Shifting the Narrative:

Exploring the Role of Arts Interventions in supporting communities in working across sectors to achieve place-based climate action

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THE UNIVERSITY
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Funding from the British Academy's Shared Understandings of a Sustainable Future programme has enabled us to explore what the community-based storytelling sector can contribute to shifting narratives towards sustainability in the face of the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Through our engagement with 56 informed advocates (IAs)[i] for working with traditional and performance storytelling[ii] in this context, we found the following key findings:

1. ***Storytelling creates community while holding diversity.***

During live storytelling events, a group of listeners is brought together to share an experience that will never be repeated in exactly the same way again. IAs characterized this as forming a community of experience for the duration of that event, whether it was a formal performance or the sharing of a story in a workshop, pub, classroom or conference. Some brought up the caveat that this movement of 'me to we' is not guaranteed and may not be experienced by all listeners.

Community building was related to the ability of storytelling to provide a vicarious experience through story. Not only do listeners share the experience of being in a room together, they also share a virtual narrative journey. The listeners' ability to empathise with characters is essential to their imaginative experience of the story and can be enhanced by the storyteller's skill.

Tradition bearers[iii] spoke of their storytelling inheritance as having existed within a long-term, multi-generational, geographically bounded community with a shared culture. Shonaleigh Cumbers, from the Jewish Drut'syla tradition, spoke about how when her grandmother was a child, the Drut'syla would gather the community together to hear stories on a regular basis. She has translated this tradition into a regular, live online telling session via Zoom, which has created an ongoing, but geographically spread out community over the past two years. Members of this virtual community, have told her that these sessions have supported their mental health through the pandemic. Seanachaidh, George Macpherson spoke at length about the role of a tradition bearer in Gaelic Scotland as holding and transmitting histories, knowledge and values for a community.

While storytelling brings people together (virtually or in person) and can create and support communities of brief or long duration, the stories themselves will be interpreted differently by each individual listener. In this way storytelling is unpredictable, as any change happens in the listener, which the teller ultimately has no control over. Perhaps in view of this unpredictability, the one IA who stated that stories should have a clear message, was a communications person for an environmental lobbying organisation. Other IAs were adamant that the flexibility of stories, which enables them to be interpreted in profoundly personal ways, beyond the intellectual level of the 'message', is a key strength to working with storytelling to effect changes in meaning, understanding and values (Nanson, 2021). While stories need ambiguity, performances and workshops could be themed. In this way, stories would be heard at least in part through the theme of the session (Ramsden, 2021)

Jerome Bruner (1990), who was cited by a couple of our IAs, contrasts narrative knowing and logico-scientific knowing, with narrative knowing being open and fed on uncertainty and contradiction, while logico-scientific knowing requires certainty. Stories with appropriate levels of ambiguity enable listeners to construct meaning that is relevant to their own experience and to where they are in their journey towards living more sustainably.

Live storytelling is an accessible means of creating a community of shared experience, while enabling listeners to interpret, connect with and make meaning in unique ways relevant to where they are. This

finding applies to any format in which stories are shared live with a group of listeners, in formal and informal contexts, from conversations to performances.

2. ***Dialogue is fundamental to working with stories to effect shifts in individual, organizational and community narratives and storytelling is fundamentally dialogical.***

Live storytelling is fundamentally dialogical. The storytelling practices that we studied are unscripted. The role of the storyteller is to know the story and to tell it skillfully, such that it 'meets the audience where they are'. While the elements of the story (characters, setting, plot) remain the same, the language, pacing, gestures, facial expressions, story length and even theme may change from one telling to the next. In this way, traditional and performance storytelling is more similar to the sorts of informal, everyday storytelling that all people engage in, than it is to more familiar contemporary forms of storytelling (textual, recorded video and audio story-sharing). Skilled storytellers plan each telling based on what they anticipate of their audience and purposefully engage in 'banter' before they start telling. They also respond in the moment to the reactions of their audience. Some referred to this as an 'exchange of energy' between tellers and listeners or as co-creating the story.

