

reframe  
the debate

# What we share

Experiences of narrative change practice  
in Germany



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in Germany**



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# Introduction



## Introduction

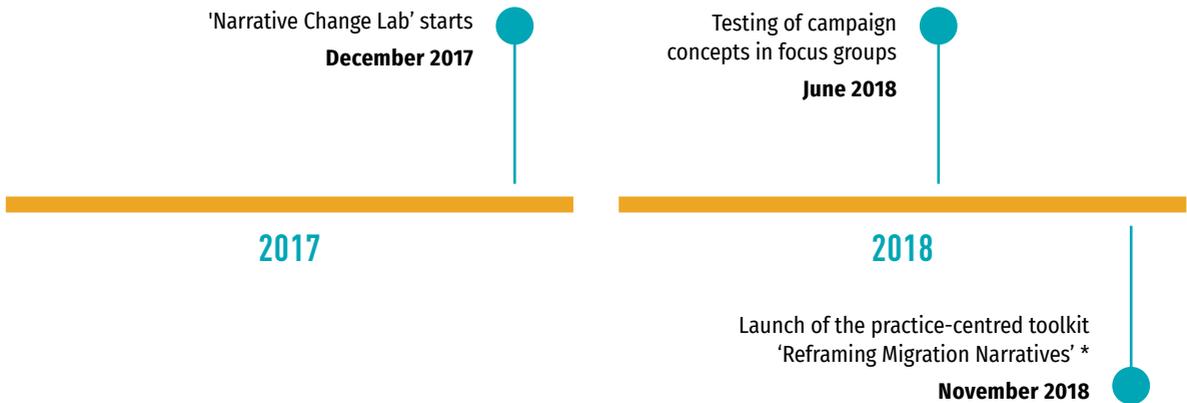
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**Lisa Quinn**

Director, International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA)

It's a real pleasure to close one chapter of ICPA's narrative change work by profiling a selection of the German practitioners in the fields of diversity, migration and integration who were integral to the success of this phase and give them space to reflect on their experience of participating in the Narrative Change Lab. We hope that readers enjoy learning about the practitioners' first-hand experience as much as the ICPA team enjoyed accompanying them in this process, and that you get a sense of the open, ambitious and strong collaborative spirit which each and every participant brought to the Lab.

As narrative change gains momentum as an advocacy approach, there is a growing body of research and thinking in this field, but the lessons learned from those applying the approach in practice in Europe are not yet widely documented or shared. In our toolkits and resources, we share campaigning guidance built on real cases and practice. Our intention throughout this publication is to add another layer of insight by bringing the work to an experiential level, and providing space for eight German practitioners to share their reflections on learning about and experimenting with narrative change. By adding this layer, we hope to further demystify the reframing approach and share what it really takes to do this work. At a minimum, we hope that readers will appreciate the complementary role this approach can play alongside other advocacy/activism tools, and, at a maximum, that some will be inspired to join the expanding circle of German and wider European practitioners working to rebalance the public debate on migration and integration.

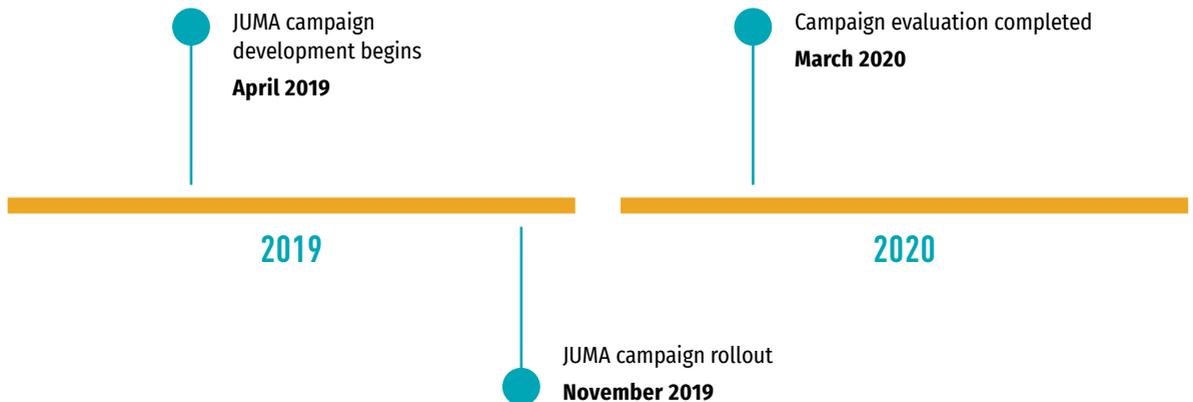


\* [www.narrativechange.org](http://www.narrativechange.org)

## The path to narrative change work & the Lab

Let's start with a backdrop on why ICPA decided to get involved in this public advocacy work, given that our focus up to that point was on supporting the policy analysis and advocacy capacity of researchers and activists to better inform decision making with more expertise and evidence towards advancing the core values of an open society. We worked over an extended period with advocates and activists in migration and integration, most closely with a European network of practitioners<sup>1</sup>, and that collaboration shed light on the growing challenge for advocates. In the 2008–2015 period, with the growing mainstreaming of fear-driven, othering, populist narratives, it became clearer that our partners were losing the middle group in the migration debate, which had the direct effect that decision makers were no longer open to their proposals. We synthesise this challenge as follows: **in divisive and intractable issues such as migration, the public debate sets the boundary of acceptable policy choices.**

We articulated our theory of change as follows: if we can support our partners' efforts to rebalance the public debate and turn down the anxiety on migration, then this will serve to open the political space and build the constituency needed for more inclusive and diversity-driven policy proposals to be seriously considered by reasonable politicians and policymakers. We knew this would require our partners to add a different communication approach and tactics to their advocacy toolbox, so we sought to experiment with a reframing approach in the German context that would:



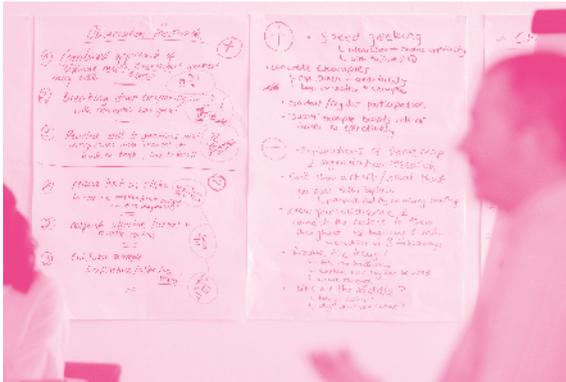
- ▶ **Focus on broadening, rather than countering narratives** by starting and steering a different conversation rather than staying stuck in negating the frames<sup>2</sup> – and ultimately, the agenda – of others;
- ▶ **Adopt a value-based approach to messaging**, centred on developing and actively advocating for new positive narratives that embody shared/unifying values which resonate with a wider public; and
- ▶ **Broaden the target audiences for communication** beyond the usual circle of existing supporters (the base) or attacking hard opponents, i.e. an expansion with communications to also target those in the middle who are neither supporters nor opponents – often called the ‘movable middle’ or balancers<sup>3</sup>.

