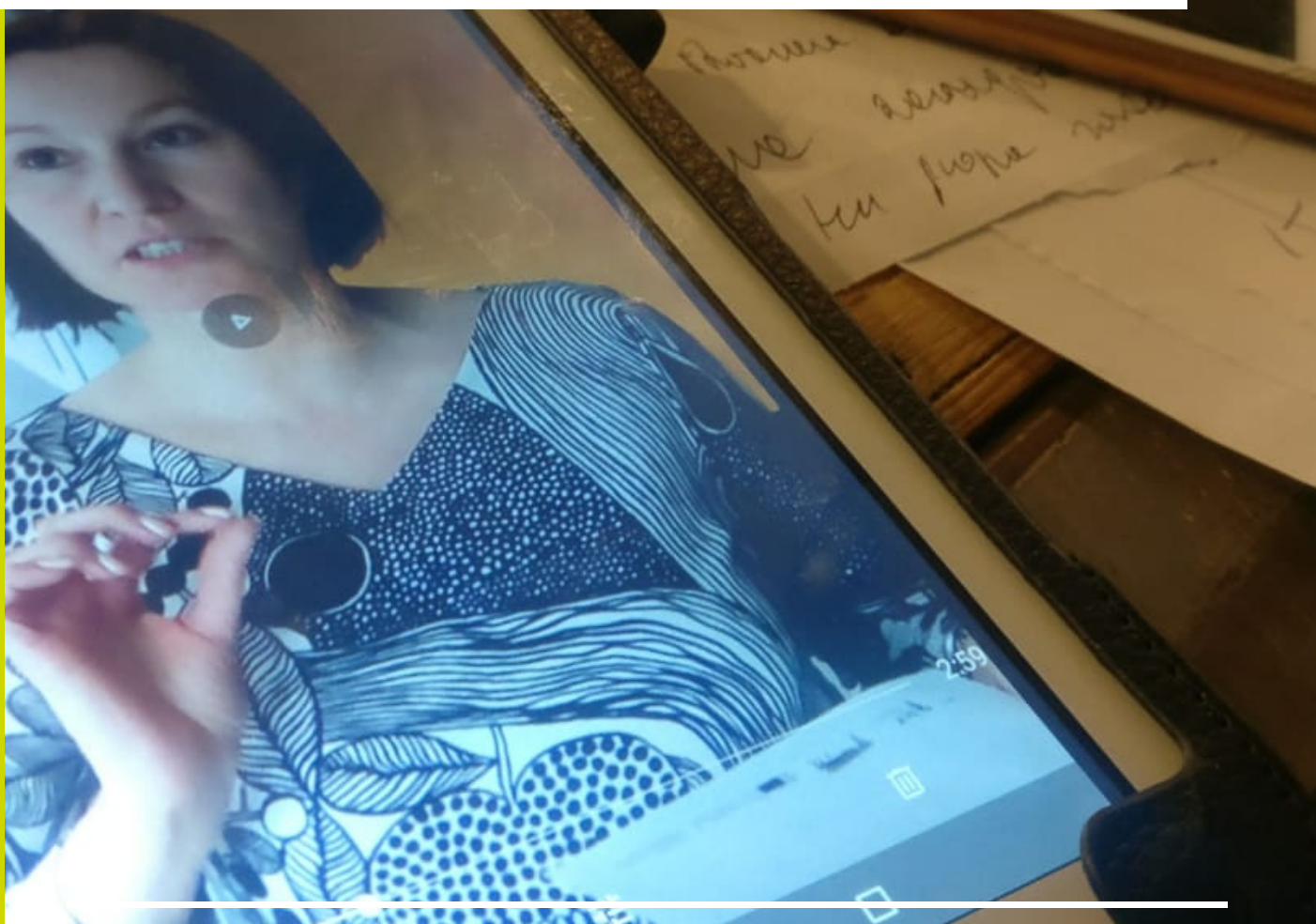


WORKING WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE STORYTELLING AS A TOOL FOR CO-CREATION

Toolkit



COSIE

Co-creation of Service Innovation in Europe



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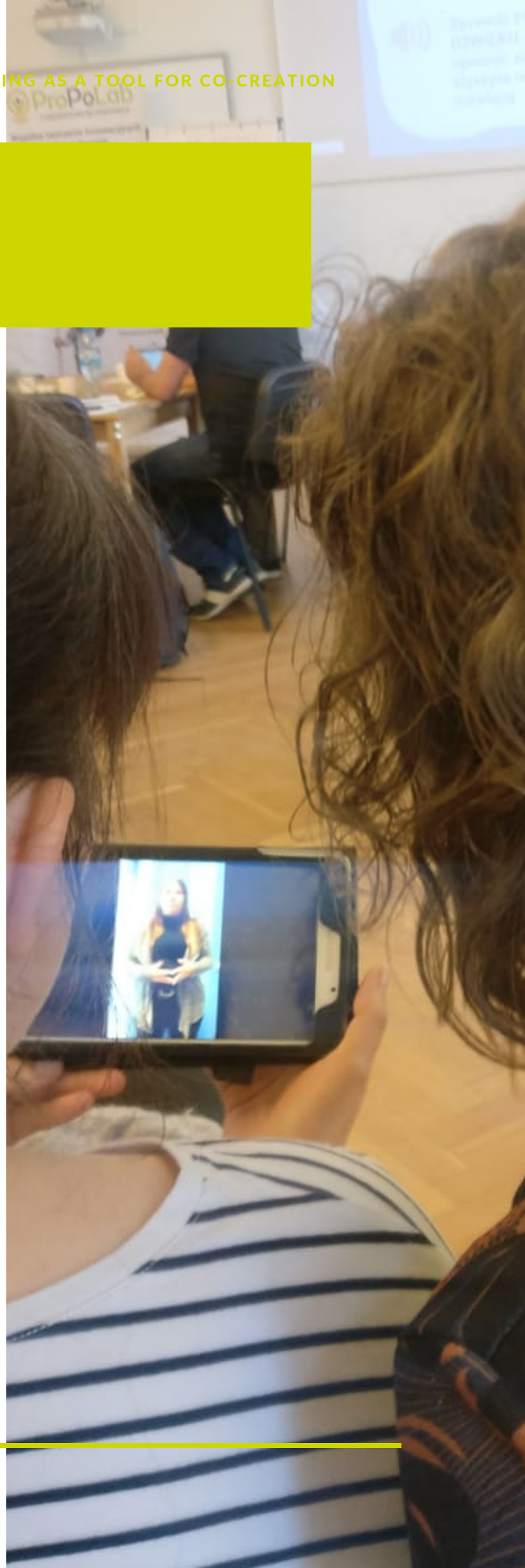
ABOUT

The CoSIE Horizon 2020 applied research project supported the creation of collaborative partnerships between citizens, public sector agencies and services, non-governmental organisations and civil society actors, and private companies. It researched, through practical application processes, how public services can be enhanced via co-creation.

People's Voice Media led a stream of work that supported public services across Europe to use lived experience storytelling as a tool for co-creation to support service design, delivery, and evaluation. As part of this work, we used our specific approach to lived experience storytelling – Community Reporting – which is a mixed methodological approach for enhancing citizen participation in research, policy-making, service development, and decision-making processes.

This toolkit synthesises the key learning from these activities and presents a set of resources to help services work with lived experience.

[Watch this short video to find out more about how lived experience storytelling was used in the CoSIE project.](#)





SECTION ONE

How can Lived Experience storytelling be used as a tool for co-creation?

In this section, we will look at how lived experience storytelling can be used as a tool for insight, dialogue and reflection. We will explore how different public services - from employment support to probation to health and social care to rural development - have utilised lived experience in co-creation activities.



A TOOL FOR INSIGHT



As an insight tool, lived experience storytelling broadly fits into the field of participatory research. It can engage citizens, people who work in services and other stakeholders in sharing their experiences. From these stories, people can work together to identify the insights and learning from the different perspectives represented in them.

What are the strengths of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

- It gathers **richer qualitative data** than more traditional research approaches do. This helps us to understand ‘wicked’ or complex problems, and to gain deeper understanding of people’s lives and how they experience the world.
- It can help services to **better engage with groups** who would otherwise not usually have their voices heard. Storytelling as a medium, and when used in a peer-to-peer manner, is an accessible way of involving people in conversations and research.
- It can help to **address power imbalances** between services and the people who access them, and between researchers and the people being researched. It allows citizens to set the agenda through their experiences.