IAs recognized that a well-chosen story, well told could be enough to shift someone's beliefs and values. In an online event, a participant shared that attending a storytelling session had completely changed her view of another religion and had shifted her behavior in relation to people of that faith. However, a number of our IAs thought that such a shift has more to do with the listener, their openness to listening, their skills in listening, the experiences they brought to the listening, than to the story or the teller.

To increase the impact of the storytelling session, most storytellers reported using dialogue directly in their sessions. Some IAs drew on pedagogical thinking from Paolo Friere and Stuart Hall to underpin their approach to dialogue. There was consensus that such discussions should aim to enable an 'exchange' of responses to the story. A few IAs stated that analyzing the story or striving to derive an expert interpretation must be avoided. Instead, the storyteller needs to facilitate a containing space in which all responses are welcome. This could be an unstructured, open space, or questions could be prepared beforehand, but the story itself provides the main provocation for dialogue. Some tellers use 'bridging activities' to help listeners reflect on the story in relation to their own lives and experiences before opening up a discussion. Many tellers begin the discussion portion of the session by asking listeners about images from the story that stuck in their minds or resonated with them.

Shonaleigh Cumbers' discussion of the Drut'syla tradition highlights dialogue as key to the way in which stories were shared within those traditional communities. The Drut'syla would tell a story that she felt needed to be heard at that time and listeners would be encouraged to discuss whatever came up for them, even during the telling of the story. Shonaleigh emphasized that it is this dialogue that shifts ideas and values, not the story itself. In relation to difficult and contested topics, she contrasted 'traditional telling' with storytelling performances that provide no opportunity for direct dialogue. In the traditional mode, discomforts and critiques can be voiced, heard and worked through, enabling all listeners and the teller to learn and shift their narratives. With a performance alone, listeners may be left with uncomfortable feelings and unvoiced thoughts in ways that actually block shifts in narratives.

Unlike in reading, which requires high levels of literacy (Wolf, 2007), listening to storytelling is an accessible way for a listener to bring story into dialogue with their own experiences. Live storytelling offers opportunities for interactive discussion and dialogue that text and broadcast forms of storytelling

do not. Given this finding, we are exploring with two of our community partners[iv] ways in which they can incorporate dialogue into their communications, which are primarily text and broadcast based.

3. ***Storytelling, emotions and care***

A well-told story is an emotional experience for the listener. While this is true of all mediums, live storytelling offers unique opportunities.

One researcher attended a live online workshop led by an art therapist and storyteller that followed almost all of the dialogical processes discussed above. As a teller with an art therapy background, she was able to facilitate bridging activities that helped participants make strong connections between their own lives and the stories told, to work through difficult emotions related to climate change and biodiversity loss, and to come up with concrete actions to take. She drew explicitly on Joana Macy's (2021) insights into working through grief to enable action.

Traditional stories and storytelling were used in part to help people in the community to deal with the difficult things in life. An online conference into 'Rewilding Cinderella', led by Joana Gilar, brought together storytellers and folklorists from around the world to tell their local versions of the story. The day ended with a discussion of how traditional versions of Cinderella (as opposed to 'Disneyified' ones, Zipes, 2008) can help individuals and communities deal with the grief associated with biodiversity loss through climate change and lead to action.[v]

Many IAs tell stories outside in the landscape. Even stories told inside often are explicitly set in local places and landscapes. Seanachaidh, George Macpherson, talked to us extensively about the oral tradition that he comes from and how it connected his community to the land. In may IAs' experiences, these place-based stories, which facilitate an emotional journey, helped people to perceive, value and care for their local places.

4. ***Reaching people who have not yet been reached***

This theme came up from both storytelling and sustainability perspectives. Some IAs discussed getting storytelling to people and communities who would not normally attend events advertised as 'storytelling'. Many people still consider storytelling to be for children and while some IAs discussed their work in schools, most of the discussions were focused on telling to adults.

Meanwhile, other IAs were concerned with reaching people who are not yet engaged with living more sustainably. During fieldwork, one of the researchers attended a 3-day long conference on community-based climate action in Scotland at which the main theme was also, 'how do we reach people who have not yet been reached'.