We established a new pillar of work at ICPA called ‘Reframing for Impact’ to deliver this approach for a 10-year period, knowing from experience that systemic work requires commitment, investment and persistence – it’s the long-game! And then we got to work! The first main initiative under this pillar was the pilot project “Reframe the debate! New migration narratives for constructive dialogue” which we implemented from 2017–2019<sup>4</sup>. This project followed a year of groundwork in 2016<sup>5</sup> which enabled us to develop a strong analytical foundation, insights from international practice and an initial network to work with in Germany. The Narrative Change Lab was the core component of this pilot project and we decided to call it a Lab as we were experimenting on two levels.



First, as stated above, we wanted to see if we could build a network willing to communicate beyond the base to more challenging audiences in the middle. This wasn't an 'easy sell'. We anticipated the reaction of some that communicating to the more sceptical 'movable middle' audience would be seen as watering down or selling out on one's principles. From our own experiences and the fact that progressives had been losing ground in the middle with existing approaches, we could see that a more emotionally smart approach was needed so that advocates could successfully bring middle audiences to the table. Once they are at the table, there are opportunities to have the difficult conversations about principles and bring in facts and analysis. But for these audiences, the approaches need to be carefully sequenced. Further, and maybe more importantly, we stress that it's not one approach or the other; we need all approaches to turn the tide. As our partner Frank Sharry so succinctly puts it, **"It's not either/or but both/and."** There were also valid fears from membership-based organisations that branching out to the middle would be at the expense of their base, with many asking: "How can we do this communications work without losing our base?". We shared evidence and tactics from practice to address this, including full transparency and involving your membership in the process of developing and testing new narratives.

The second dimension to the experiment was to see if the group could identify shared values they had in common with middle audiences and, on that basis, develop new narratives that would resonate with middle audiences and open a space for constructive dialogue. At this point in the Lab we moved from a focus on learning into testing the approach in practice. We were delighted that a small but growing NGO, JUMA<sup>6</sup>, stepped up to try out a reframing approach through a pilot campaign "Together Human" (in German "gemeinsam menschlich")<sup>7</sup> and invested significant resources



from their teams in Berlin and Stuttgart in this work. Lab participants from WIR MACHEN DAS (“We are doing it”)<sup>8</sup> and DeutschPlus<sup>9</sup> also invested in developing the concept for a campaign called “Original Nürnberger”. In doing so, members of the Lab discovered that they did in fact share some values with middle audiences and could communicate to them whilst remaining true to their organisational values and missions.

In addition to ICPA playing our usual role of navigating campaign teams through the development process with training and mentoring, it was great to see the level of solidarity and hands-on input that emerged organically among Lab participants in support of JUMA. The reflections of those interviewed who were involved in making and supporting the campaign show what a rich experience it was. We’re also delighted that our partner Social Change Initiative (SCI)<sup>10</sup> invested in documenting the exciting and challenging journey of JUMA’s campaign development and have shared this online as a case study<sup>11</sup>. As it documents, JUMA’s small-scale pilot campaign resonated well with the target middle audiences! This practical and positive experience gives a solid foundation for advocates/activists to build on, as well as giving hope that this approach can and does work in Germany.

#### Four (of many lessons) from the Lab

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The Narrative Change Lab proved to be a valuable learning experience for us all – the ICPA team and the emerging German community of narrative change practitioners – and we share the lessons learned as widely as possible. I hone in here on four key



lessons that are also brought up in the eight interviews in this publication and which we feel are worth pulling together to share as our collective advice for those supporting or engaged in narrative change work:

### 1. Foster a safe, supportive, peer-oriented environment to motivate and engage activists

At risk of stating the obvious, narrative change work is not easy! It is particularly challenging for those used to empowerment, rights and/or evidence-driven approaches to activism and communications/advocacy. Hence, building a community that values solidarity and openly provides support is key to advancing this work and proved crucial to the effectiveness of the Lab. At ICPA, we always speak about **building the skills and confidence of advocates**. Creating a safe and collaborative learning environment has been a key factor to achieving that dual goal over the years. In the Narrative Change Lab, this turned out to be even more important than usual! Lab participants were struggling with how to effectively respond as the migration debate became increasingly heated and angry, and fear was a big factor. Supporting people well in the experimentation process and fostering a collaborative community of practice felt so important; ensuring against a 'sink or swim' approach. The environment of the Lab was appreciated by many, as comes through in the stories of the participants in this publication. Ultimately, we see this as one of the key factors in enabling participants to engage more deeply with the reframing approach and in building networks that can take this work forward and to scale.



## 2. Test to see what works and build confidence of activists

The experimental process of developing narrative change campaigns needs to be grounded in testing and evaluation. Throughout the project we worked steadily to develop an evaluation framework and try out different methods and tools. Conducting focus groups with target middle audiences to test the concepts for pilot campaigns proved especially pivotal. It's not a surprise that several participants interviewed here bring it up, as the experience had a lasting impression on us all! Having Lab participants observe the testing process not only 'exposed' them to the middle audiences in real life, but also mobilised a wider circle to support the work, and enabled a deeper sense of solidarity among the group as they shared this challenging yet exciting experience. The broader evaluation and other lessons learned from the JUMA campaign, which we are sharing in Germany and beyond, have proven to be inspirational for others, as they see that the application of a reframing approach is possible and can be effective (and not just in Anglo-Saxon contexts)!

## 3. Draw on inspirational international practitioners for support and strategic guidance

Standing on the shoulders of giants is an ICPA policy that has served us well over the years. In this project we drew extensively on experienced international reframing practitioners to inspire and provide moral support for our German network as well as strategic guidance for ICPA management in building up the work. In addition, their campaigning practice was valuable input into building the case studies for Lab



workshops and our toolkit<sup>12</sup>. Lab participants interviewed here also express their appreciation for this international support, showing how much it mattered. We are fortunate to count many generous-spirited partners among our international network, all of which made valuable contributions to the project. Of particular note are Frank Sharry of America's Voice, Sunder Katwala and Steve Ballinger of British Future, Arun Devisa and Nick Spooner of HOPE not hate, and Tim Dixon of More in Common. Our partner SCI played a pivotal role in this regard and has been amazing at turning international connections into in-person support at our workshops and events!

#### **4. Be flexible to accommodate different people playing different roles**

Narrative change work is not one-size-fits-all! In fact, it's crucial when working to scale that the different but complementary roles of a variety of actors are respected and accommodated. In the Lab, some chose to be learners and/or supporters rather than start campaigning directly and we respected and welcomed all these different roles. Readiness is a key factor. As stated above, this work is not easy and communicating with middle audiences is not for everyone for a variety of valid reasons. In the end, we were delighted that 28 organisations participated in the Lab, playing the role that was best for them, with 11 participants also stepping up to be trained as ICPA's Narrative Change Associates<sup>13</sup> to champion this approach to a wider circle of German and international practitioners. Our intention with the eight Lab participants interviewed here is to reflect the diversity of roles and experiences. Learning about their individual journeys is fascinating and has a wider reaching impact than a homogenous group would have brought to the experiment.



