. At the same time, decisions about where to organize public meetings, in the city hall or in a neighborhood center, also influence the power relations between parties in conflict. In the case of the new town, the use of formal language in interaction with the residents created a gap that deepened the experience of marginality for the group and strengthened the role of the professionals. To understand these power dynamics in processes of conflict, a meta-narrative is not sufficient because it summarizes events and does not allow for insights into the communication between parties. To acknowledge each distinct story that brings to the surface distinct emotions in moments of conflict, we must turn to an approach that keeps every storyline intact—like a braid that is not supposed to turn into a ponytail.

In sum, during episodes of conflict each party narrates the story in a particular way, values different events, uses particular language and gives meaning to events, places, identities and relationships. To understand the relationship between parties, the practitioner suggested staying close to the distinct language and performance displayed by each party. These cannot be revealed in a meta-narrative because a summary of stories tends to exclude thick descriptions of the discursive practices and emotions that reveal the marginal

stories in conflict. Consequently, emotions do not find their way into the political discussion about planning. A narrative practice aims to engage in and acknowledge each particular storyline so that people in each storyline are empowered to speak their own language and repertoire to influence the outcome of a planning process. This approach to story and emotions seeks to move away from an authoritarian position of the planner that demands that he be evaluative of emotions. Instead, the planner moves toward a position that makes the stories of parties (residents and any other party in conflict) as much a part of the interdependent network of stories as his own story of planning. Dealing with conflict from this perspective demands that the practitioner engage in the stories of the 'other' and make them part of the story of 'self.' However, as Jane Mansbridge argues, that does not take place in a power vacuum. To understand power dynamics between storylines, we must understand the relationships between them. That way, policy makers, planners and conflict analysts can see where stories contradict and overlap, how they tap back into our understanding of conflict—for that more structural understanding we move to the concept of 'master' and 'counter' plots.

Master and Counter Plots

We have established that stories are means to make sense of conflict, but that these understandings also shape our ability to act in the process of dealing with conflict. Our repertoire to deal with conflict stems from power dynamics that allow certain storylines to become dominant and others marginal. When a party's storyline picks up on elements of the master plot, that story is more likely to be accepted as the 'real' or 'true' story and becomes the dominant interpretation of conflict. A master plot in the case of the new town was the story of the necessity of a professional community center. This is an ideal that refers to a broader story about the Netherlands as a well-functioning welfare state that offers everyone the same chances and is accountable in its organization. The storyline of welfare workers refers to this plot by using terms like 'pedagogical responsibility,' 'accountable organizing,' and 'activities for everyone.' By referring to a dominant story about the Netherlands, professionals legitimized their formal position as community organizers. On the other hand there was a counter plot that missed these strong rhetorical elements. Groups that form minorities usually shape these plots on the periphery, outside the realm of the dominant plot. Members of the group from the old neighborhood constructed their story in private gatherings where they commemorated their old club. The story that resulted out of these meetings revealed emotions and nostalgic memories that did not appeal to the dominant plot about a well-organized neighborhood. In fact, the informal and nostalgic memories about

the old club revealed a private story that in its turn strengthened the dominant plot, the need for professional organizing.

A counter plot is usually understood as a less appropriate interpretation of conflict; therefore these counter plots become marginalized and cannot find their way into the public debate. In order to grasp the power relations that are in place in conflict, we must analyze the types of plot—master or counter—these stories refer to. Master and counter plots help us to become aware of what Mansbridge suggested, to understand the ability of different stories to affect the outcome of a planning process. This also allows us to get an insight into the ways people who identify with these stories get more easily included in or excluded from the deliberative process.

However, such a master–counter plot dichotomy could easily suggest that there is no way out of power relations. To allow for a sense of agency within the power dynamics of conflict, Bamberg convincingly complicates the distinction between master and counter plots. He speaks about master narratives and argues that they are apparent in every social interaction where they set up sequences of actions and events as routines, therefore one could say they delineate agency and reduce the repertoire of action (Bamberg 2004: 360). He continues, however, by saying that without that guidance and sense of direction we would be lost (*ibid.*). In other words, we are dependent on these dominant narratives and one could wonder how conscious we are about the way dominant narrative occupy our existence. Thus our complicity with them does not automatically result in being complicit with or supportive of hegemonic-knowledge complexes (*ibid.*). Bamberg seeks to understand the fabric of master narratives in order to understand the social and individual forces to change them. His argument is that master narratives guide and structure our understanding of positioning in society, but that “people have room for improvisation and careful management of perspectives that is sensitive to possible counters from the audience” (*ibid.*: 363). He calls that management “juggling several storylines simultaneously” and he concludes that “counter narratives always operate on the edge of disputability and require a good amount of interactional subtlety and rhetorical finessing on the part of the speaker” (*ibid.*).