The general answer given to this challenge was to bring storytelling related to sustainability to community groups; integrating storytelling on these issues with events that are already ongoing. Bringing storytelling to pubs was mentioned, with an excellent example given of intersectoral, pub-based story-sharing work in a small rural community as a means of overcoming divisions in that community. Another example was an invitation for a storyteller to provide the 'key-note' at a regional climate change conference. One IA has had success in shifting narratives through working longitudinally with a group, such as a work-based group, on both storytelling and sustainability.

Many storytellers work in schools and while this does reach a wider demographic, some IAs were keen to not overly burden children and young people with the climate crisis and to also ensure that sectors of the adult population were reached too.

5. ***Skills needed in working with stories in this way.***

We will keep this section short as there are a number of books and training courses that cover this in detail, many of which have been written or led by IAs on this project. Being a good storyteller is seen as an asset in working with stories to shift narratives and so general storytelling skills are important. These include: language skills of word choice, imagery, rhythm and rhyme; performance skills including pacing, voice use, body language, facial expression; knowledge and understanding of story structure, character, plot and setting; and some skills in research, particularly of folklore and ethnology.

In addition, many IAs thought that facilitation skills were also important, given the centrality of dialogue to working with stories in this way. These include the skills to hold a welcoming space that enables everyone to contribute and may also involve more specialized skills if bridging activities are to be included and difficult emotions are to be worked with. Groupwork facilitation skills were highlighted by a few as essential to working with story and social change, especially considering that the shift happens in the listener, as discussed above (see Gersie 1992). In some ways, merging contemporary storytelling and groupwork provides a contemporary version of the traditional storytelling practices in community espoused by the tradition bearers we spoke with.

We have written very little about choice of story here. We were given a range of advice about this topic, much of it contradictory. IAs work with different genres of stories, with different structures and attributes. Some emphasized that stories should be positive, while others felt the traditional role of the storyteller included telling difficult stories that the community needed to here. There was debate over telling stories from different cultures and how to do so respectfully. Some took the view that the teller does not choose, it's the story that chooses to be told.

6. ***Sustainability of storytelling. TEK and TK***

Some IAs and interviewees brought up the sustainability of storytelling. First, storytellers do not require any technology, although some have been using technology in innovative ways. As a low-tech, community building practice that requires very few resources, storytelling is therefore seen as a sustainable practice, which has been around for most of human history (Gottschall, 2012). In contrast, a couple of IAs reported that that to have a sustainable income as a freelance artist, they needed to travel for work as there were not enough 'gigs' available locally. They had concerns over the climate impact of this travel.

There was a storytelling revival in the UK and the rest of the western world in the 1990s, which a few of our participants were a part of. Some IAs brought up the ageing demographics of storytellers in the UK, pointing to the need to encourage and train more young people in order for it to be sustainable. We did have two young storytellers serving as IAs for this project.

Tradition bearers face huge challenges in maintaining their traditions (see also Smith, 2001), even while they demonstrate ingenuity in their efforts to protect and share their stories. The three tradition bearers we spoke to represent the Drut'syla tradition (brought to the UK during WWII), a Seanachaidh of the Gaelic tradition of the Scottish Western Isles (George Macpherson) and the Scottish Travellers (Jess

Smith). In other parts of the world, Traditional knowledge (TK isrecognized as important resources for enabling people and communities to live more sustainably (Kulnieks et al., 2013). The maintenance and passing on of TK and TEK are intertwined with stories and storytelling in these cultures. Support for UK-based tradition bearers in preserving and sharing their traditions is urgently needed. Shonaleigh reports that others can obtain funding for taking stories from her oral tradition to make new art with them, but that there is no funding to support her in working in a traditional way to maintain and share her tradition. Such funding is provided in other countries.

Many of the stories listed by UK storytellers as ones they work with in relation to sustainability are from traditional cultures outwith the UK. Storytellers are sensitive to cultural appropriation and reported a number of practices they engage in to work respectfully with this material. One of the reasons given for using indigenous stories from elsewhere is a perceived lack of local stories related to TEK. More research into local TEK is needed.