## Next steps to strategic communications and a movement perspective

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After the promising experiment building up narrative change work in Germany, we now focus on scaling up through our Strategic Communications Incubator programme<sup>15</sup>. This programme is designed to support the burgeoning movement that is needed to turn around the public debate and put the core values of diversity, inclusion and social cohesion firmly back on the policy agenda. Under the Incubator framework, we're working to build up a set of interconnected Resource Hubs offering the support and expertise activists and campaigners need to professionalise their communications practice (e.g. learning & mentoring, testing & evaluation). We're prioritising supporting influential networks to build the infrastructure needed to lift narrative change campaigning to the strategic communications level and work to the scale needed to change narrative structures and, ultimately, shift norms. A flavour of our work in this initiative is the five-year project supporting a nationwide network to positively shift the public debate on Islam and Muslims in Germany and embed strategic communications practices in their networks over the long-term<sup>15</sup>. We are also supporting a European coalition to add a narrative dimension to their advocacy work on freedom of movement/EU mobility policy<sup>16</sup>.

We wouldn't be in the position of scaling up this work without wide-ranging support – narrative change really does take a village! In addition to those mentioned above, we want to acknowledge the valuable guidance of Andreas Hieronymus (Open Society Foundations), Astrid Ziebarth (German Marshall Fund of the United States), Bernd Knopf (Federal Chancellery at the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration), and Simon Kuper (journalist) to the Lab in an advisory



role. We're grateful to SCI, the "Demokratie leben!" programme and Open Society Foundations as key partners who invested in our work early and over a longer period, continuing into the Strategic Communications Incubator. This support has given us the space and resources to develop well in a staged manner. Last but definitely not least, we'd like to express our deep appreciation for the community of Lab participants and especially the team of Narrative Change Associates. Thank you for your trust in ICPA and for your enthusiasm and bravery to take the leap and be at the start of something new, which is never easy! It's been a privilege for us to walk alongside you and we're looking forward to the next steps together.

Finally, this publication is an open invitation to join the expanding community of practitioners and supporters committed to this much-needed communication work. As you step up to play your unique role in shaping the public debate – whatever that may be – you can be sure that there is a supportive learning community awaiting you. Shifting narratives and norms is a bold ambition, but it's a destination that all together we can make a reality!

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- 1 Supported by Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE). Key research from the At Home in Europe programme [www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/living-together-projects-promoting-inclusion-11-eu-cities](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/living-together-projects-promoting-inclusion-11-eu-cities)
  - 2 More on the power of frames: [www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/01-understanding-power-frames](http://www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/01-understanding-power-frames)
  - 3 More on the movable middle: [www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/11-target-middle-segments-their-current-frames](http://www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/11-target-middle-segments-their-current-frames)
  - 4 With support from German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth under the federal programme Demokratie leben! with co-financing support from Social Change Initiative (SCI).
  - 5 Supported by Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE), part of Open Society Foundations (OSF)
  - 6 JUMA – jung, muslimisch, aktiv [www.juma-ev.de/juma/](http://www.juma-ev.de/juma/)
  - 7 [www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/](http://www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/)



- 8 [wirmachendas.jetzt/en/](http://wirmachendas.jetzt/en/)
- 9 [www.deutsch-plus.de/](http://www.deutsch-plus.de/)
- 10 [www.socialchangeinitiative.com/](http://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/)
- 11 [www.socialchangeinitiative.com/gemeinsam-menschlich-together-human-a-public-campaign-to-move-the-middle-a-case-study](http://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/gemeinsam-menschlich-together-human-a-public-campaign-to-move-the-middle-a-case-study)
- 12 [www.narrativechange.org](http://www.narrativechange.org)
- 13 [www.narrativechange.org/news/events/training-narrative-change-associates-spread-word](http://www.narrativechange.org/news/events/training-narrative-change-associates-spread-word)
- 14 [www.narrativechange.org/incubator](http://www.narrativechange.org/incubator)
- 15 RESET – Building Strategic Communications to Reset Public Narratives on Islam in Germany, a project in partnership with CLAIM Allianz (<https://www.claim-allianz.de/en/>) and funded by the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth under the federal programme Demokratie leben! with co-financing from Robert Bosch Stiftung. [www.narrativechange.org/RESET](http://www.narrativechange.org/RESET)
- 16 Supporting the Civic Observatory on the Rights of EU Citizens (CORE), which is a joint venture of the European Citizens Action Service (ECAS), the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and Medecins du Monde (MdM). This work is funded by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM).

# The "Reframe the Debate"-Project in numbers

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Through the project "Reframe the Debate!" New Migration Narratives for Constructive Dialogue (2017–2019) we ...

... Directly supported 28 German organisations

28

221

... built the capacity of 221 participants

... distributed 3000 copies of the '12 Keys to reframing the migration debate'

3000

...trained up 11 Narrative Change Associates<sup>17</sup>

11

<sup>17</sup> [www.narrativechange.org/news/events/training-narrative-change-associates-spread-word](http://www.narrativechange.org/news/events/training-narrative-change-associates-spread-word)

23000

... facilitated 23000 views  
of the Reframing Migration Toolkit

... shared lessons with 650 German  
and international activists

650

2

... developed and tested 2 narrative change campaigns

... presented at 30 partner events

30

55

... cooperated with a wider network of 55 German  
and international organisations



## Framing the research

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**Sarah Lyall**

Programme Manager, International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA)

The Narrative Change Lab built the capacity of 221 participants, worked closely with 28 German organisations, and developed and tested two campaigns. These numbers are useful for understanding the scale and reach of the Lab, but they only tell us so much. Behind them are the personal stories of the activists, campaigners, policy advisers, creatives, grantmakers and journalists who took part – their experiences, challenges, triumphs and lessons, and the changes they have gone on to make in their institutions and in the migration debate. Moving from outputs to outcomes is where we find longer-term, sustainable results.

Complementing quantitative data collected throughout the *Reframe the debate* project, this publication adds a qualitative dimension based on interview research with Lab participants. Through 1:1 semi-structured interviews with individuals, I sought to understand:

**What motivated participants to get involved in the Lab?**

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**What did they learn?**

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**What impact did it have on their approach to their work?**

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**What wider impacts resulted, on institutions and in society?**

The eight participants interviewed were selected to reflect the diversity of backgrounds and experiences involved in the Narrative Change Lab, with a spread across professions, level of engagement in migration (frontline, communications, arts and media, policy), and type of participation in the Lab.



I interviewed some Lab participants who were engaged from start to finish, others who were deeply involved in specific sections; those who developed campaigns, and those who supported or observed campaign development. This ensured coverage of the range of possibilities in terms of lessons learned and types of impact.

