



**How to talk about
the societies we
want in Europe**

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Introduction

This guide has been put together by a collection of civil society and trade union groups (see p.29) committed to building better societies in Europe.

We want to see a more sustainable, equitable, inclusive, democratic Europe.

To achieve this we think we need new ways to talk about the Europe we want.

Across Europe people are struggling with rising inequality, decreasing living standards, declining buying power and the rise of precarious work, hardship created by austerity policies, discrimination, and the impacts of climate change and environmental destruction.

Our ability to meet these challenges depends largely on the dominant narratives in society that help us understand the nature of the problems and guide us towards solutions. As people search for answers, an absence of hope has caused narratives of nationalism, hate, anti-immigration and austerity politics to emerge.

New ways to talk about Europe

Too often, the communication strategy of civil society groups rests on the principle that we need to persuade people how *urgent* the situation is. This is important, but our narratives also need to give people hope.

Without hope for the future we stand little chance of building the societies we will need if we are to reduce inequality, end discrimination, stop the destruction of our environment, and deal with other major challenges we face.

We believe there's an appetite for change, and that finding new narratives is an important piece of the puzzle.

This guide summarises the findings of a 6-month collaboration of civil society and trade union groups aiming to find new hopeful narratives. We developed ideas for the **values, imagery** and **examples** we could use in our narratives, and then tested these in five focus groups around Europe. (More of what we did on p.26). Our recommendations are intended for campaigners, communicators, activists and all those who want to create opportunities for citizens to have conversations about the kind of Europe they want to live in.

We hope you will find this useful in your work to inspire hopeful conversations about the future and bring about a better Europe.



The challenge

We are seeking to find ways of talking about the societies we want that can:

- ★ reach wider audiences and engage people not already thinking critically about the kind of Europe they would like to live in
- ★ make people feel more hopeful
- ★ stimulate conversations—and make people want to keep talking
- ★ be usable by a broad range of civil society organisations, trade unions and others working for different causes across European countries.

To build a more sustainable, equitable, inclusive, democratic Europe, we need new ways to **talk about Europe which ultimately need to make people feel that:**

We (People across Europe) have common, shared problems and ‘a good life’ for everyone is possible if we (Europe) acts together.

We want narratives that help bring the idea of ‘Europe’ closer to people and their communities. One of our challenges is that ‘Europe’ already evokes a lot of associations in people’s minds—many of them far from people’s everyday lives, and unhelpful to the challenge of inspiring hope for the future.

We chose focus groups as our testing methodology so we could understand how our frames could stimulate discussion and change people’s thinking.

Top take-aways

Create conversations.

Bring Europe closer to people and their communities.

Balance urgency with hope.

Lead with strong empathy and equality values.

Encourage participation and stress the power people have to change things but where possible emphasise the empathic motivation behind mobilisation.

Be cautious when talking about the need for 'greater participation', it can quickly lead to negative associations with democratic failures and the rise of the far right.

Use the imagery of construction to help talk about community, co-operation and support.

Beware the difficulty of reframing—for example when we talk about 'open borders' people still hear 'borders'.

Use specific, hopeful examples that signify more caring and equal European societies.

The VALUES we want to strengthen

Values are the guiding principles for the society we want; and therefore the key ideas we want to express when we talk about the future of Europe.

A body of research in social psychology tells us that ‘intrinsic’ values—based on compassion for others and self-direction—are most associated with being pro-social and environmental.

We tested the following intrinsic values and found them to be present in European societies but not enough. We need to strengthen them through our communications.

The “quoted” texts in this guide are the formulations of the values, imagery and examples we tested in the focus groups.



No1. EMPATHY

“In an empathetic society of solidarity, we are caring and able to empathise with the problems, fears and concerns of our fellow humans.”

EMPATHY is the core value to express in relation to Europe. People see it as the starting point for the societies we want to build and what other values need to be based on.

Our focus group participants told us...

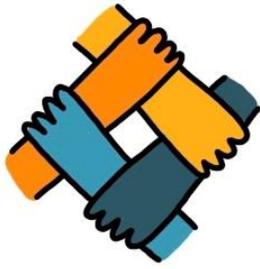
- * Empathy should be more present in societies in the future
- * Of all the values, empathy in particular needs to be more strengthened
- * Empathy is foundational and a prerequisite to other values
- * A lack of empathy helps explain the development of extreme political positions and anti-immigration sentiment.