What are the challenges of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

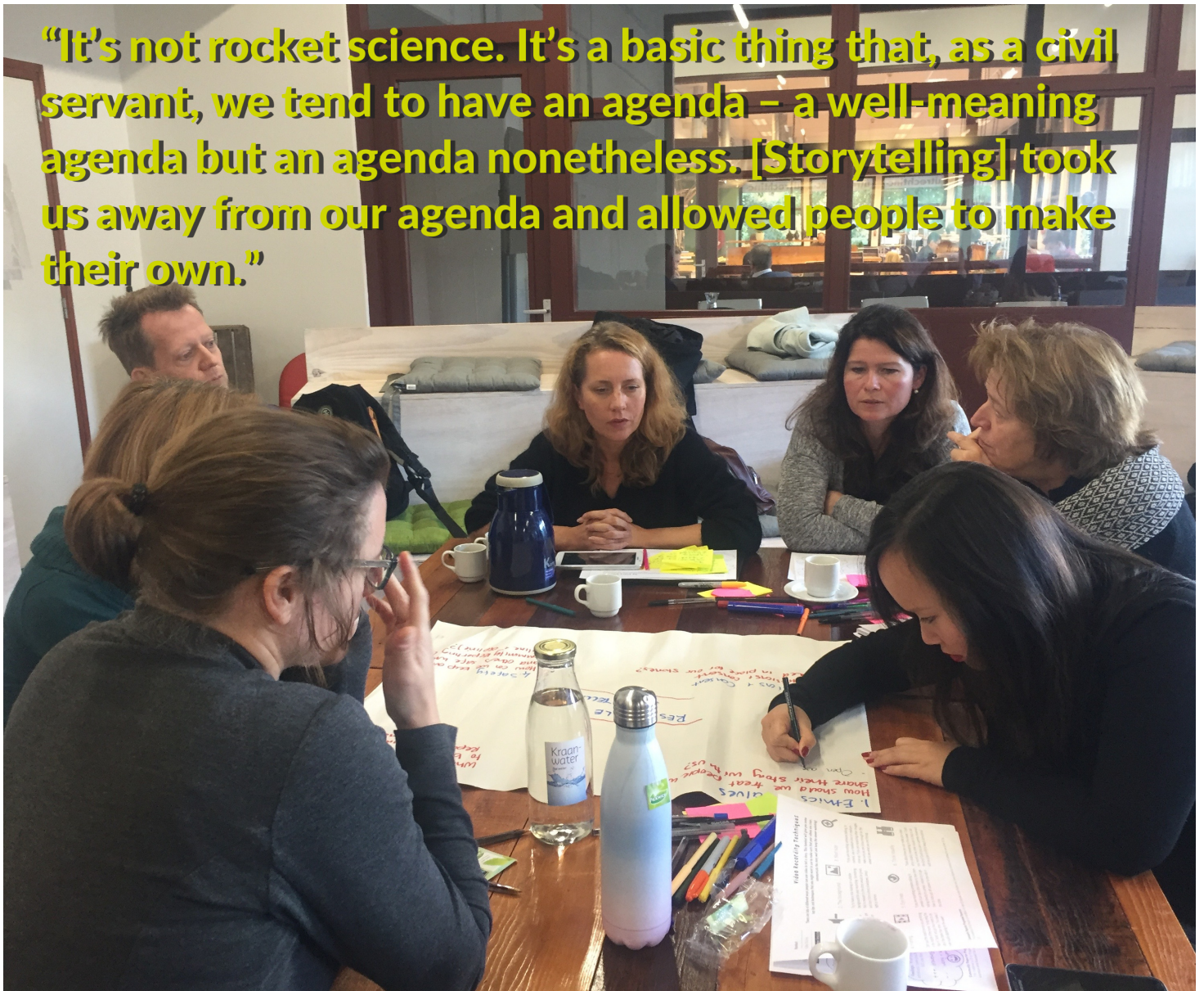
- It can **take more time and resources** to apply than other simpler data collation techniques such as surveys.
- If the storytelling involves digital tools, it can be difficult for some groups to engage with due to various **digital literacy and access barriers** people may face.
- It is an **innovative form of data** and sometimes experiential knowledge is not recognised by traditional ‘powers’ as a valid or valued type of data.