Finally, some IAs called for storytelling practices of re-indigenising, including digging for stories and fragments of stories that are local and 're-hydrating' them as well as co-creating new stories of being and becoming indigenous to place.

7. ***Support to enable storytellers to expand their contribution to the shift to a net-zero society***

Live storytelling involves few resources making it inexpensive in relation to the contribution it can make. The IAs we engaged with are all highly motivated to use their skills and ideas in service to bringing about a net-zero future, We asked them: 'Suppose you had all the support you needed, what would be a project you'd like to undertake to aid a group, organisation or community to shift their narratives towards more sustainable ways of living? ' Most of the suggested projects were locally-based but nationally-networked. Many involved inter-sectoral collaborations. To give some examples, one person wanted to integrate storytelling with a local hedgerow adoption scheme. The stories would connect people to place and to each other and provide more meaning and value to the hedgerows. On the other end of the continuum, another IA provided a well-thought through blueprint for training up and deploying a national network or local 'storytellers for change'.[vi]

When asked what support would help to increase the impact of their storytelling for sustainability work, highest importance was placed on increased opportunities for storytelling, particularly performances. Support and opportunities for networking and collaborating within the field and with other sectors was also seen as important. Related to this, many IAs felt that deepening connections between storytelling and formal curricula in schools would be helpful, where it could serve as a form of critical practice.

Other supports mentioned included: more opportunities for teaching and training people in storytelling, especially for the environmental sector; mentorship programmes; more funding for storytelling, more research into stories and into storytelling as a practice; and embedding storytellers into other sectors through 'storyteller in residence' programmes. Accreditation programmes for storytellers were mentioned but were controversial with some storytellers being strongly against such a system.

Research summary

Our project set out to explore how people work with stories to effect social change in relation to the entangled crises of climate and biodiversity loss. Storytelling as an art-form goes back millennia. More recently, the term has been applied to almost every form and media for sharing a story. However, each medium provides its own opportunities and limitations. To get at story at its most foundational, evolutionarily speaking, we focused on live traditional and performance storytelling in communities.

Through our networks and those of our community partners (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland TRACS, Architecture and Design Scotland A&DS and Scottish Communities Climate Action Network SCCAN), we identified 53 Informed Advocates (IAs) for working with stories for social change in relation to sustainability in the UK and 92 outwith. These people had at least 3 years' experience working with stories (waived for two young tellers), and significant experience in working with stories around environmental issues. IAs were approached to participate in an initial survey co-created with our community partners. Responses the UK (n=27) and Global (n=23) surveys were analysed and a subsequent survey was produced for each cohort, which fed back some initial findings and asked for their reflections. We received 22 responses to the second survey from the UK and 18 from the Global cohort.

To deepen our understanding of survey responses, we interviewed 3 Tradition Bearers[vii] and 4 storytellers with extensive knowledge and experience in working with storytelling for social change in relation to environmental sustainability, all UK-based. Researchers also attended 5 events as participant observers.

Our work builds on the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences over the last decades. In this approach, society and personal identity are seen as inherently narrative, as caught up in and shaped by the stories that circulate around us (Bruner 1990). Some of this work has looked at stories and social change, focussing on text and broadcast mediums and informal conversation (Polletta, 2015;Nelson, 2001). This work has neglected environmental issues, with Jones' (2014) study of the heroic stories of environmental organisations a notable exception. Our work contributes to sociological understandings of story by looking at story in community arts practice and the climate crisis.

There are a few publications on the how-tos of storytelling and nature connection, some written by people who contributed to this project (Gersie, 1992; Gersie et al. 2022). Our project complements their work by gathering experiences, opinions and practices across this sector and by digging down into the processes underpinning them.

Our IAs work with story and environmental sustainability in a range of ways, including through performances, workshops, in schools, libraries and pubs, outdoors, at museums and other heritage sites, alongside rangers, at workplaces, conferences, local community events and more.   While the venues are varied, all these activities primarily involve intentional, live, skilled telling of stories to a group of listeners. Such community-based narrative practices offer something different from text and broadcast modes of sharing stories, and from conversation-based approaches to climate change.