“Empathy is the basis of everything, because if we are humane everything else falls into place.”

—Focus group participant, Austria

What other words can be used to express empathy in your language?



No2. EQUALITY

“We are all human—we all deserve to be treated equally. In an equal society we all have the same rights and opportunities no matter what our gender, origin, religion or other characteristic.”

EQUALITY is the secondary core value to express in relation to Europe. It is a foundation that society should be based on.

Our focus group participants told us...

- * Equality should be more present in societies in the future
- * Equality is a core value for the societies participants want to live in
- * They associated equality closely with empathy.



“Empathy is a pre-condition for equality to exist.”
—Focus group participant, Denmark

Try creating a word cloud around equality in your language. How many words or phrases can you think of?

We recommend referring to the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) for agreed human rights and equalities.



No3. PEOPLE POWER & PARTICIPATION

“We want to be involved in decisions that affect us. In a healthy society, we have access to information about what’s going on and how money is spent: we participate in decisions that affect our lives.”

&

“We all have the power to change things. In a people-powered society, we resist when something we care about is threatened, and we can come together for what we believe in.”

PEOPLE POWER and **PARTICIPATION** are values that can help build a better Europe, but only if they are rooted in **EMPATHY** and **EQUALITY**. They can also have negative, fearful connotations so should not be used in a vacuum and should always be clarified.

Our focus group participants told us...

- * Participation and people power are somewhat present today, but they need to be more present in the future
- * Participation on its own tended to be judged neutrally—for instance, that we do have means of participating, but the impact of it is questionable
- * People power on its own had some negative associations—for instance, that it can operate as an anti-democratic force.

Coopération Participar **Cooperazione** Comhoibriú
 Samarbejd **Demokrati** EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉS Volby
 Beteiligung **Spolupráce** Medewerking **БЫТЬ ЧАСТЬЮ** Wybory
 Współpraca **Valg** **Lankidetzá**
 ΣΥΜΜΕΤΕΧΩ

“Participation and people power are vital for our society.”
 —**Focus group participant, France**

Can you think of real-life examples where empathy has motivated people to act in large numbers?

The IMAGERY we can draw on

Metaphors and imagery can be a powerful way to help people think about a complex topic like Europe. Analogy is a way to translate abstract ideas and provide new perspective.

We tested two metaphors and explored their verbal and visual associations.

No1. BIRD'S EYE IMAGERY—BORDERS FROM ABOVE

“Viewed from above Europe’s borders are usually invisible, and beautiful. Mountain ranges, open countryside, rivers and streams know no borders. Hundreds of roads and transport links connect countries, and thousands of people move between countries every day for work, for travel, for leisure. Seen from the sky, European countries are intimately connected and borders are unrecognizable.”

This is a way of talking about Europe that is useful for talking about travel, movement, tolerance and cultural exchange.

However, we found that using the word ‘borders’ encouraged lively and emotive debate about migration, even though we were trying to emphasise that borders are invisible when you get a bird’s eye view. Instead people talked about how “humans have always strived for borders” and “borders are determined by natural conditions”. We see this as an example of [George Lakoff’s ‘Don’t think of an elephant’ problem](#). It is difficult to reframe a loaded term like ‘borders’.

We recommend using this imagery of the shared and continuous land and waterways of Europe, but without explicitly mentioning borders.

Imagery and words associated with "borders from above" by focus group participants.

Travel freely

Together

No need for borders!