The approach to narrative practice that I propose is attentive to the discursive performances that people develop to “juggle several storylines.” Conflict starts out with one party feeling delegitimated as they disagree with the proposed process, plan or ascribed position. The power structure that is invoked by master plots entitles groups to certain roles and guides the repertoire of action. As a response, people attempt to regain legitimacy through the construction of a counter plot, or other discursive practices that reveal a counter plot in action. If we allow these discursive and maybe informal responses to become part of the narrative of planning, we open the possibility

for engagement and renegotiation. Planning conflicts take place exactly at that intersection of dominant and counter plots. The challenge of narrative practice is not to be responsive to or summarize different stories, but instead braid them through the storytelling of decision-making. The next section will discuss how practitioners as well as analysts can engage in contradicting stories without losing sight of their own story and remain within the boundaries of what is pragmatically possible in a planning process.

Narrative Practice

A narrative practice starts from the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between the stories we construct to make sense of conflict and our future practices and behavior. Therefore, a narrative perspective bridges the gap between theory and practice. Both analysts and practitioners are responsible for the mimesis between life and narrative. In other words, whoever deals with parties in conflict becomes part of the dynamic relationships between different stories. Furthermore, the practice of the practitioner shows that only by understanding each story and the dynamics between them was he able to negotiate. As he said, his understanding of each story and how stories were embedded in the power context informed his responsiveness to and acknowledgment of emotions. Consequently, narrative practitioners need to be able to 'learn-in-action' (Schön 1983). To learn in the moment of action means to simultaneously understand the meaning of stories in relation to the conflict and to develop a practical response. Narrative practitioners are able to acknowledge dominant as well as marginal stories, so that they can start an inclusive process of decision-making. They need to understand as well as to respond to emotional outbursts. Therefore a narrative practice approach is an effort to bridge theory and practice as it allows for analyzing the meaning of diverse stories in interaction and provides means to engage them in the process of deliberate decision-making.

The narrative practice that I want to propose draws an ongoing discussion with scholar of narrative Sara Cobb. In the context of research we worked on together, she framed this narrative practice as 'braiding,' as in making a hair braid where at least three different strands are folded around each other. The idea of braiding sets out an argument for planners and policy practitioners to take up their responsibility to pay equal attention to each storyline (Cobb 2013). A simple sequence of events that the residents shared about their beloved bingo night in their old club is as important to the planning story as the dominant story of policy makers who sought to develop a lively community in the new town. The braiding analogy allows each story to be a strand that is folded around the other strands. As each story does not have to become part of a bigger whole or tale, the language of each party remains identical to their

utterance, emotions stay within their context and memories shape the story people want to convey.

The first step in narrative practice as a braiding exercise would be what the practitioner had done in his very first quote: to listen to the diverse stories in place. The practitioner soon gets an insight into the dynamics between storylines as one story turns out to be dominant and others marginal. The challenge for the practitioner is to engage in each storyline so that he understands how each of them constitutes a morally appropriate story about the self. The moral values that the residents applied to their role as organizers were tied to their understanding of self during the days that they were organizing their club. That story got delegitimated in the story of welfare workers whose moral value was focused on the accountable organizing of such a club; their story of the history of these residents tied them to unprofessional events that were not attractive to everyone in the neighborhood. Narrative practice is not to condemn the story of professionals, but to understand how it delegitimizes the story of the residents in this case, how people juggle several storylines and what the effect of that is. The narrative practitioner seeks to uphold the legitimacy of all stories and weave them together. Holding the narrative strands, the public official's role, in this practice of braiding, is to function as the 'holder' of the stories, and the one who helps the community to witness the legitimacy of all the stories that are present in the community (Cobb and Verloo 2011: 45). That is necessary because, as we have seen, the parties themselves are anchored in their own stories and often these stories have a centrifugal force that keeps those who tell them in their grip, as when the story of residents was supposed to counter the story of practitioners, and it ironically strengthened the dominant story of the need for professionalism in the neighborhood. Thus the narrative practice I propose keeps each narrative intact as a strand of a braid; that way, each story is given equal opportunity to affect the planning outcome. However, how can we make this braid if some strands are thicker or thinner than others?

When we look at the case, it seems that not every story is as thick, some references work better than others and not all stories have an plotment about the future. To deal with that dilemma, we have to turn to what Sluzki (1994) and Cobb (2003) call 'better-formed stories.' Sluzki and Cobb argue that some stories are better than others and that the characters of 'not-so-great stories' cause conflicts to deepen and extend. According to Cobb, a not-so-great story of conflict reveals a time pattern that is focused on the past, whereby the description of the past is more vivid than that of the future; characters in these stories are usually flat and are often portrayed as victims; these stories have a linear logic that externalizes responsibility in the acts of the other, leading to passive, reactive positions for the speaker; and themes reveal hopelessness, suffering and vengeance (Cobb 2003: 10). A better-formed story,

on the other hand, beholds the past, present and future; there are diverse characters in play and the boundaries between victims and victimizers are fuzzy; there is no determined causality between events; values circle around hope, development and participation (ibid.: 12). If we look at the case study, all the elements of a not-so-great story are present in the storylines. The residents focused on the past and described their memories vividly; in their description they were the victims of a system that discriminated against them, which left them suffering without any real role or agency. The storyline of the professionals was less focused on the past, but their presentation of the future portrayed a very flat description of the residents as being unprofessional and aggressive, which made the professionals the victim of a group of 'folk' people with whom they could not cooperate.