### Variable

### Definition

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#### **Individual skills and knowledge**

Set of skills and knowledge gained in the Lab and put into practice since

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#### **Institutional changes**

Changes made within the individual's own organisation as a result of new knowledge or skills gained in the Lab

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#### **Transfer within networks**

Sharing and spreading the approach and practice from the Lab with other networks, organisations and individuals

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#### **Reaching the movable middle**

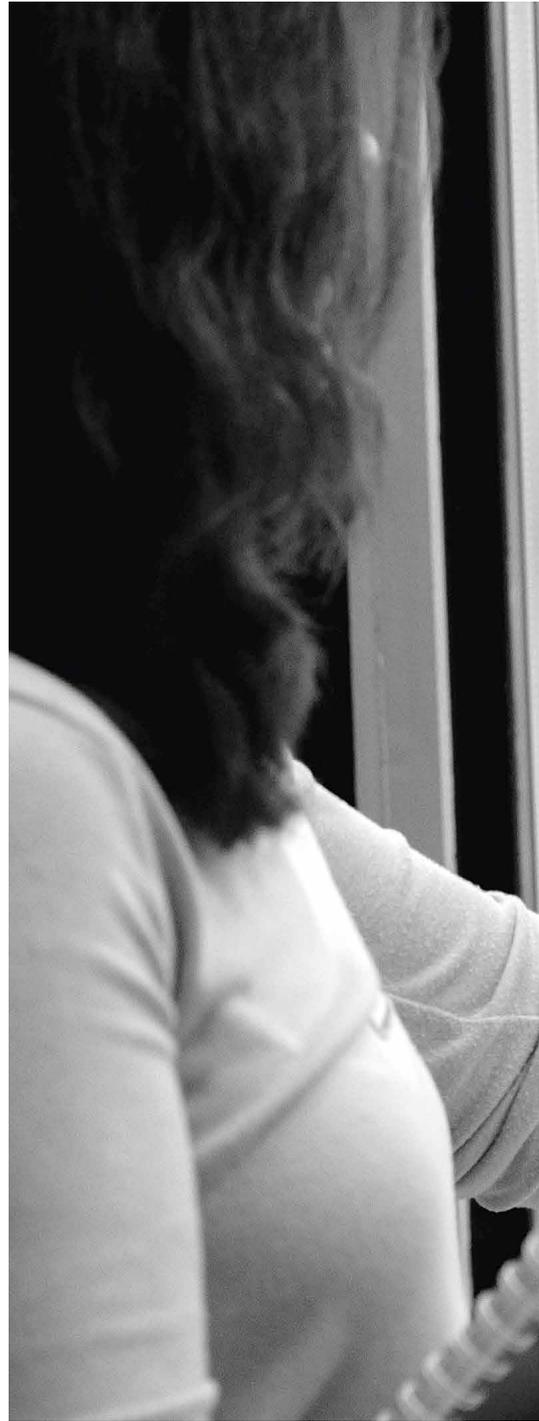
Effective practice engaging with middle audiences on a personal, institutional or campaign level, with the potential to change the migration debate



From the start of the research, I hypothesised four potential impacts of the Lab based on the project's goals and activities. I used these as variables, which I examined through the interviews:

Coding the interview transcripts for these variables, I found instances of every type of impact, with many of the participants sharing examples across all four. The profiles shared here focus on the strongest and most striking outcomes for each person, which teach us both about the overall impact of the Lab and useful lessons for the practice of narrative change. Each story is told by the participant themselves, in their words, with edits made only for clarity and fluency. My analysis is included as bolded sentences introducing each segment.

Interviewing the participants was the highlight of the research, and I am grateful to each individual for the time they took to reflect and share their stories and insights. I hope you find hearing their reflections as interesting and helpful as I did, and that these stories encourage you that narrative change is not only possible, but can also be an enjoyable process!





What not could usefully be done at the EU & local level?

- local: lot for allies
- EU: granting campaigns (low scale, reduce admin. burdens)
- EU: open source campaigning materials/ marketing element, united language slogans

5) targeted, content specific campaigns

much more evaluation work than the rest of a campaign  
 keep all your own parameters and see each other as competitors  
 message → your brand  
 amplification  
 (you & your brand disagree)

work at EU level  
 - keep many parties  
 being fully involved  
~~as a~~ a healthy  
 and see hope to lead the discussion  
 see instead of being led

III  
 find campaigns at  
 for local and national  
 comments that  
 focus on  
 narrative change.

3)  
 shabby ideas  
 online campaigns  
 shabby across  
 audiences using  
 social media  
 develop specific  
 campaigns tailored to segments

# The Narrative Change Lab from the perspective of eight participants

Colour-code:  
**Main focus of the interview**

Institutional changes

Transfer within networks

Reaching the movable middle







## Nadia Wernli

Seite 32

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A designer and activist's story of putting theory into practice by empathising with and reaching out to the movable middle, and encouraging diverse Muslim organisations to develop skills in narrative change.



## Sophie Reimers

Seite 36

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A social scientist's story of finding a pragmatic approach to rebalancing the migration debate which bridges perspectives and welcomes the range of contributions migration sector organisations make.



## Sima Gatea

Seite 40

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A social business leader's story of discovering tangible solutions to deadlock in the migration debate and making narrative change a core part of rethinking and reworking integration.



## Karim El-Helaifi

Seite 44

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An activist's story of realising the power of frames in changing the ways diversity and Islam are discussed to shift the debate towards progressive values; in personal encounters, the media and through the communications of Germany's NGO sector.



## Sophie Rauscher

Seite 48

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An activist's story of overcoming resistance to speaking to the middle, to discover the importance of reaching them to win the debates that matter most, and that shared understanding is possible.



## Alice Lanzke

Seite 52

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A journalist's story of conviction that this approach is needed to change the tone of the debate in Germany, while recognising that it's not easy to work in this space and activists need the support of a community to do so.



## Heiko Kalmbach

Seite 56

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An artist's story of integrating narrative change into his art and teaching to broaden perspectives, open new possibilities and help heal society.