No need for passports

Invitation



Inclusion

Different cultures

Village community

Everyone is welcome

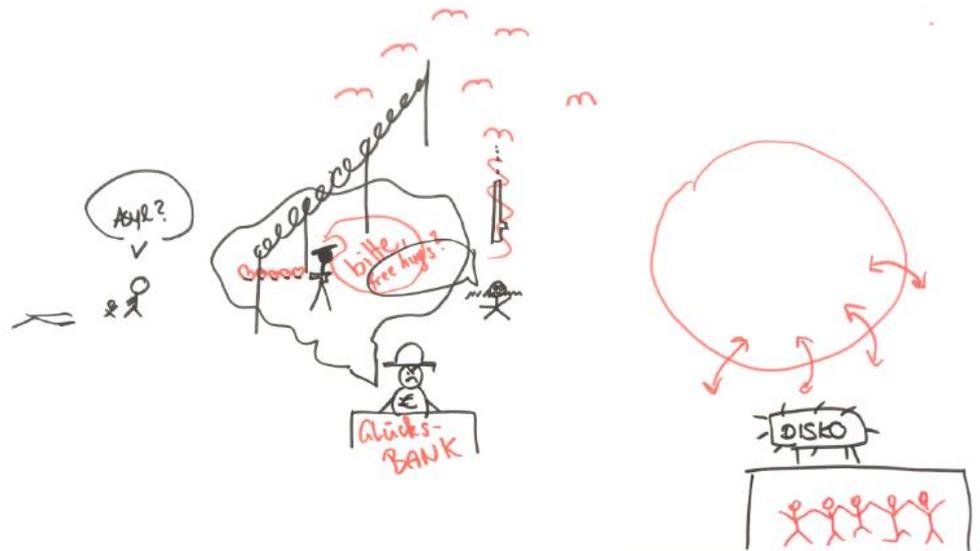
Racial tolerance

Building bridges

Natural borders

Infinity

Movement



No2. CONSTRUCTION IMAGERY—BUILDING TOGETHER

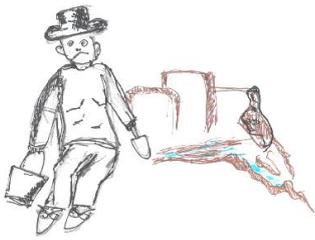
“Building something together is better than building alone. When people build something together—be it a cooperative business, a community garden, a renewable energy project, a children’s play area—they make friends, share skills, are more creative, and get a greater sense of achievement. Collaborating and creating together makes communities stronger.”

This is a way of talking about Europe that is particularly helpful for expressing interconnectivity, mutualism, racial diversity, group belonging and working together—all aspects of the European community we would like to strengthen. Of the two metaphors, this one was the one that focus group participants felt most hopeful and optimistic about.

However, our focus group participants applied this imagery to local communities and did not seem to find it easy to think about Europe in this way. Some even commented that the idea of ‘building together’ in the context of Europe had been a failure. We would need to experiment with including it alongside an explicit reference to Europe.

We recommend using this imagery to talk about our values and our communities.

Imagery and words associated with "building together" by focus group participants.



