

Synthesis Papers: Guidance to Authors

Project Title: Future Uses of Space (FUS): Narrative Evidence for Science & Technology Advantage through linking Research and Policy

Project Aim: The project's aim is to demonstrate how narrative evidence gathered as part of storylistening can be used to inform policy decision-making. The specific challenge identified by the principal policy "client", the Government Office for Science, is: "*How can the government better use narrative evidence to manage uncertainties in policy areas to advance the UK's Science and Technology Strategic Advantage?*"

The project's approach is to bring together academics and practitioners to develop a principal case study focusing on the policy questions and evidence surrounding potential future uses of space. For the final report, these findings will be complemented by lighter touch case studies in three other areas: nuclear weapons, AI and climate change.

Project Definitions: Narrative evidence is the product of the expert act of both direct critical engagement with stories (broadly defined), and critical engagement with others' storyimbining (a term used to cover all activities such as story- reading, watching, listening, and interacting). Critical engagement means explicit observation, analysis, and reflection. Narrative evidence is the evidence gathered by *storylistening* - the theory and practice of gathering narrative evidence to inform decision-making, especially in relation to public reasoning, as part of a pluralistic evidence base.

Brief: The project is commissioning 8 synthesis papers of 7-8000 words, with an 800 word executive summary, from academics with narrative expertise across the humanities and social sciences. The purpose of the papers is to synthesise the most cutting-edge research in an academic field of relevance, in order to generate evidence in ways that will in turn, and when set alongside scientific and technical evidence, inform decision-making by space policy practitioners.

'Evidence synthesis' refers to the process of bringing together information and knowledge from a range of sources within or across disciplines to inform debates and decisions on specific issues. This definition is taken from the Royal Society and the Academy of Medical Sciences' [report](#) on performing evidence synthesis, which provides further useful guidance. Synthesis requires systematically looking across the research available within the relevant discipline(s)/field(s) and, in an expert fashion, making judgements about what is most relevant to the policy question, conveying this for an audience outside the discipline, and doing so in a way that includes uncertainty,

disagreement and contention, where it is important for the reader to be aware of them. Synthesis is not about advocating for a particular academic approach, theory or method, nor for a particular policy solution or worldview; rather, it is a process of mapping the range of evidence that is potentially relevant and is academically robust, describing the terrain and the difference between the various elements of it.

Each project synthesis paper should draw together research and evidence from the relevant discipline, attending to the cognitive value that can be derived from consideration of the functioning of relevant stories. As authors, you are invited to think specifically about the four cognitive and collective functions of stories outlined in *Storylistening*. These four functions are: offering multiple points of view and new **framings**; providing insights into **collective identities**; functioning as narrative **models** that enable surrogate reasoning about the target system; and informing **anticipations** of the future.

The attachment to this guidance sets out a range of areas of policy and evidence which reflect the interests of policy practitioners today. These summaries are intended to help you scope and focus your synthesis paper. You may select one or several of the issues raised. You may also consider that there is some evidence or issue not included, but where there is evidence from your field that practitioners should be considering. If so, please include it, but remember that in order to build confidence in the use of narrative evidence across academic-policy interfaces, it will be important to demonstrate value on both sides, and for each to pay attention to what the other is saying.

The synthesis papers and executive summaries should be submitted to Elena Violaris (ev299@cam.ac.uk) by Friday 2nd June, and they will be circulated in advance of the workshop on Tuesday 18th July 2023. The papers will be included in the final project report.

Style: The synthesis papers must be clear to a lay person: that is, to anyone inside or outside academia, who is not an expert on the material, but who can be assumed to be willing to read the paper carefully and thoughtfully. The papers should therefore be informed by academic insight and expertise, but written in an accessible manner distinct from the kind of paper that would be sent, for example, for specialist peer review. The papers can include suggestions for further reading, but must be intelligible on a stand-alone basis without the further reading.

Examples of synthesis papers: This project is trialling what narrative evidence might look like and how it creates value and impact. It is therefore as experimental in terms of what it is asking of academics as it is in terms of what it is asking of policymakers -

challenging humanities scholars to effectively produce such evidence and challenging policymakers to start to gather and include it. We therefore cannot provide examples of exactly what we are seeking. But, as a synthesis author, you might consider two adjacent types of material:

1. Short examples of the stimulus paper form, but not examples of narrative evidence: see this [page](#) in the PDF documents on the right, from Sarah Dillon's 'The Function of Stories' to Tim Radford's 'Of Word and Image'.
2. Longer examples of synthesis of humanities scholarship for policymakers. Again, not narrative evidence specifically, but useful as examples of synthesis, and for style and tone: see the British Academy's report '[The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19](#)'.

Additional Commitments:

1. The Project Team hopes that UK-based synthesis paper authors will be willing to attend a one-day workshop with policymakers on 18th July 2023, in London. This workshop will be structured to enable the production, transfer and use of narrative evidence in relation to space policy, and draw out the project's more general findings on narrative evidence. However good the writing of a paper is, we find that the hard work on interdisciplinary and cross-boundary thinking that takes place at such a workshop goes much better when the authors are present. Such discussions are also invariably extremely interesting.
2. In order to support authors in writing the synthesis papers, the project team provided a 2 hour training session from 3.00-5.00 p.m. on Monday 20th February, online, which provides an introduction to the project, an overview on engaging with policy, a recap of the aims of the synthesis papers as outlined here, and a chance for questions and discussions. This session was recorded, and can be shared by Elena on request.

From the Project Team: Elena Violaris; Sarah Dillon; Claire Craig; Alex Tasker