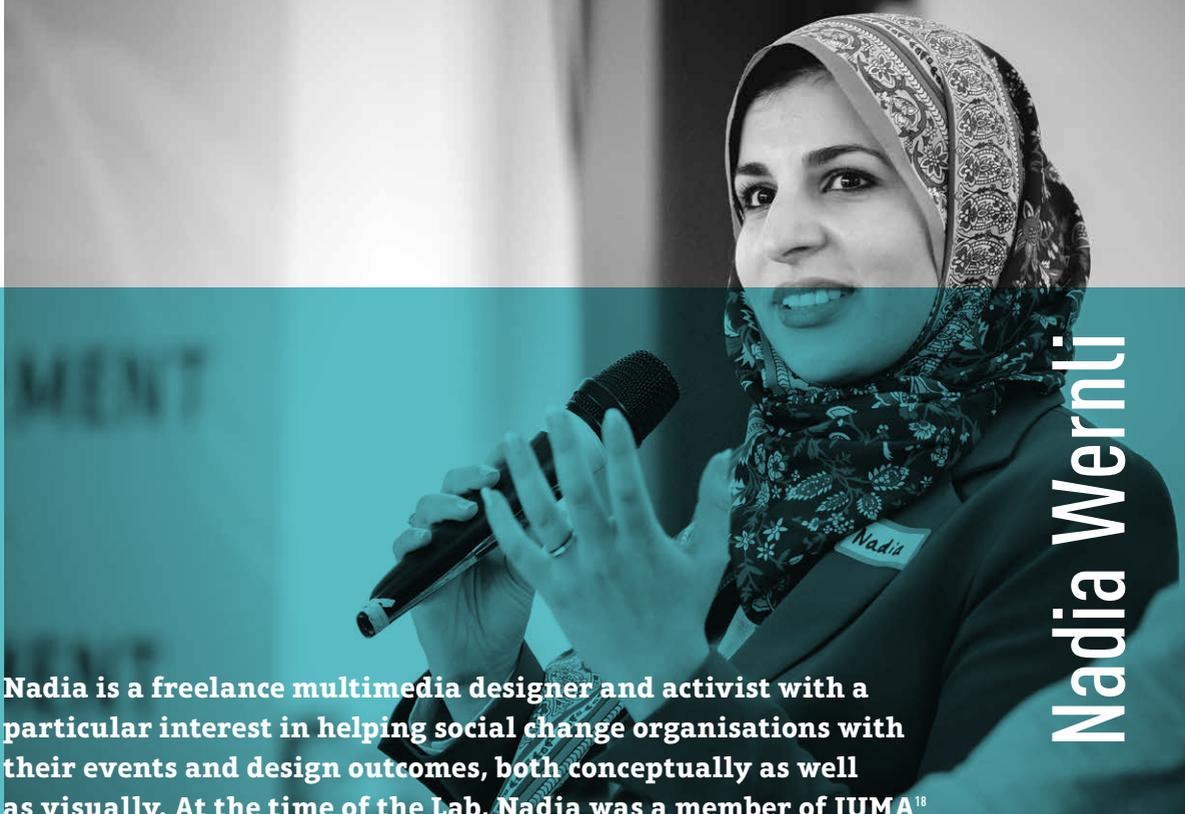


## Astrid Ziebarth

Seite 60

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A policy expert's story of seeing an approach known from the USA being applied on a practical, authentic level in Germany, and sharing the methods with a range of audiences, from NGOs and social movements to government ministries.



# Nadia Wernli

**Nadia is a freelance multimedia designer and activist with a particular interest in helping social change organisations with their events and design outcomes, both conceptually as well as visually. At the time of the Lab, Nadia was a member of JUMA<sup>18</sup> and co-led (with Karim, see p. 44) the creative development of JUMA's 'Together Human' campaign<sup>19</sup>. She is a strategic communications trainer, certified by ICPA to share the approach more widely.**



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## The work is showing the middle that it's OK that we have differences, while putting more emphasis on how much we have in common.

/ Nadia first heard about the Lab from members of JUMA Stuttgart, who told her about focus groups they had observed with the movable middle. She was intrigued by the emphasis on understanding the target audience, which she knew from design but had not seen applied in social change campaigns. /

» I heard that JUMA were developing a campaign focussing on a specific target group and that they did focus groups to test the reactions to draft campaign materials. This was interesting because I'd never heard of a campaign that actually did that. I know that in theory they should be doing that, but it doesn't usually happen. It makes perfect sense to me because of my background. Design is all about focussing on the target group, looking at their needs and trying to target those needs. «

/ After joining the Lab, Nadia got to know the middle herself through segmentation research and further testing. She realised the importance of developing empathy in order to reach them with campaigns. /

» The first step was self-reflection. Our problem is that the middle claims to know us although they don't. But it goes both ways. We claim the same thing. The kind of self-reflection, where you start being aware that you have no idea who you're talking to, is a huge eye opener because it makes you approach the whole conversation differently.

The middle are always being blamed for being ignorant but I think the bigger cause is them being scared; scared of what they do not understand. It's not nice to be scared. And I think this fear sometimes leads to developing feelings of hatred and even racism. So, the work is showing the middle that it's OK that we have differences, which can help reduce their fear, while putting more emphasis on how much we have in common. «

**/ Connecting with international campaigners and activists, who ICPA invited to share their practice with Lab participants, Nadia was encouraged that she is part of a global community with many strategies and specific problems, but a shared overall goal. /**

» It makes you realise that we're actually all just fighting for human causes [...] We met HOPE not hate<sup>20</sup> and British Future<sup>21</sup>. We met Frank Sharry from America's Voice<sup>22</sup>. Each of them have different issues, different techniques, different ways that they tackle the problems. But in the end, it comes back to the same [...] I think every minority thinks they're alone in the world and that no-one understands them. Then you realise, 'OK, there are many different minorities and we are all facing discriminatory experiences every day'. So, it brings us back to the human part – you realise we're all human and we're in this together. «

**/ The Lab gave Nadia opportunities to 'learn by doing' in a safe and supportive environment. Co-leading the creative development for the JUMA campaign allowed her consolidate new skills and see the narrative change approach succeed in real life. /**

» There was always a practical part, not just theory. So, everything we learned in theory had to be applied, which was sometimes challenging but you always got feedback from your peers and from instructors. It was a safe, open space – after all, you were trying something new.

Being part of the JUMA campaign brought it to a whole new level because we were putting all the knowledge together and into something others can to learn from. It made all the theoretical information we had so far tangible. We could see that, yes, it made a difference when we did it that way, when we stuck to the [narrative change] approach. «

**/ Applying the narrative change approach was challenging, particularly reaching the middle whilst ensuring the continued support of the base. Understanding the values shared by the Muslim community and the middle, and demonstrating these in the campaign, was an important solution./**

» My role was the creative implementation of the strategy into something that people would actually like to see and watch. So, first finding the suitable protagonists that embody the different values. Then moving forward with the production part, which meant deciding on the visual style and editing style.

I think the biggest challenge was that, on the one hand, you have your target group and their values, and at the same time, you have your own community that you are representing and that you don't want to lose [...] Are you going to sell out on your own values in order to reach the middle? Do you have to compromise and give up some values? No, you don't. We find the common ones and focus on them.

Whether it's Säli as a medical student, or Nariman as a soldier, or Ali as a firefighter, they all embody the value of teamwork and this was extremely important in their work, even vital [...] So, this was one way of showing the value of teamwork that was really important for the

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**This kind of campaigning is like the start of a new era. If people would really implement it, it would change so much.**

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middle and more broadly, is a major factor in any society. The other example is football. This was really good because it's something that many people like without it defying anyone's principles. It shows that there are so many things we all have in common and agree on, but we never talk about them. «

**/ Nadia would now like to see a scaling up of this campaigning work, with more Muslim organisations involved, and has a vision for how this could happen. /**

» In the Muslim community, we have different opinions, we have different ideologies, we have different associations, but we're still fighting – or rather living – for the same cause. We all want the same thing, which is to live in peace.