Everybody together

Balance

Harmony with nature

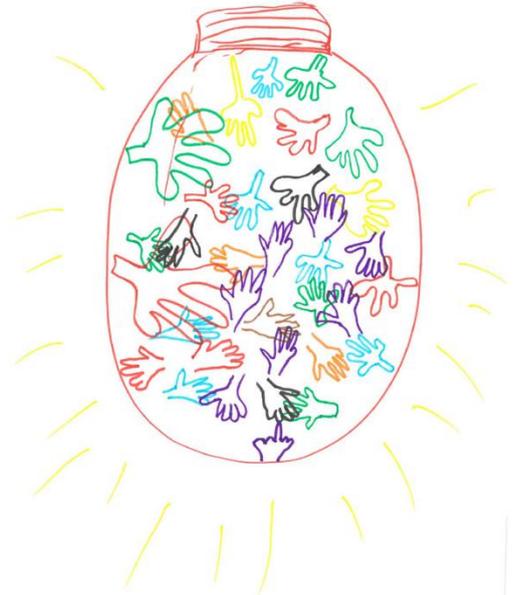
Need for belonging



Co-operation

Sharing

People power



Participation

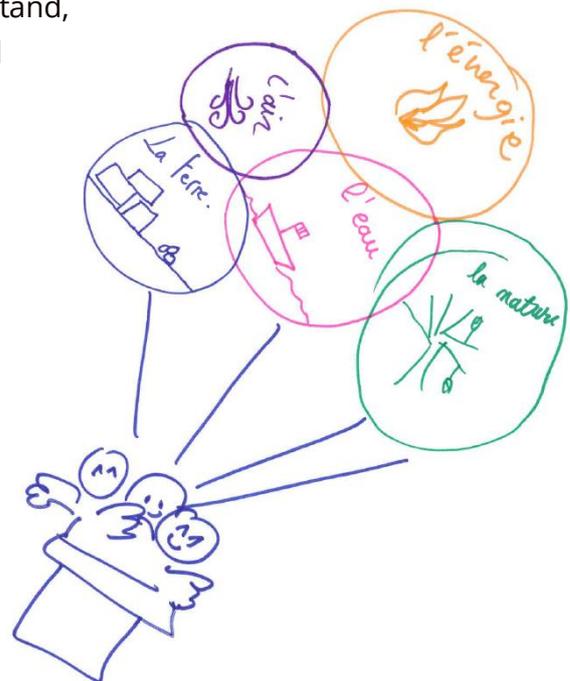
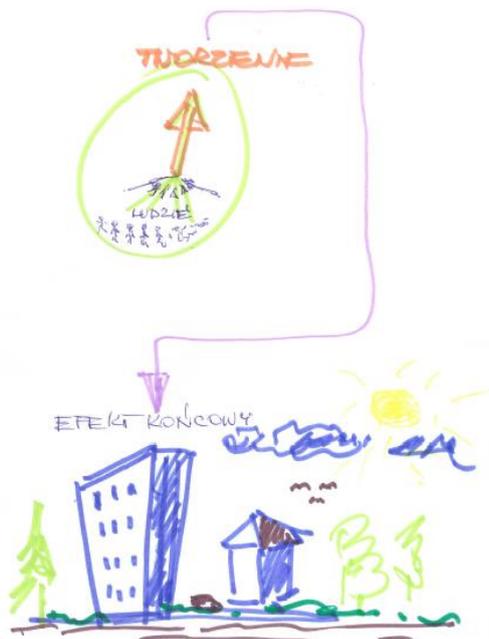
Mutual support

Collective intelligence

Community housing

Creativity

Together we stand,
divided we fall



The **STORIES OF HOPE** we want to tell

Just as stories can create meaning for us as individuals and groups, collections of stories (or narratives) create meaning for entire societies. By telling different stories, we can bring new worlds into being.

The following real-life case studies and examples were found to combine the values we want to strengthen and to inspire people...





Zorro2212 CC BY-SA 4.0, from Wikimedia Commons

No1. Polish Women's Strike

“In 2016, when the Polish government proposed to make it more difficult for Polish women to have abortions, women across the country went on a symbolic strike. Millions of women marched through the streets, and made human chains around public buildings, all dressed in black. This powerful movement formed quickly, in local communities across Poland, and connected women of all ages and backgrounds who wanted to stand up for their rights.”

The Polish Women's Strike is a powerful example of building a better Europe. It can give people hope by reminding them of how a single struggle can address a wider issue of inequality. It works as an example of people power motivated by empathy and equality values.

It can also help us talk about people coming together across social classes and communities to fight for a common cause.

“The EU should guarantee freedom of choice for all women”
—Focus group participant, Poland



No2. Erasmus

“The EU’s Erasmus+ programme provides opportunities for millions of Europeans to study, train, gain experience, and volunteer abroad. It gives opportunities to people (old as well as young) to travel and experience Europe. It fosters dialogue, togetherness and cultural understanding across borders. Such opportunities should be open to everyone.”

The Erasmus scheme—and its expansion to more people—is a helpful illustration of what a more inclusive, connected Europe can look like. It was one of the ideas people felt most positive and hopeful about across the focus groups.

It resonates best with young people as it is perceived as a youth programme, but might resonate more widely if its accessibility is emphasised.

“We are capable of creating smart things like Erasmus.”

—Focus group participant, France

Finding our own stories of hope

Here are just a few inspiring examples of other initiatives which we didn't test but which contain some key 'ingredients' of the stories we want to tell.

Erasmus x 10

The European Youth Forum's 'Erasmus x 10' campaign calls for a more inclusive and accessible Erasmus+ Programme with ten times more funding. It uses storytelling to explain the positive impact Erasmus+ can have on people from all backgrounds, nationalities & stages of life.

[Erasmus x 10 campaign website](#)

[Campaign Video: Let's increase the Erasmus+ budget](#)

Marriage equality in Ireland

The 2015 YES campaign for Marriage Equality in the Republic of Ireland was an outstanding success. 62% voted for marriage equality in the referendum, and the YES vote won in 25 out of 26 of Ireland's counties. Ireland became the first country to pass a law on same-sex marriage by national referendum. The campaign which centered on shared values of generosity, equality, fairness and inclusivity is seen as one of the most successful social change campaigns in modern Europe.