Case Study: Re-designing social services (The Netherlands)

The Municipality of Houten were interested in addressing the issue of unemployment. They wanted to identify ways in which social services could create sustainable and successful matches between employers and people looking for work, particularly people who faced structural or multiple barriers to employment.

[Click here to listen to Jessica from the Municipality of Houten speaking about her experience of working with storytelling to learn more about people's experiences of the barriers to unemployment.](#)

“It’s not rocket science. It’s a basic thing that, as a civil servant, we tend to have an agenda – a well-meaning agenda but an agenda nonetheless. [Storytelling] took us away from our agenda and allowed people to make their own.”



A TOOL FOR DIALOGUE



As a dialogue tool, lived experience storytelling can be used as an initial engagement activity for stakeholders, a means of generating ideas for the pilots, a communication aid to talk to decision-makers and to exchange knowledge between different people, groups and organisations.

What are the strengths of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

- It supports people to think **'outside the box' and from 'different perspectives'**. This can help improve problem-solving.
- It helps people, groups and organisations to **share knowledge** and thus more effectively learn from one another's experiences.
- Its focus on equity helps to provide opportunities for people with opposing or differing perspectives and experiences to engage in a **non-hierarchical dialogue**. In doing so, voices that are often unheard are listened to.

What are the challenges of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

- It can be **hard to reach consensus** between different perspectives as storytelling can generate too many ideas.
- It can be challenging for people to **share their stories in large groups** and with people in positions of power. Sometimes people are more comfortable with sharing experiences with people they have existing relationships with and in whom they trust.

Case Study: Youth Co-empowerment (Finland)

In Finland there is growing concern about the amount of young people not in employment, education or training. The Municipality of Turku wanted to understand this situation more and pilot new ways of involving young people in society. Through social hackathons, public service actors, NGOs and young people came together to create ideas for how youth participation in society could be improved.

[Click here to listen to Hanna and Ville who worked on the hackathons speaking about how stories from young people have helped discussions between different actors in the social hackathon process they've delivered.](#)



“The stories worked as conversation starters in many different locations. In the hackathons they brought the real voice of the young people to the table.”

A TOOL FOR REFLECTION



As a reflection tool, lived experience storytelling supports people to reflect on their experiences and the experiences of others. This proactive, critical reflection provides people with the space and time to more deeply understand how they and others experience the world. From this perspective it can be seen as a learning and development, or evaluation tool that people can use to identify how public (and other) services can improve.

What are the strengths of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

- It supports introspection in an **accessible manner**, and can support people's individual self-development as well as the development of services.
- It can be applied at different moments in a co-creation process to provide **on-going learning and development**, rather than just summative evaluation.
- It supports **active and deep listening** that helps people to better understand different perspectives and situations.
- It helps to **make visible and communicate the results** of projects.