I think the 'Together Human' campaign, is all about that cause. So, you could keep the slogan and every year a different association would do the campaign [...] It would send a much stronger message. I'd love to gather all the different associations and give a crash course of the learnings from the Lab and do workshops on this kind of campaigning approach. «

**/ Ultimately, Nadia would like to see the debate rebalanced towards a sense of unity in diversity. /**

» This kind of campaigning is like the start of a new era. If people would really implement it, it would change so much. It's sick how the media takes things that are so rare and puts a huge spotlight on them. I think this kind of campaigning might even affect the media to start telling normal stories, because normal stories have drama in them. It's not the fake drama that leads to division and hatred. It's the kind of drama that actually lets you feel, 'OK, we're all part of the same world facing the same challenges'. «

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18 [www.juma-ev.de](http://www.juma-ev.de)

19 [www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/](http://www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/)

20 [www.hopenothate.org.uk](http://www.hopenothate.org.uk)

21 [www.britishfuture.org](http://www.britishfuture.org)

22 <https://americasvoice.org>



# Sophie Reimers

**Sophie is a cultural and social anthropologist who at the time of the Lab worked for WIR MACHEN DAS ('We are doing it'), a non-profit which brings together arts, culture, science and journalism to promote participation and diversity, in the context of migration.<sup>23</sup>**



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## I was struck by the idea that frames cannot be changed by just giving information.

**/ Sophie attended the Lab to gain insights for the work of WIR MACHEN DAS, but also found that it gave her a new perspective on the challenges of building support for migration more broadly. /**

» There's a different energy in this kind of workshop than in your normal work situation. It's condensed and you get a lot of input in a short time. I was always collecting information and giving it back to the team, and it was also interesting on a personal level.

In particular, I was struck by the idea that frames cannot be changed by just giving information, which is new for someone from a scientific background. During my [PhD] studies, I was always dealing with topics about immigration. We talked a lot about why people feel overwhelmed by globalisation and how we could transfer information out of our research to inform people,

so that nationalist ideas wouldn't become stronger. But for me it seemed it wasn't really working. In the Lab it became crystal clear that emotional approaches are much more powerful than just presenting information and facts. And that made a lot of sense. «

**/ In the narrative change approach, Sophie saw opportunities to bridge the gap between progressive (but rather academic and removed) conversations and the mainstream debate, in a way that could create meaningful change. /**

» Something that I realised on a personal level when I was studying and was part of all these discourses about gender and racism, was that they didn't have anything to do with the passions that were, for example, in my family. My family is relatively open and not conservative. But still, they are far from the political sensitivities that were being discussed at university.

I was just seeing these different bubbles that I couldn't bring together at all [...] and at some point you feel, 'Why am I even doing this? This doesn't make sense because it's not working for the majority of people'. Of course, I like to analyse and critique. But still, for me, it's also always about realising stuff in practice. And when you are disconnected from the majority, the work doesn't lead anywhere, it doesn't lead to changes on the political level.

Then at the ICPA workshop, there was somehow an instrument to keep these important ideas about racism and gender, and still reach mainstream groups and find commonality. «

**/ Sophie worked with Sophie Rauscher (see p.48) on developing the Original Nürnberger campaign, to change attitudes to diversity and integration in South Germany. She found the message testing especially insightful and motivating. /**

» First, we got an overview of this whole reframing idea and then I worked with Sophie to develop ideas and get really creative. Then, the most important thing was the message testing event, with actual people from the movable middle. I think that impacted me the most: having people in front of me and seeing their reaction to, for example, an image of girls with headscarves on a trampoline. I mean, I was doing research in a Muslim family for years for my PhD and heard about discrimination and racism

from them. But then to see the other side and that they [focus group participants] said, 'They [Muslim women] don't laugh like that. That's just unrealistic.'

The way people put other people in boxes and don't even see them as other human beings – on one hand it was devastating, on the other hand it was really motivating to do something. And of course, to go through that as a group brought us together, like a bonding experience.

**/ Sophie brought her experiences back to WIR MACHEN DAS, which at the time was working on its digital strategy. Evidence of the power of personal stories with the right balance of resonance and dissonance encouraged the team to continue and extend work to reach middle audiences. /**

» The information I was bringing back from the Lab supported what we were already doing: to keep on doing it, that it's important and the right approach, even if WIR MACHEN DAS found the approach by intuition, without having the research [...] For example, literature events that put together authors from areas of crisis with authors who are already established in Germany [...] People attend who are not so open towards

immigration. They attend because it's a literature event and then find that the authors also talk about immigration and see, 'OK, this woman from Syria, she's not oppressed, she's really strong', which challenges the stereotypes.

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## We are on the same team ... Let's have an atmosphere of support and appreciation.

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We had the goal to reach more people, this movable middle, and we were working on our strategy as a small NGO. Some of the things that we developed during that time and afterwards worked out really well. For example, we had this cooking format in which people with migrant backgrounds cooked dishes. We made short clips for YouTube and Facebook where they were cooking and talking about the experience that they connect with this dish<sup>24</sup>. There were some unexpected things like a Turkish-German author who cooked a typical South-German dish and talked about how her grandmother always made it. That was partly shaped by the ideas that I took away from the ICPA workshops [...] And they were really popular, a lot of people watched those videos «

/ Building on the promising collaboration in the Lab, Sophie would like to see the sector coming together further – caring for each other and valuing the role each plays. /

» I would say support each other and don't fight people who are in your boat. I think people in progressive groups and NGOs tend to fight against each other. When we are so critical of each other, everybody is so anxious not to make mistakes that you don't do anything at all.

We are on the same team [...] Let's have an atmosphere of support and appreciation, seeing where everybody's coming from and accepting different approaches as part of one bigger goal. See yourself as important, but even more so the collective goal. «

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<sup>23</sup> <https://wirmachendas.jetzt/en/>

<sup>24</sup> "Gerichte mit Geschichte". [Dishes with history].

Watch them here: [www.facebook.com/watch/wirmachendas.jetzt/330296744231789/](http://www.facebook.com/watch/wirmachendas.jetzt/330296744231789/)



**Sima is a social entrepreneur and coach. She co-founded SINGA Deutschland<sup>25</sup> in 2016 with a mission to bring locals and newcomers together to engage collaboratively in social, professional and entrepreneurial projects. She is now a leading consultant on SINGA's 'Re-thinking Integration' programme<sup>26</sup>, which aims to share their approach and methods with NGOs Germany-wide. She is also a Narrative Change Associate, trained by ICPA to share the approach more widely.**



**Sima Gatea**

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## From the start, it was clear that ICPA was offering very concrete methods on how to address the issue of populism and rising fear in society.