The Eusko—and other local currencies

Euskos, are the French Basque region's successful local currency. It was created to encourage custom for neighbourhood businesses. Local currency schemes exist in more and more countries. They connect a community and are a way for people to show support for local traders. Often local—or micro—currency schemes reduce ecological damage caused by long supply chains and aim to promote solidarity.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_currency#Europe

The Leap Manifesto

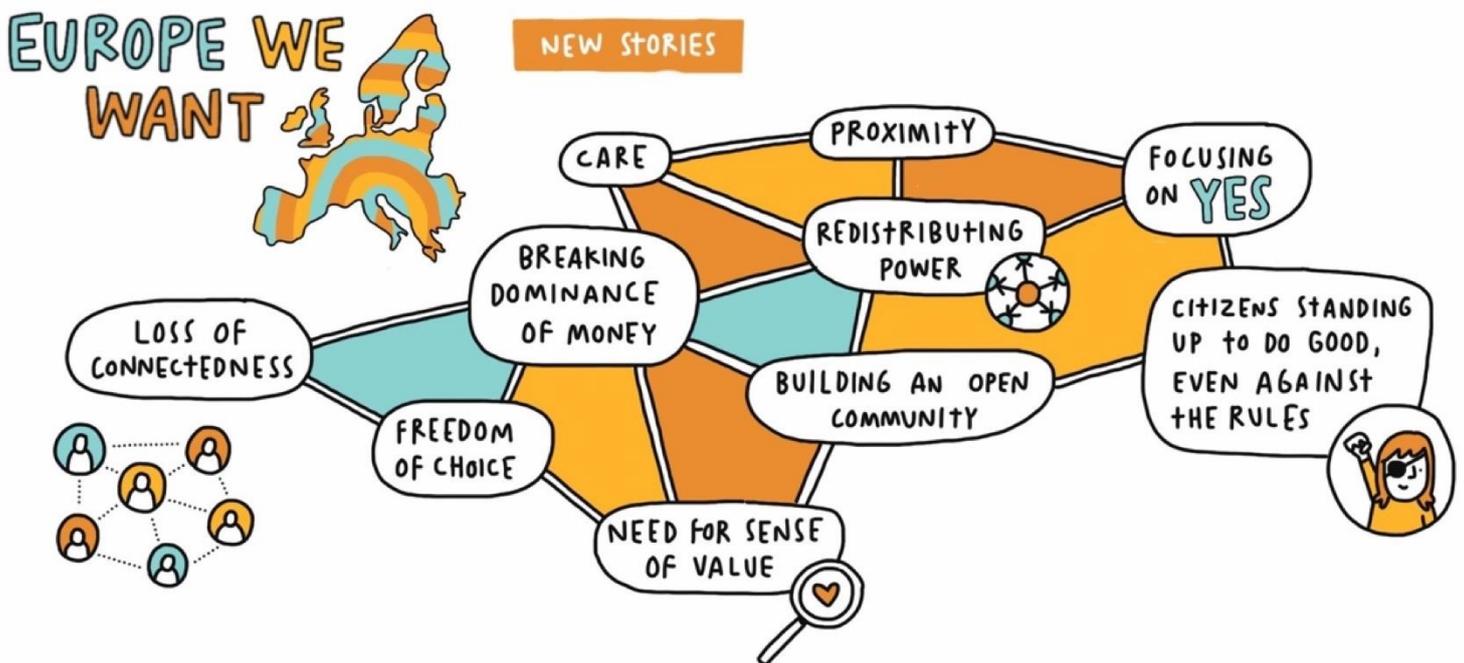
A Call for a Canada Based on Caring for the Earth and One Another. The Leap Manifesto is a 'common front of hope' in Canada which is based on a bold, radical, transformative narrative around caring and better lives, people and planet, and climate jobs as care jobs.

leapmanifesto.org

Key components of stories of hope, case studies and examples that can help visualise the societies we want to build in Europe:

- ★ **empathy** and **equality** are clear motivational values for the people involved
- ★ associations with **participation** and **people power**—they show mass mobilisation around a common cause
- ★ contain other positive intrinsic values—like creativity, solidarity, culture
- ★ are real-life, memorable stories—not abstract concepts or general descriptions
- ★ directly relevant to people—ideally from their own community or country, but positive stories can transcend borders and languages!

What movements or initiatives have there been in your country that meet these criteria / have these ingredients?