Live storytelling brings listeners together in a community of shared experience for the duration of the event. The tradition bearers we spoke with highlighted the traditional role of storytelling in their oral cultures as being in part about holding and supporting their place-based communities. Part of this

experience of community comes from being at a live event in company with other listeners (in person or online), part of it comes from sharing in the virtual experience of the story itself. While an event brings people together, each listener will interpret the story differently. In this way, live storytelling supports community while enabling diversity and enabling each listener to take away what they need from what they have heard. Other researchers have shown that the more a listener is 'transported' by a story, the stronger the impact of that story will be on their opinions and attitudes (Polletta and Redman, 2020). Being together with others in person, listening to a story live, provides an excellent context in which people can be transported to the virtual storyworld. The art of the storyteller is focused on enabling listeners to be transported in this way.

Dialogue is a key part of working with stories to effect shifts (Heinemeyer, 2020; Gersie et al., 2021). Tellers experience performing as dialogical; they report that the responses of the audience feed into and shape their telling (Nanson, 2021). Some characterized this as an exchange of energy. While there was anecdotal evidence that listening to a story on its own could enable people to have epiphanies, most storytellers incorporate direct forms of dialogue into their events, including interactive storytelling, open discussions and working with set questions. Some use reflective and somatic exercises to bridge the storytelling and the discussion. The aim of these sessions is to enable audiences to respond to their experience of the story and to bring the story into relationship with their own lives.

The centrality of dialogue and of bringing a story into dialogue with the meanings, values and experiences of listeners is supported by psychotherapeutic approaches, such as Narrative Therapy--a practice which aims to help people and communities shift their narratives from disabling stories to ones that take them towards desirable futures (White, 2000). It also resonates with what researchers into the written word have found (Wolf, 2007). Book club discussions have also been observed to help readers shift the meanings they have previously given to their experiences with the natural world (Willis, 2019), as has classroom practices that integrate reading graphic novels about protecting nature with activities (Willis and Schmidt, 2018).

While researchers have observed that the power of story in general lies in its ability to bring people on an emotional journey (Willis, 2019), we found that live storytelling contributes something specific. At a live event, there is a shared emotional journey. When dialogue is integrated with the story-telling then emotional journeys can be shared. When 'bridging activities' are included by skilled storyteller-facilitators, emotions can be shared and worked through. Others have argued that difficult emotions, such as grief, interfere with people's motivation and ability to act on environmental crises (Macy 2021). Storytelling with dialogue can be part of the process of helping people and communities move through grief into action. Storytelling, as a low tech, low resource form of communication can easily be done outdoors. Using place-based stories in landscapes can help people to connect with and care about those landscapes. Indeed it has connected people and cultures to landscapes for millennia.

One of the areas we were interested in was what makes a good story for working with environmental issues. Interestingly, there was no consensus on this. Our IAs used all sorts of different genres in their work, including traditional stories, fairy tales, ghost stories, historical stories, stories with animals as characters, stories of transformation, legends, myths, real life and personal stories. Despite the range, the preponderance of stories with fantastical elements in the examples shared with us is notable. This seems to reflect Zipes (2008) assertion that the fantastical is an essential element in helping people to envision a different way of living. There was no consensus around whether stories should be 'positive' or

'negative'. As one tradition bearer pointed out, lots of folktales are scary, the storyteller's job is to take the listener to and through that scary place and that includes climate change.

Storytellers were in agreement, however, that stories should never be 'preachy' and storytellers should never try to hammer out a single message in their storytelling. One IA drew explicitly on the work of Jerome Bruner (1990), arguing that story works on ambiguity and on contradiction. A good story is one that can be interpreted in a range of ways. A good story has enough in it that it can meet the needs of listeners at various stages of contemplation and action in relation to environmental sustainability. A good story is one that is ambiguous, contains some friction and is provocative. This seems to reflect Polletta and Redman's (2020) overview of the literature on 'narrative persuasion' in social change, which shows that the audience is much less likely to be 'transported' by a story if they believe that the teller is trying to persuade them of something. Our storytellers used a stronger word: 'manipulation'.