**/ The Lab began at a time when Sima was already in search of a new approach. In narrative change, she found practical and implementable methods capable of changing – not just reinforcing – existing debates on migration. /**

» Like so many other people, I was feeling very frustrated with the political climate and public discourse on immigration and having a sense that, no matter how much more work I put into SINGA, we were only having an impact on a certain segment of the population. Somehow, I was aware that we weren't really offering anything – at least not systematically – to people that weren't already somehow pro-migration. If anything, we were actually pushing them away, which was the worst part.

I'd been to every other conference or workshop that was offered in Germany, mainly in Berlin, on the topic of welcoming, integration and

migration [...] On a lot of international stages, I hadn't heard anything new. It's sort of recycled information, usually along the lines of: 'We shouldn't go for assimilation, we should go for integration.' But OK, we've heard that a hundred times and it's not enough.

Attending the ICPA workshop was the first time in a long time that I heard something new that made me feel like, 'OK, this is where we need to be going.' Immediately, from the start, it was clear that ICPA was offering very concrete methods on how to address the issue of populism and rising fear in society. «

**/ Sima was impacted by research showing that there is a movable middle, and that within the middle there are different groups with varied values and concerns. She realised that the usual approach of rejecting people's concerns on the basis of factual incorrectness limits the potential for dialogue. /**

» I was super fascinated by the findings! This idea of actually breaking down the population into multiple segments – to zoom in and understand how the segments are differentiated – you realise that certain types of messaging would actually only speak to one segment and not the others, and just because a message resonates with you, doesn't mean it's going to resonate with someone else. Realising that reaching the middle requires separate approaches and that they are not just one block was very convincing.

I also realised that dismissing the concerns of the middle is a perfect recipe for failure. Yet this tends to be the first thing that a lot of people in our field do because we feel angry and frustrated. We feel that our experience contradicts their claims, so we feel like, 'But it's not true.' And yet, people's concerns don't need to have anything to do with reality [...] Whether it's based on facts or not, it's a real concern. If we want to address their concern, we first need to acknowledge that it's real. «

**/ Sima practices the narrative change approach in personal encounters with people in the movable middle, using empathy and open questions to take the heat out of conversations. /**

» Since participating in the Lab, I've become a lot more conscious of my conversations with people – whether it's family, friends or acquaintances – who don't share my views. The notion of empathetic listening and finding points of connection is useful in any field where we're trying to find consensus, compromise or at least peace. In fact, just recently I met some acquaintances and, through speaking about my work, we ended up on the topic of immigration and society. It was evident that they were very concerned – really in a textbook way. I could see a lot of the research on the movable middle in reality! [...] I found myself making all the mistakes. At some point I got heated and frustrated, then there was a moment where I finally was able to catch myself and tune into my awareness that this was not the best way to go about things. I tried to offer an opening, a point of resonance [...] I'm not sure if it completely worked, but it seemed to simmer down the discussion. «

**/ Sima has incorporated narrative change into the trainings and advice she provides to NGOs and finds the approach particularly useful in helping NGOs transform how they engage their target groups to increase social cohesion. /**

» I included insights from the Lab in SINGA's newest programme, 'Rethinking Integration' or 'Integration neu denken'. We set it up a year ago with the intention of scaling our impact.

We offer training and consulting on SINGA's methods and approaches to seven organisations Germany-wide. I've found that a number of these organisations are actually already in direct contact with people from the middle in their localities, and so, we've been able to include some of ICPA's philosophy in the advice that we give them on how to engage with people in their community.

I connected ICPA's learnings with my approach of co-creation to be able to advise organisations on how to engage locals as a target group, not just as volunteers. This basically means understanding that locals have needs too, which are often being ignored. It's realising that xenophobia and

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## Narrative change, like any tool, needs to be used in unison.

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populism don't come from nowhere – people have fears because they are scared of losing something and have, in some cases, lost something. So, this needs to be addressed as the foundation of strategic communications to the movable middle [...] Organisations can create opportunities for people to express their concerns, needs and interests. When this happens, it's also possible to identify the talents that locals bring into the whole process of integration, social inclusion, social cohesion or whatever word we find best «

*/ Sima argues that to shift the migration debate at scale we need a networked approach, with a range of organisations contributing in different ways to a shared impact goal, combining communications with experiences to immerse narratives in everyday life. /*

» Narrative change, like any tool, needs to be used in unison. You could have a communication campaign with posters, slogans and images, but ideally there would also be opportunities on the ground locally for people offline to engage and connect.

One campaign, one time, will not be able to have the level of impact necessary to change the weather or move the debate. It's important to have a multitude of activities and messengers that are engaging in this work together. For instance, a variety of actors in a particular place interested in speaking to the same segment of the population could approach or speak to them from different perspectives and in different ways. There could be organisations doing targeted messaging online, and at the same time another organisation on the ground could offer events and activities to allow for deeper engagement – multiple strategies running at the same time for a collective impact goal, as in a so-called 'smart network'. I think that is the only way to have – or increase your chances of – impact. «

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<sup>25</sup> <https://singa-deutschland.com/en/home-en/>

<sup>26</sup> [www.integration-neu-denken.de/en/](http://www.integration-neu-denken.de/en/)



# Karim El-Helaifi

**Karim is an activist and writer. He is board member and spokesperson for 'neue deutsche organisationen'<sup>27</sup> ('new German organisations'), a nationwide network of initiatives led by people of colour that promotes diversity and stands against racism, and founding director of Schülerpaten<sup>28</sup>.**

**In the Lab, Karim supported the creative development of JUMA's 'Together Human' campaign<sup>29</sup>. He also worked with ICPA on the project RESET: Building Strategic Communications to Reset Public Narratives on Islam in Germany<sup>30</sup>, supporting German activists to build skills in this area.**

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## All of us need to start to see narrative change and reaching the middle as a normal part of the toolbox.

**/ When Karim joined the Lab he readily saw the value of the narrative change approach because he had experienced first-hand some of the challenges of communicating to wider audiences. /**

» When we founded neue deutsche organisationen (ndo), part of the point was communications and I could see what kind of reactions we got to press releases we wrote and to interviews that I gave.

It's one thing to communicate to our members but communicating with a group which you're not part of yourself is for sure much harder [...] I had begun to ask: 'How is it possible that there is often a different understanding of what you say, that it can be received very differently from what you intended?' [...] I had an understanding about frames before [the Lab] because I had worked as a journalist, but the strategy was new to me.