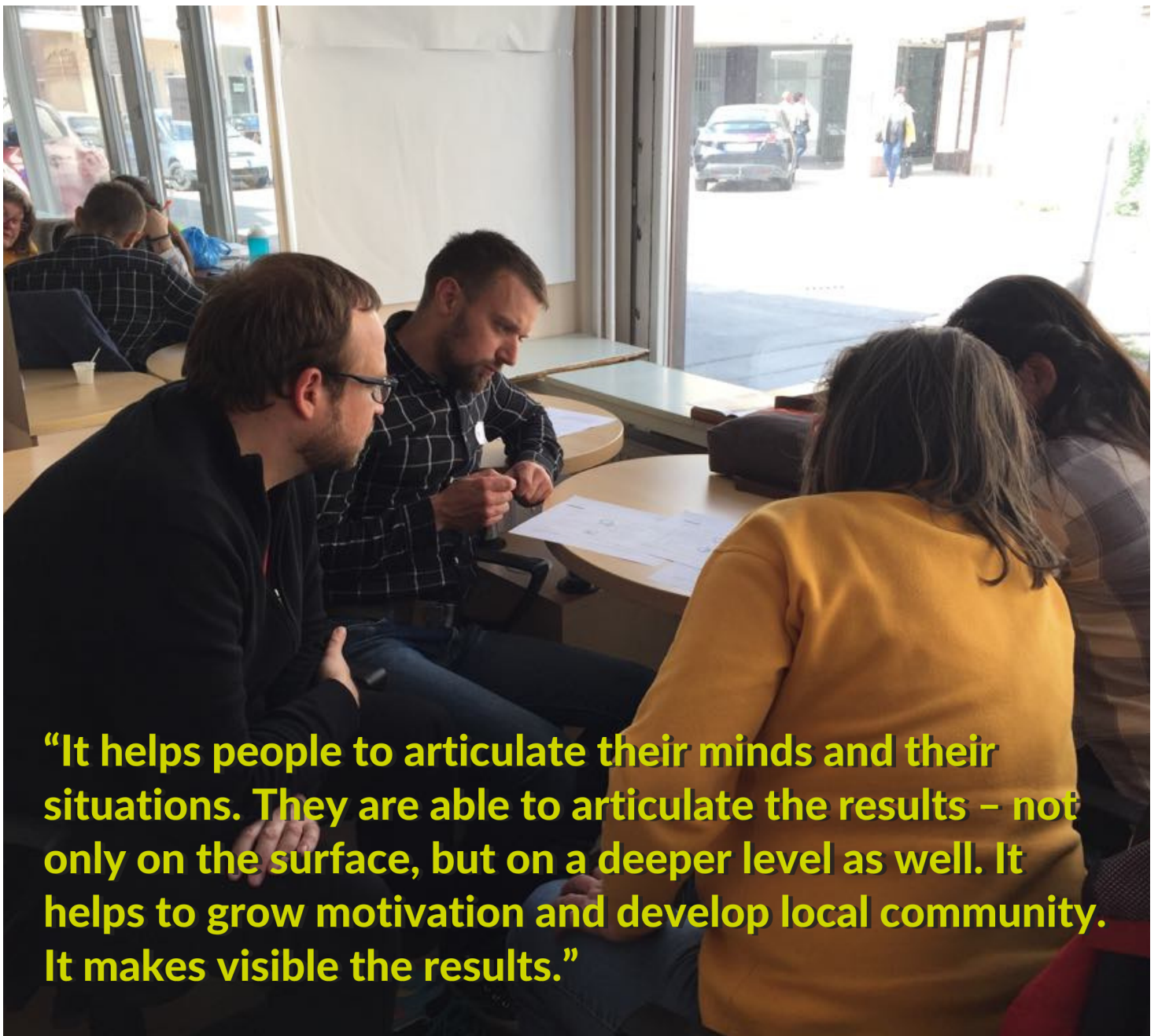
What are the challenges of using lived experience storytelling in this way?

- It can be **difficult to keep people involved over longer periods** and therefore you cannot always guarantee that people will share their reflections consistently over a period of time.
- It is not initially **as quick or easy to see and evidence** things like 'distance travelled' through stories as it is by other more quantitative measurements, but this can be achieved through properly analysing the stories and from this, more nuanced understandings emerge.

Case Study: Household Economies in Rural Areas (Hungary)

There is an increasing demand for economical activation of the rural population in Hungary. The main aim of this project was to revive the forgotten culture of household economy, including horticulture and livestock farming by enabling families to utilise their own resources and capacities. The project took place in 10 different settlements across Hungary, and no two villages were identical.

[Click here to listen to Aranka from the rural economy project speaking about the benefits of using storytelling to reflect on learning and build community.](#)



