

Report ENSOr5 – 14.03.2024 - Workshop 2: How to engage and activate stakeholders? Awareness raising - storytelling – cocreation

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Context and goal of the workshop:

Six years after the first workshop on raising awareness about emerging contaminants in soil, we organized a second workshop at ENSOr5. We aimed to assess changes in awareness since 2018, reflect on lessons learned, and explore ways (such as storytelling, cocreation, stewardship, ...) to improve our awareness raising approach in the future. We also discussed both 'individual' and 'collective' roles of stakeholders and potential actions.

Workshop results:

Participants briefly introduced themselves and shared something 'that made them happy that day'. This simple ritual aimed to encourage 'storytelling' and to '**foster gratitude**'*, creating a sense of connection within the group.

Ellen then shared a personal story about living in a "No Regret Zone" since 2021, near a firefighting station, contaminated with PFAS. Her honest story resonated with participants, evoking empathy and '**acknowledgement for the/honouring our pain**'*, and allowing for a non-polarizing discussion on the emotional impact of emerging contaminants on affected communities, authorities, experts involved.

We discussed changes in awareness on emerging contaminants since the previous workshop, noting significant progress in recommendations from the 2018-workshop: increased knowledge, data availability, and regulatory measures, leading to heightened awareness of emerging contaminants. However, due to their complex nature and rapid evolution, perceptions of their impact remain 'polarized', creating tensions between precautionary principles and pragmatic approaches, often resulting in feelings of powerlessness and frustration among stakeholders. We explored ways to draw lessons from this and searched for '**seeing with new eyes**'* to promote awareness in a less polarizing (and more unifying) manner to foster systemic and collective 'step by step' solutions.

We proposed the use of **storytelling** as an instrument to work on the wicked problem of emerging contaminants. Storytelling raises systemic awareness, making people look at all elements involved and the interconnections within the wider system. It fosters connection and engagement among stakeholders and helps systems change since it gives deeper understanding, builds community and helps rewrite our worldviews/dominating beliefs systems.

Conclusion:

Raising awareness is crucial for collaborative efforts to address wicked problems like emerging contaminants. Storytelling can play a unifying role, allowing everyone to participate in the narrative. To conclude, we invited each participant to consider which role they could and would like to take on '**moving forward/going forth**'*.

*we followed the structure of Joanna Macy – Active Hope about finding and offering our best response when facing concerns about our world situation - <https://www.activehope.info/images> where you find The Dandelion

An example of storytelling on stewardship for soil care can be found [here](#) (Dutch) and [here](#) (English)

A video with more than 23 soil care storytellers (in Dutch) can be found [here](#)