Traditional and performance storytelling practices offer something different to text, broadcast and social media modes of sharing stories and to storytelling in informal conversation. The importance of responsiveness and exchange in a contained and facilitated context presents a provocation to these other modes. We will be continuing to work with SCCAN and A&DS, exploring how insights around community building and dialogue can be incorporated into these modes, which are the modes most commonly used by their member communities and by the organisations themselves. SCCAN member organisations also use Carbon Conversations, Conversations 4 Change and Climate Cafés, which are already dialogical and we will explore with how skills and insights from traditional and performance storytelling might be incorporated into these modes of engagement as well.

Lessons Learnt

Working with this group of community arts practitioners and tradition bearers was different to what any of us had experienced in research before. Having in many cases already shifted in their own self-narratives from neo-liberal discourses that emphasise transactional relationships, speed and efficiency to narratives that value inter-personal relationship and slowing down to pay attention to the world around them, our IAs challenged us and our ways of working in constructive ways.

Our informants demanded a high level of interaction and communication before they would engage with our project. We had to build their trust. There was a great deal of emailing back and forth in the lead up to the first survey. This took more time than we had budgeted for and ultimately set back our survey timeline by about six weeks. However, through building these relationships we achieved high response rates (more than 50% in the UK cohort) with 80% going on to complete the second survey. These numbers are almost unheard of in survey-based research. The slower, more relationally sensitive way of working paid off in levels of engagement.

Not surprisingly, given that they make a living from talking, interviews also lasted longer than we had anticipated, generating rich data that included a number of told stories. All participants were invited to an online knowledge exchange session in June, in which we outlined our initial findings and asked for their feedback (which was then fed into our analysis process in lieu of a focus group as originally planned). Twenty people showed up to this two-hour session and contributed generously once again.

All of this did take more time than we had originally planned for our data collection. While analysis began as soon as the first surveys were returned, we were still finalizing data collection into June, which set back our plans for drafting academic publications and conferences. We did get one paper drafted and submitted to the Cumulus design conference in Detroit in November 2022 (led by Verhoeven). We are planning to produce 4 papers in total, one with each of us as lead. We look forward to taking a slower academic approach to drafting these publications after this report has been submitted and will keep the British Academy updated on their submission and publication.

We have been inspired by this work and the people we have met on our journey to ask the question: How can we enable this process of research and story to shift our own narratives as academics in the way we connect with the more-than-human world and communicate our ideas? As part of this, we are looking at more storied ways of disseminating our research findings as a way of shifting the narrative in our own sector.

Project implementation was challenged by continued pandemic restrictions. When we applied in December, we were hopeful of a greater opening up in the Winter and Spring. However, pandemic restrictions remained in place in Scotland until April 21st. As a result, there were few in-person events for the researchers to engage in, so our plans for participant observation had to be altered. We identified a storytelling workshop in Glasgow, specifically on climate change. However, the group's leader refused us permission to attend because the community, which was a 'multiply-deprived one' (to use ScotGov's language), was over-researched. Nevertheless, we attended five storytelling events as participant observers: an online international storytelling conference with workshops and performances, a Scottish community climate organisation's weekend conference (in person), a children's storytelling day (in person), a weekend self-development and storytelling weekend for adults (in person) and an in-person visit to the Cateran Eco-museum's story themed exhibition.

While we were able to complete all of our data collection goals, albeit in a slightly different format than originally planned, pandemic restrictions had a bigger impact on the schedule of our outputs and dissemination. Architecture and Design Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland did not run conferences during the springtime as they had done in pre-pandemic years, so those sessions have been postponed. At the same time, we were able to make use of new opportunities that emerged through our community partnerships and to respond to requests from our IAs for shared resources coming out of the research. This has enabled us to keep a similar balance of outputs and dissemination events for practitioner, academic and community climate change groups to what was proposed, even as the exact nature of outputs has shifted somewhat. We will continue to update the BA as additional outputs are fulfilled in the coming months.

