STRATEGY CANVAS™

FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION

INTRODUCTION

Many strategies focus on infrastructure, demographics, economics, and service provision.

Far fewer examine the stories that shape how people understand a place, its future, and their role within it.

Yet every strategy tells a story.

It communicates who belongs, what matters, what counts as progress, and what kind of future is considered possible.

The Narrative Strategy Canvas is a practical framework designed to help municipalities, organisations, and communities develop more inclusive, place-sensitive, and future-oriented strategies.

It builds upon the findings of a Narrative Impact Assessment (NIA) and translates narrative insights into strategic action.

Step 1

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE

Before designing the future, it is necessary to understand the stories that already exist.

Key Questions

- How is this place currently described?
- What stories dominate public conversations?
- Which narratives shape local identity?
- What assumptions about development are taken for granted?
- Which stories are repeatedly told?
- Which stories are rarely heard?

Output

Narrative Landscape Map

Step 2

IDENTIFYING NARRATIVE RISKS

Some narratives strengthen belonging.

Others unintentionally create distance, exclusion, or disengagement.

Key Questions

- Who is represented as valuable?
- Who is represented as a problem?
- Which groups are largely invisible?

- Which places are framed as successful?
- Which places are framed as declining?
- Are there signs of territorial stigma?

Output

Narrative Risk Map

Step 3

IDENTIFYING NARRATIVE ASSETS

Every community possesses narrative resources.

These may include traditions, local knowledge, shared experiences, cultural heritage, social networks, or stories of resilience.

Key Questions

- What are people proud of?
- What creates attachment to place?
- What stories generate hope?
- What strengthens social trust?
- What connects generations?

Output

Narrative Asset Inventory

Step 4

IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Strategies often become trapped in a single vision of progress.

The Narrative Strategy Canvas encourages exploration of multiple futures.

Key Questions

- What futures are currently imaginable?
- Which futures have been excluded?
- What would a desirable future look like?
- What would an inclusive future look like?
- What futures emerge from local perspectives?

Output

Future Narrative Scenarios

Step 5

DEFINING THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

Every successful strategy requires a coherent narrative.

The Strategic Narrative becomes the guiding story that connects actions, policies, and aspirations.

Components

Identity

Who are we?

Direction

Where are we going?

Values

What matters?

Belonging

Who is included?

Possibility

What future are we creating?

Output

Strategic Narrative Statement

Step 6

TRANSLATING NARRATIVES INTO ACTION

Narratives alone do not create change.

They must be reflected in decisions, policies, communication, and everyday practice.

Key Questions

- Which actions reinforce the strategic narrative?
- Which actions undermine it?
- How can communication support belonging?
- How can institutions embody the desired future?

Output

Narrative Action Plan

FINAL DELIVERABLES

Narrative Impact Assessment

Understanding the current situation.

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Narrative Risk Map

Identifying invisible boundaries.

Narrative Asset Inventory

Identifying strengths and resources.

Strategic Narrative

Defining a shared direction.

Narrative Action Plan

Turning stories into practice.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The central question throughout the process remains:

Does this strategy strengthen people's ability to belong, participate, and imagine a future here — or does it contribute to them being talked away?

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CANVAS TEMPLATE

1. CURRENT NARRATIVE

What is the dominant story today?

How is the place, community, organisation, or group currently described?

Examples:

- A declining rural area
- A vulnerable neighbourhood
- A growing municipality
- A place with limited opportunities

Key observations:

2. INVISIBLE BOUNDARIES

Which boundaries currently exist?

☐ Social

☐ Geographic

☐ Economic

☐ Cultural

☐ Institutional

☐ Narrative

Examples:

Social

☐ Geographic

☐ Economic

☐ Cultural

☐ Institutional

☐ Narrative

Workspace: Examples

Notes: _____

_____
_____
_____

3. MARGINALISED VOICES

Who is missing from the dominant story?

☐ Young people

☐ Elderly residents

☐ Newcomers

☐ Local businesses

☐ Volunteers

☐ Minority groups

☐ Other

Notes: _____
_____
_____
_____

4. NARRATIVE ASSETS

What strengths already exist?

☐ Strong local identity

☐ Community engagement

☐ Cultural heritage

☐ Natural environment

☐ Local knowledge

☐ Entrepreneurial spirit

☐ Other

Notes: _____
_____
_____
_____

5. FUTURE NARRATIVE

What story do we want people to tell five years from now?

"We are a place where..."

Write your future narrative:
_____
_____
_____

6. STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

Who are we?

Where are we going?

What matters most?

Who belongs?

Draft strategic narrative:
_____
_____
_____

7. NARRATIVE ACTIONS

What concrete actions support the desired narrative?

Action 1

Action 2

Action 3

Additional actions / notes:

_____
_____
_____

8. SUCCESS INDICATORS

How will we know the narrative is changing?

Indicators / evidence:

_____
_____
_____