The societies we want



Instead of speaking simply about ‘Europe’, with the negative or abstract associations that has, we can speak about...

- ✓ the communities we want to exist all across Europe
 - ✓ the societies we want to live in throughout Europe
 - ✓ the lives people want to lead right around Europe
 - ✓ European societies fit for the future
 - ✓ European communities that meet everyone’s needs
 - ✓ OR, communities around Europe that welcome refugees / towns and villages throughout Europe growing their own healthy food / workplaces in every corner of Europe which respect people’s rights / etc.
- Add the specific issues you work on or care about.**

What issues do you care about and how can you relate them both to Europe AND to people’s everyday experiences?

The CONVERSATIONS we want to have



New ways of talking about the societies we want need to stimulate conversations.

To engage more people in thinking critically about the kind of society they would like to live in, it's not enough to broadcast messages—we need to create opportunities to truly connect people, give people ways to express their hopes and ideas for the future and to be heard.

Here are some suggested questions that could be used as 'conversation aids' to open up discussions about future European societies:

- * What do you care about?
- * What gives you hope?
- * What are your hopes for the future?
- * What would more caring communities look like?
- * How could an economy based on care work?
- * What kind of Europe would you like to see?

Some places where conversations might be opened-up might be meetings with colleagues, member forums, cultural and community events, events for volunteers and activists, places of worship, workshop, door knocking, street stalls, or festivals.

What spaces can you think of for stimulating conversations about the societies we want to build in Europe?

Balancing **URGENCY** with **HOPE**



It's critical to instil a sense of hope in people—
with no hope people are not motivated to act.

This has been demonstrated in studies on climate change communication, showing that fearful, threatening imagery can increase people's sense that the issue is important, whilst at the same time suppressing efficacy—the sense we can do something. But, if people feel too optimistic they are also not motivated to act.

So, we need to balance **HOPE** with **URGENCY**.

Research on positive and negative emotions, and their psychological impacts, suggests that we should aim for a ratio of 3:1 in our communications as a general rule-of-thumb. We recommend applying this ratio to our communication of hope and urgency, if we are to incite people to act without demoralising them.

We don't need to look far for reasons for urgency...

- ✦ Democracy declined more in Europe than in any other part of the world in 2017-18
- ✦ Participation in the European Elections has declined steadily since 1979. Just 42.5% of people voted in the European Elections in 2014.
- ✦ We have 12 years to keep global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C, beyond which the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people will be much worse.

Country-specific highlights

This section contains highlights of the five focus groups and some things people said in different countries.

Across all 5 countries **empathy** and **equality** were consistently said to be key values for future societies. Even if they are present around Europe now, they need to be increased. **Participation** and **people power** were consistently said to require empathy and equality as pre-requisites.

AUSTRIA

Values

- * **Participation** and **People Power** seen as similar
- * Austrian society said to have strong **People power**
- * **Empathy** most appealing

Images & exemplars

- * The **Polish Women's Strike** was powerful to most participants, especially older females
- * Even participants who hadn't heard of **Erasmus** before were enthusiastic about it
- * Feeling that **borders** are natural and not necessarily negative

CROATIA

Values

- * **Empathy** the key value
- * Participants said they would not want to live in a society without empathy and equality
- * Values very much seen to be interlinked – like a chain or circle

Images & exemplars

- * Female participants most intrigued by the **Polish Women's Strike**
- * High levels of concern about abuse of democracy in other countries

DENMARK

Values

- * All agreed **empathy** is the most important value – both now and in the future
- * All the values tested said to exist in Danish society

Images & exemplars

- * Clear links made by the focus group between the **Polish Women's Strike** and the values of **empathy** and **equality**

FRANCE

Values

- * **People power** seen as different from **participation**. People power more lacking in France than participation.
- * **Empathy** said to be starting point to solve societal problems.

Images & exemplars

- * Conclusion European people are strong when united in their diversity
- * Initiatives like **Erasmus** said to give people hope and help abolish fear of the other.
- * **Polish Women's Strike** a strong example of unity

POLAND

Values

- * **People power** interpreted both positively and negatively
- * Thought to be too little **empathy** in everyday life

Images & exemplars

- * **Polish Women's Strike** most striking as close and connected with group
- * **Erasmus** less appreciated because it already exists and thought to benefit a particular group

The full findings from all the focus groups are available on request, please contact new.narratives@protonmail.com

What next?