On the unexpected but positive side, collaborations with community partners have been valuable for both sides, and as a result, Arno Verhoeven has joined the board of Architecture and Design Scotland and Alette Willis has joined the 'Story Circle' (similar to a Board but working on Sociocracy principles) of the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network, so there will be ongoing impact from this project on these two organisations and from these organisations onto our academic work.

We came to understand our own interdisciplinary qualitative research as a mode of storytelling. One of our interviewees said about his own practice as a storyteller: 'And what I catch through these old folktales and myths is a different sensitivity, a sensitivity to patterns rather than facts.' We resonate with this description. Through our analysis, we have been looking for patterns in the stories told to us about the role that storytelling can play in shifting society to net-zero. We have shared these patterns in this report. Each of us, coming from our own disciplinary perspectives has interpreted the stories that were told to us slightly differently and it is through dialogue between us and between us and the IAs that the findings this report conveys have emerged.   Our knowledge of the British Academy as an audience has shaped the telling in this report. We will tell this story slightly differently to other audiences.

With thanks to all the IAs who gave their time to this project, we have a rich set of data, which we will be working with for some time to come. It is so rich that we simply cannot do justice to everything that was shared with us in such a short report.

Some further avenues for research have become apparent through this research. Although there has been quite a lot of experimental research into audiences for written and recorded stories (see Polletta and Redman for a summary 2020), as far as we can find out, no research has been done into the impact on listeners of live storytelling.   As the shifting of narratives happens within individual and communities of listeners, such research would help further understandings of the role this sector can play and good practices to take in communicating on net-zero. Finally, our ongoing work in applying the findings from this study to other forms of story-sharing in collaboration with community partners is another area where systematic research could prove useful.

Financial Summary

There were only three elements to our project budget:

- Postdoctoral research/clerical assistance
- Travel, fieldwork and related expenses
- transcription costs ('Other costs')

We underspent our travel expenses as the challenges around the ongoing pandemic meant that there were not as many in-person events to attend as we had hoped. Because we had fewer events to choose from, we were unable to find dates which we could all attend as originally planned and so attended events individually.

We overspent on transcription costs for a number of reasons. We did an additional interview, 7 instead of the planned 6. Most interviews were longer than planned, so we had more minutes of recording to be transcribed. We were also delayed in our data collection, as explained above, and so we needed to pay for expedited transcribing, which was significantly more expensive, to enable us to do our analysis in time for this final report. As our transcription over-spend is smaller than our travel under-spend, we hope that the British Academy will accept these changes to our spending.

Please note: The University of Edinburgh is currently implementing a new finance system, and payroll transactions for June 2022 are not currently visible. As such the School Research Office has estimated payroll costs for Jule Hildemann for June using previous months. We expect some movement in the figures, due to monthly payroll adjustments. Therefore, the final statement of expenditure will follow this report statement later in July.

Budget Category	Budget	Expenditure	Variance
Travel, fieldwork and related expenses	£3,400.00	£626.74	£2,773.26
Networking costs	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Postdoctoral research/clerical assistance	£15,312.11	£14,565.92	£746.19
Other costs (Transcription)	£891.00	£1,630.08	-£739.08
	£19,603.11	£15,192.66	£3,519.45

Outputs and Dissemination

The following table lists our completed and planned outputs, dissemination and knowledge exchange events. The right-hand column reports whether the item was included in the original proposal or is a new item.