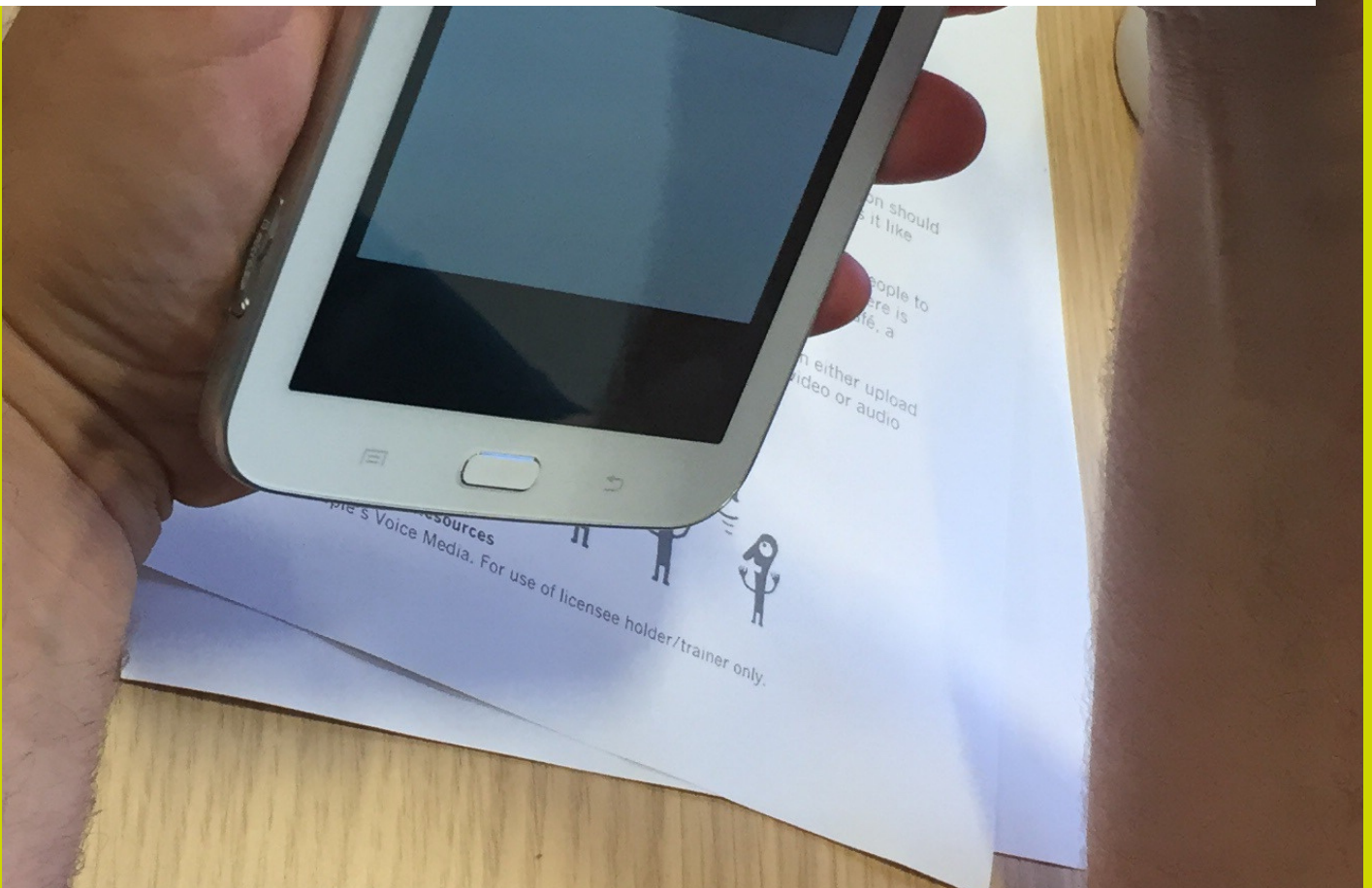
“It helps people to articulate their minds and their situations. They are able to articulate the results – not only on the surface, but on a deeper level as well. It helps to grow motivation and develop local community. It makes visible the results.”



SECTION TWO

How can we use lived experience storytelling in our co-creation activity?

In this section, we will go through three key steps in thinking about how you can work with lived experience as a tool for co-creation. We will start by looking at 'why' you want to incorporate lived experience in your work, before moving onto thinking about 'how' you are going to do this and finally by exploring 'what' you are going to do in practical terms.



WHY?

Before you start working with lived experience storytelling, you should first think about why you want to work with this type of knowledge and what it can bring to your co-creation activities.