More testing!

- It would be great to repeat our focus groups in more countries.
- We could also test more stories, exemplars, images and other narrative elements we think can meet our challenge and strengthen the values we want to strengthen.
- It would be great to do different kinds of testing more suited to broadcast medium, e.g. testing of a slogan on a poster, a subject line of an email.

More tools and collaboration...

- We'd love to start a shared image bank where we can build-up a collection of powerful, free-to-use images that transcend language and capture the societies we want to build.
- We'd love to collect, share and learn from more 'best practice' examples of great campaigns, local initiatives, communications, materials from all around Europe.
- Involve artists, poets, musicians, painters, film-makers in bringing new ways of talking about the societies we want alive in creative ways.
- Think about who tells our stories. Who are the right messengers that people will hear and listen to and convey the values we want?
- More workshops, skillshares and learning from one another.

A common cause?

- What about a new campaign to demand a more caring Europe, focusing on a specific flagship European initiative that promotes solidarity?

Background

What we did

This guide is the result of a 6-month process which looked roughly like this:

- + **SURVEY:** we collected existing thinking, new ideas, examples of communications and framing, data, research, and experience on new ways to talk about Europe. Most respondents were from non-government organisations, and many were communications professionals.
- + **ANALYSIS:** we digested and synthesized the survey responses and extracted the main themes and recurring ideas and took these into a...
- + **WORKSHOP:** a one-day workshop brought together around 30 people representing organisations working on migration, youth, the environment, social justice, development, and the solidarity economy, as well as some other interested individuals. In the workshop we distilled and confirmed the survey findings about what new narratives need to do to be successful, nail-down the core challenge the narratives need to address, and we started to develop ways to talk about the societies we want to take forward to...
- + **TESTING:** once we had refined the ideas that came out of the workshop we tested them in focus groups in 5 countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Poland. The focus group participants were people of diverse ages and backgrounds who had one thing in common: they were not already engaged in thinking about the future of Europe. The key test for the focus groups was: do our ideas make people feel more hopeful about the future?
- + **THIS GUIDE:** we collected our conclusions in a format to share widely with people also interested in building a more sustainable, equitable, inclusive, democratic Europe. We hope you will make use of them and pass them on.





What we didn't do

- ✘ We do not claim this is a comprehensive process. We know there are other complimentary, overlapping initiatives out there. We tried to bring in diverse perspectives and viewpoints from all around Europe, but we know some groups and countries were under-represented.
- ✘ We tested in focus group which means the recommendations particularly suit mediums where dialogue is possible. We haven't tested these ideas in a broadcast format, e.g. as a slogan on a poster—although we imagine they could usefully inform such mediums.

Please treat this as one contribution to the overall, ongoing effort to build better, more hopeful societies around Europe.

Resources

How do we frame our way out of this mess?

Public Interest Research Centre, 2018

Common Cause Handbook

Public Interest Research Centre, 2011

Smart CSOs Lab

Innovating civil society strategies to make the Great Transition Happen.

The Art of Organising Hope

Research project documenting grassroots and civil society organisations all over Europe, in search for hopeful discourses, methods and practices to counter the present-day upsurge of Euroscepticism and defeatist perceptions of crisis.

More in Common

International initiative to build communities and societies that are stronger, more united and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarisation and social division.

New Migration Narratives for Constructive Dialogue

A project which aims to empower progressive campaigners to more effectively engage and rebalance the public debate around migration in Germany, putting diversity and inclusion more firmly back on the agenda.

Contacts

We would be happy to get your feedback on this guide, and to hear about your efforts to inspire more hopeful conversations about the societies we want.

You can contact any of the organisations involved via our websites, or write to the project at new.narratives@protonmail.com



Friends of the Earth Europe

CONCORD

European NGO confederation for relief and development



European Youth Forum

Fair Trade
ADVOCACY OFFICE



PIRC

PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH CENTRE



WeMove.EU



ripest europe
Solidarity Economy Europe

This project was coordinated by Friends of the Earth Europe, with support from CONCORD—European NGO confederation for Relief and Development, Fair Trade Advocacy Office, European Trade Union Confederation, European Women’s Lobby, European Youth Forum, RIPESS EU—Solidarity Economy Europe, and WeMove.eu, under the guidance of Public Interest Research Centre.

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