UNDP Mayors for Economic Growth
Urban Imaginaries Programme

Inspiration Session: Storytelling for Systems Change

About the session
This inspiration session, delivered within the Urban Imaginaries program, introduces the concept of storytelling, and how it can act as a tool to enable system change. Building on the work done by CPI, the session showcases how stories can be a vehicle for building empathy, changing mindsets and learning, and thereby lead to system changes in cities. The session also touches upon factors such as what makes it hard to tell such stories, what differentiates a good story, and gives real-life examples of how people are using stories to drive systems change along with tips and tools to build such stories. The session builts on the insights and findings deriving from the 'Storytelling for Systems Change: Insights from the field' report.

Speaker Profile
The session was designed and led by Thea Snow, Director of CPI in Australia and New Zealand, who co-authored CPI's report on 'Storytelling for Systems Change: Insights from the field.' Thea's experience spans the private, public and not-for-profit sectors; she has worked as a lawyer, a civil servant and, most recently, as part of Nesta's Government Innovation Team.

Thea recently returned to Melbourne after spending a few years in London where, in addition to working at Nesta, she completed an MSc PPA at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Resources:
- Presentation
- CPI Report - Storytelling for systems change: Insights from the field

Key Takeaways for Cities
What is storytelling?
- Good stories are authentic and honour the voice of the person whose story is being told, while those centred in ego, pass judgement and designed to promote something are not good stories

Understanding systems change
- When we talk about 'systems' of society we are talking about the processes, institutions, or structures that shape the way we live, such as governments, education and media organisations, businesses, as well as the dominant societal norms and behaviours. These systems are shaped by the narratives and mindsets that people hold.

- Talking about changing systems, or 'systems change' means focusing on conditions that hold these systems in place.

Potential of storytelling to create systems change
- Stories are a way to understand the changes occurring in these systems, however small, and to evaluate and showcase these changes to us, the people. They also have the potential to challenge traditional power dynamics by bringing in new and possibly unheard of perspectives to the fore.
- Systems change is driven when people change how they relate to others, who they are in relationship with, and what they believe they are capable of doing.

Supporting better stories
- In order for stories to effectively contribute to systems change, we need to understand both how to support people to tell better stories and how to increase the likelihood that there is an audience ready and willing to hear and respond to the stories.

Examples of stories driving systems change
- A practical example of storytelling driving systems change is the work of [Oxford Together and Arts at the Old Fire Station](#), who used storytelling as a way of capturing their work and experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

About Urban Imaginaries Programme
The Urban Imaginaries Programme is part of the joint EU and UNDP Mayors for Economic Growth Facility (M4EG) that promotes inclusive economic growth and innovation in the Eastern Partnership Countries. The Urban Imaginaries (UI) Programme is supporting cities across Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine and Azerbaijan in 2022 to develop solutions to their most pressing urban and local challenges. The programme is designed to strengthen the innovation capabilities of mayors and city leaders in 19 cities across these five countries, equipping them with the skills needed to develop initiatives that reimagine or reinvent key aspects of local living. The UI Programme is being jointly implemented by the Centre for Public Impact and UNDP.

About Centre for Public Impact
Centre for Public Impact (CPI) is a charity that works with government, civil society and public sector organisations across the globe to help them reimagine and redesign systems, work and cultures. Its mission is to support the people within and across these organisations to bring about a paradigm shift towards a more human centred and relational approach to public management, that embraces complexity and places learning at the heart. CPI acts as a Learning Partner to organisations, supporting them in building the capacity and structure to listen, learn, and adapt on an ongoing basis.