The second step in a narrative practice would be to recognize these stories as strands and develop them into better-formed stories without losing their specific characteristics. In the case of the new town, the practitioner did not stop with the simple accounts of parties that externalized agency. He continued his practice with storytelling and 'repeating': "I repeated their words very often, every word, every sentence, 'Do I really understand you well?'" (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009). Using their exact words allowed him to construct the story in the distinct terms of each party. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggested, repeating words is not all; the practitioner also tried to embody the emotions of others without being afraid of his own emotions. That way, he was able to engage in the stories of people, instead of remaining in an outside and evaluative role. Embodying stories goes hand in hand with understanding how the characters, time, values and causality are interlinked within each story. That internal development allowed him to form better-formed stories together with each party, but it also helped parties to develop the 'critical intelligence' they needed in order to understand the other.

In the case of the new town, the practitioner was able to turn the stories of each party into better-formed stories that formed strong narrative strands. One could say the practitioner functioned as a 'narrative mediator' between the different stories that he embodied. In each group he was able to listen and engage in the story of self, but also counter that story by the embodied story of the other. He recalls how he embodied stories, but also how he countered them by revealing the story of the others while keeping to the distinct language and emotional values in each storyline:

You take time to listen to the neighbors and you also make time to go to the professionals. [They] asked me "What's your opinion?" How you react to that is very important. With that knowledge [and their response to my opinion] I could go back to the next meeting and talk [...] about it to the

government. So it has to do with listening well to the people and listening well to the professionals. [...] So I would say personally, I always gave my opinion, it was important because I had that [personal] relationship with the people. (transcript of a local practitioner working in the city of The Hague, spring 2009)

Here the practitioner shows that he was not afraid to share his opinion with the group; he used their request for his opinion to make sure he embodied their story. Giving his opinion was in line with not being afraid of his own emotions and therefore becoming part of the network of stories and thereby the process of deliberation himself.

The residents of the old neighborhood were given a memorial of their club in the new center. That way, their story found acknowledgment and they were challenged to develop it into a narrative about their future role in the center in cooperation with the welfare workers. The welfare practitioners were challenged to think about their position in relation to the 'volunteers' and what such a title could mean from the perspective of residents. The practitioner was able to legitimate the role of the professionals within the narrative strand of the residents, and thereby their formal responsibility was acknowledged. Professionals became able to engage in the story of the residents, which enabled them to understand and recognize their grievances and give them responsibilities in the center without losing their own sense of self. Of course, cooperation was still problematic in practice as each group had different ideas and repertoires of action. However, now that they were able to communicate their distinct storylines and recognize how each of their stories overlapped and contradicted, they experienced interdependence and were also able to acknowledge each other as a legitimate party in deliberation. Their stories did not merge together as a common narrative; instead the narrative practice developed the agency of each party in the way they constructed their better-formed strand and affected the outcome of the deliberation about community organizing.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have set out an approach to narrative practice that seeks to engage and acknowledge each distinct storyline in the process of conflict. Planning conflicts were framed as inherently emotional as they propose a change and leave an old situation behind. Emotions are intuitive and intangible and therefore difficult to engage in the planning process. Nevertheless, narrative practice allows for engaging in diverse emotions by preserving the language in which they get communicated and acknowledged through an embodied performance. Stories are a tool to bring emotions to the surface

without evaluating their appropriateness, because in episodes of conflict emotions provide an opportunity to engage diverse actors in the process of decision-making.

Two approaches to narrative in planning are developed into an approach that crosscuts theory and practice as it includes storytelling as a tool to analyze and embody the stories of actors in conflict. The narrative practice approach recognizes that planning in itself is a story about the future, but seeks to overcome the power relations that one such encompassing story prevails. The narrative practitioner becomes part of an interdependent network of stories, in which he or she is responsible for upholding all narrative strands in the process of deliberation. That way, a narrative practitioner can learn-in-action as he or she develops an eye for the relationships between dominant and counter plots. This approach suggests that each storyline has to remain intact as strands of a braid so that the distinct characters of each storyline become part of the deliberation. Narrative strands are challenged to develop into 'better-formed stories' so that each storyline can affect the possible outcomes of a planning process by describing a past, present and future with diverse characters and moral values.

The account of the narrative practitioner provided in this chapter reveals the interdependent relationship between the practitioner and conflicting parties as his purpose is to not only understand but also embody the stories so that he can inform and counter the stories of others and thereby juggle between master and counter plots. Narrative practice is therefore a means to acknowledge the parties who usually have trouble finding their way into the deliberation process. Multiple forms of communication are necessary to be taken into account; emotions, informal memories and embodied gestures reveal people's experiences as much as planning documents and strategic policy formulations, or formal repertoires of participation. In other words, if we seek to learn from and deal with planning, we need to elaborate the deliberative process and engage parties that lack the dominant language of policy. Narrative practice suggests taking all stories into account and developing them into storylines that acknowledge each other's legitimacy.

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