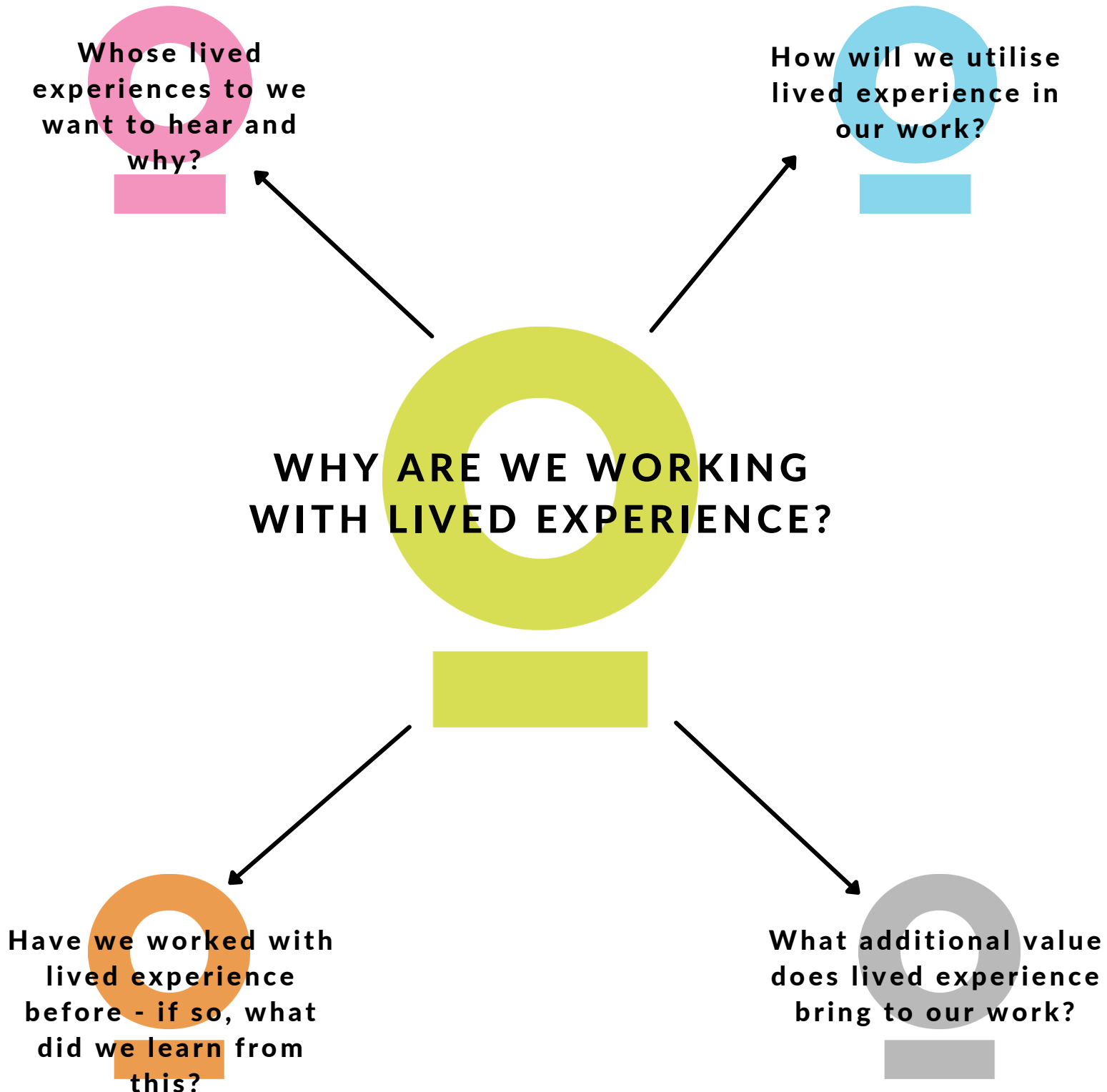
Activity 1: Learning from other people's experiences

Think back to the information in section one of this toolkit and listen back to the case studies from the CoSIE project and complete the table below to summarise your learning.

Identify the different ways that lived experience can be used in co-creation activities	Identify the opportunities that working with lived experience storytelling can bring	Identify the challenges of working with lived experience storytelling

Activity 2: Thinking about your own context

Use the mindmap template below to explore your own reasons for incorporating lived experience storytelling in your work. This rationale will help you with the next stages of planning.



HOW?

When you work with lived experience storytelling it is important that you really think about how you are going to do this responsibly. Part of this thinking is about the values that will underpin how you work with people and their stories, as well as other areas such as safety and consent.

Activity One: Developing a responsible practice

Responsible Storytelling asks us to think about the ethics and values of gathering and sharing stories, the content of stories we gather and what people share and how we can keep people safe when doing storytelling. Take some time to discuss the following questions with people you would like to gather lived experience stories from and note down people's ideas. You could do this using flipchart paper and post-it notes.