Output/Dissemination Event	*Notes*	Proposal/New
Contributed a session on 'The Sociology of Working with Stories for Social Change' to SCCAN's Storyteller Collective training series	*Alette Willis, 17 February 2022*	New
Invited Keynote at SCCAN Community Climate Networking Conference, Edinburgh	*Alette Willis, 11 March 2022*	New
STEM and Sustainability mini-programme for STEM Initial Teacher education students of the postgraduate diploma in education programme at Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh	*Ramsey Affifi, 12 April 2022,* Held at Edinburgh City Council's Lagganlia Outdoor Centre in Glen Feshie, led by Andrew Bagnall, Outdoor Learning for Edinburgh Council	Proposal
Abstract for Cumulus Conference '22: Design for Adaptation	*Arno Verhoeven as lead, accepted 12 May 2022*	New
Facilitated an Open Space session on 'Stories for Change' at Transition Together, international conference online	*Alette Willis, 27 May 2022*	New
Knowledge Exchange with Informed Advocates on initial findings.	*Full Team, 8th June 2022*	New
Compilation of suggested stories for social change in relation to nature crises: https://restoryingtheearth.com/stories/research-on-storytelling-ethics-and-social-transformation/shifting-the-narrative/	*1 June 2022*	New
Compilation of suggested networks for storytelling and shifting the narrative: https://restoryingtheearth.com/stories/research-on-storytelling-ethics-and-social-transformation/shifting-the-narrative/	*15 June 2022*	New
Paper for Cumulus Conference '22 drafted 'Design, Storytelling, and our Environment: Critical insights from an empirical study with storytellers'	*Arno Verhoeven as lead, submittted 20 June 2022*	New
Resource for the Big Scottish Story Ripple with TRACS https://www.sisf.org.uk/community-programme	*Alette Willis, Resource will be sent out in September 2022, draft completed 20 June 2022*	Proposal
Architecture and Design Scotland Session - Met with Blackburn Secondary School - Further public engagement event	*Arno Verhoeven* - *May 25 2022* - *July 2022 (TBC)*	Proposal

Podcast – 1000 Better Stories (SCCAN): https://www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk/1000-better-stories/	*Alette Willis, to be released on the podcast by the end of September 2022*	Proposal
Scottish International Storytelling Festival Global Labs contribution online	*Full Team, 25 October 2022 as proposed*	Proposal
Learning for Sustainability Scotland Session	*Ramsey Affifi, conference rescheduled to October 2022*	Proposal
Presentation at Cumulus Conference '22	*Arno Verhoeven, November 2-4th 2022*	New
The findings from this project are shaping the design and delivery of a postgraduate module on the new MSc in Narrative Futures at the Edinburgh Futures Institute: https://efi.ed.ac.uk/narrative-futures/	*Alette Willis, February-March 2023, fusion teaching so available on and off-campus and for CPD*	New
Annual House of the West Wind Lecture on storytelling and society	*Alette Willis, December 2023*	New
Journal article for Environmental Education Research (first draft) –	*Replaced by the Cumulus paper above, although we do intend to write a paper for this journal on this project in the future*	Proposal
Draft chapter for The Earth Stories Collection	*Willis as lead, not yet completed*	Proposal
Podcast – Restorying the Earth	*Willis, podcast on hiatus as research project taking up all available time*	Proposal
Practitioner conferences on Outdoor & Environmental Education	*Hildmann, not yet completed*	Proposed

Data:

As per the data plan in our proposal, we have uploaded anonymized survey responses, anonymized and attributed interview transcripts (as relevant) and fieldnotes to the University's DataShare system so that they are available to future ethically-reviewed academic research. The data can be found here (please note, the data itself is embargoed by DataShare until mid-July and so will not be accessible until then):

https://datashare.ed.ac.uk/handle/10283/4461

- And many more who wished to remain anonymous

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Endnotes

[i] A list of IAs who wished to have their names made public can be found under Acknowledgments

[ii] Most of the people we talked to label themselves as 'storytellers' and call what they do 'storytelling'. However, because practitioners in a range of fields have also adopted the title of 'storyteller' and call what they do in a range of mediums from television, to social media, to marketing 'storytelling', we signalled our more narrow focus here using the adjectives 'traditional' and 'performance'.   Such storytellers work predominantly with the spoken word in a non-scripted fashion with a live audience. For the remainder of this report, we will simply use 'storyteller' and 'storytelling', while still referring to this particular group of practitioners.

[iii] A tradition bearer is defined here as someone who holds knowledge, including stories, from an oral tradition in an unbroken line, i.e. they learned that knowledge orally, not from written texts.

[iv] We are working on this with Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) and Architecture and Design Scotland.

[v] The recording of the day can be found on Youtube, this particular discussion begins at 5:54
https://youtu.be/Ds_3A6r9QTY