1. **Ethics and Values** - How do you want to be treated when sharing your story?
2. **Content** - Are there any topics that you would not want to share?
3. **Safety** - How can you keep yourself (and others) safe (physically and mentally), when sharing your lived experience in different environments?

You can use the table below to create your own set of storytelling guidelines.

Ethics and Values	Content	Safety

WHAT?

So, you have thought about the ways in which lived experience storytelling can enhance your work and you've developed a way of working with stories that is responsible – you are now ready to start gathering and working with people's stories. This part of the toolkit supports you to work out what activities you will do.

Gathering stories

There are many ways that people can gather stories – both online and face-to-face, using technologies or paper and pens, using words or images and so on. Use your Responsible Storytelling Principles to help you think through the ways you are going to gather stories. The activity below is one way to gather stories.

Activity One: Snapshot stories

Snapshot stories gather people's perspectives and experiences in a quick way. They only have one question and are a good introductory storytelling activity. To gather them you should:

1. Pick a **topic** pertinent to your context (e.g., Wellbeing)
2. Work with storytellers to develop **an open question** based on this topic (e.g., What keeps you well?)
3. Create a space in which people can **share their responses** with you. You might want to think about how you could record these stories for future activities. Some ideas for this include:
 - people could write down their answers on post-it notes and share them on a board
 - people could record their responses as short audio or video files on smartphones
 - people could draw a response or take a representative photograph

Learning from stories

Whilst storytelling can be therapeutic and there is value for people in that. In co-creation settings, it is important to think through how you will work with the knowledge and learnings in people's stories to inform what you are doing. If people share their stories and they don't see how services are using those experiences to learn and progress, it may put people off from sharing their experiences in the future. The activity below is one way that you can work with stories to create change.

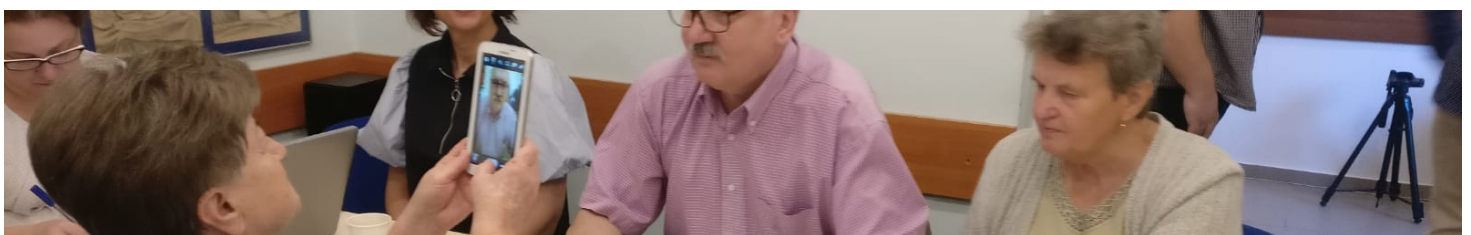
Activity Two: Story Dialogue

Story dialogue, based on the work of Labonte and Feather (1996) is a way of working with lived experience as a tool for learning and change in a practical way. It helps us to:

- Actively **listen** to people's experiences
- Connect with people's experiences and **relate** them to our own experiences of the world
- Think about what we have learned from people's stories and what future **action** it may prompt

To deliver a story dialogue activity, you should:

1. Get together a group of people you would like to influence with the stories you have gathered
2. Show them a story, an extract from a story or a set of short stories. You could do this by asking people to read stories, view photographs or listen to video and/or audio recordings.
3. When people have 'viewed' the story, you should ask them to identify the key messages in it. You could ask them to do this verbally or by writing them down and then sharing their thoughts with one another.
4. You should then ask them to share how the stories resonate or relate with their own experiences. Again, you could ask them to do this verbally or by writing them down and then sharing their thoughts with one another.
5. You should ask the group to identify what are the key learning points from the stories that relate to the service/context you are working in and how this learning can be used. Again, you could ask them to do this verbally or by writing them down and then sharing their thoughts with one another.
6. Finally, you should ask each individual in the group to identify one key action they can do immediately to put the learning from the stories into practice. Here you should highlight how we all have some power/influence (however small that may be). Again, you could ask them to do this verbally or by writing them down and then sharing their thoughts with one another.



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