Understanding chain reactions in narratives was very interesting – how, when a narrative gets triggered, the person's thinking can end up far away from what you actually said. «

**/ Karim was excited by the aim of shifting the debate because both professionally and personally he found himself caught in limiting frames. /**

» You have your own narratives that you can work with, but how can you build new ones? I was so interested in that point! Because we always start talking about something and it always ends up with, 'I don't know, but Islam is this and that.' I always have to discuss what Islam is and what Islam isn't. We talked about a different topic, but we ended up there. Why? [...] Really, I want to discuss: 'What is our vision for society?' and 'How do we create a better future for a generation that is getting much more diverse?' «

/ Karim began supporting JUMA's 'Together Human' campaign, giving him the opportunity to explore whether narrative change campaigning could work in practice. /

» I was part of the 'feedback clinics' and could kind of consult a little – coming to meetings, seeing the process, and giving my ideas and opinions.

I was testing out whether the theory that I had just learned is actually doable: 'Is it implementable? Is it possible for me to communicate in such a way, or do I feel very uncomfortable?'

I wanted to learn about that in a very hands-on experience, seeing a real campaign developing. And I liked the process – discussing what could be possible for the organisation to communicate and what values to speak to. «

/ Karim agreed to co-lead (with Nadia, see p.32) the creative production of JUMA's campaign because he wanted to be involved in the start of a new process as well as to begin changing narratives. /

» I got a call, asking if I want to be more involved in the campaign, and I thought to myself: 'If we are activists, it means we activate. We activate processes, people, change – to change society, to change injustice.' This was an opportunity to be part of activating a process that might have a big impact on the discourse.

One campaign will not change the whole discourse, but the point is that you are always developing knowledge not only for yourself,

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If we are activists, it means we activate. We activate processes, people, change – to change society, to change injustice.

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but for the community – for all activists – that they can build on. One campaign is done, then another is done, then another. Seeing that bigger picture – seeing how I could be part of activating that process – was why I became part of the JUMA campaign team.

My task was the content production together with a colleague [Nadia] at JUMA. There was a lot of work designing how the videos and posters should be, and choosing the protagonists – who could be the messenger, and what their message is – then having shootings and talking with the protagonists. We had to think about every little detail and where there could be a trigger, avoiding clichés and staying true to the campaign strategy. «

**/ Reflecting on the impact of the JUMA campaign, Karim highlights the power of activists being more present in spaces in which their voices and perspectives are usually missing. /**

» So, I'm quite realistic – we will not change the discourse overnight. The point is that we filled public space with messages and images that we chose ourselves – winning, for some time, public space as our own. Right now, you have a lot of 'Alternative für Deutschland' [the 'Alternative for Germany' party] stuff in the discourse. You see the posters they used in their election campaigns. You see that and think, 'Nobody is talking about the issues that I feel.' So, just having the public space normalise certain groups – that's winning over public space. «

**/ Karim is convinced that effectively engaging wider audiences will be part of what makes German society more inclusive. /**

» We all feel every day, especially when you're a person of colour, that society is kind of turning against you. You have the feeling that you can't find the connection to your own society. So, it's somehow understanding that there is this big section of society with which a connection could actually be built, but with a different strategy.

[Reaching out to the middle] is a complementary strategy that we have to use if we want to change how the discourse is going. We're in a situation where the discourse is going in the wrong direction and it's getting dangerous. A lot of fellow activists get hate messages and threats on

a weekly basis. There is fear, and when there is fear, it's harder to be courageous and try new approaches – to not just communicate basically only to your base. But the point is, right now it's necessary. It doesn't matter if I like the idea of communicating to [middle] groups where I feel I don't agree with all their arguments – it is just necessary.

All of us – as communications managers and activists – need to start to see narrative change and reaching the middle as a normal part of the toolbox.«

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27 <https://neuedeutsche.org/de>

28 <https://schuelerpaten-deutschland.de/>

29 [www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/](http://www.juma-ev.de/gemeinsammenschlich/)

30 [www.narrativechange.org/reset](http://www.narrativechange.org/reset)



**Sophie is an activist, journalist, artist and social media expert and lobbyist. She is active in the LGBTQI movement and has run campaigns against hate speech and for diversity in the media. At the time of the Lab, Sophie worked for Deutsch Plus e.V., a broad-based network promoting a progressive agenda on migration and integration in Germany<sup>31</sup>. Sophie also worked for a large international company in Public Policy.**



**Sophie Rauscher**

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## We have to think about the issues that are dear to our hearts in a more strategic campaigning way

**/ At the beginning of the Lab, Sophie was sceptical about whether NGOs should spend time reaching out to the movable middle. /**

» I thought that it's generally a good idea, that the approach is needed, and I hadn't seen it before on a big scale in Germany. But at the same time, I was not sure if NGOs who work in the field of migration, whose biggest percentage of their members have a migrant background, should focus their resources on reaching people who are unsupportive.

Basically, anything on diversity is explained by people who are diverse themselves and they have to do all this work on top of trying to make it in society. People who are marginalised tell their story. And often people read the story and say, 'Oh, wow, that's really unfortunate.' But they dismiss it as a one-off. «

**/ Sophie's perspective shifted when she observed focus groups and saw that people in the middle are indeed 'movable' in their opinions. She became convinced that this type of communications work should be prioritised in progressive organisations. /**

» When we were doing the focus group testing, I realised that authentic messengers are important. When somebody said, 'I can't imagine that this picture of women wearing the hijab, having fun and smiling, is real,' we had these young women in our room and they were smiling – until then! It's important to have messengers like that.

But I think we need more time and space and resources. This is not something for people to put on top of their daily work. There's already so much to do for our own communities in work around empowerment. Organisations need to invest additional resources in this work with the middle so that activists find there's actually help for them and some structure around them. «

**/ In the Lab, Sophie found a safe space for building confidence and unlocking creativity. /**

» A lot of good ideas can be released by learning to think a little bit differently [...] Just to have this environment of people who were interested in my input and creativity gave me back some confidence, and encouraged me to do more of it again.

There is a tendency towards trying to achieve perfection. You always try to be very professional. There's not a lot of room for creative ideas that might be half-baked, that need a lot of work and feedback to become of greater value [...] But [in the Lab] there was an open ear and space for brainstorming and testing ideas, trying things out. «

**/ She developed (with Sophie Reimers, see p.36) a campaign called 'Original Nürnberger', aimed at reaching middle audiences in South Germany and encouraging more positive opinions on diversity. /**

» In the 'Original Nürnberger' campaign we tried to find a positive narrative in how Nürnberg is perceived by its inhabitants. We found that one branding very typical to the city is 'Original' – so there are 'Original Nürnberger Sausages [Bratwürste]' and 'Original Lebkuchen', as well as Christkind and Glühwein. Nürnberg is proud because they see themselves as the first or the best at producing these things. Our idea was to say that diversity in the city is also very original and it's something to be proud of. That was our shared value. «

**/ Today, Sophie argues that constructively engaging audiences to achieve broad-based support is vital for policy change. /**

» I realised that I can't just try to provoke all the time and talk to my own people and ignore what this will maybe stir up. Oftentimes, it would just lead to more division.

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**I realised that I can't just try to provoke all the time and talk to my own people**

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We want to have certain laws changed and we want to have representation in society, but there's not a lot of thinking yet on how to achieve that. It's more like, we're just going to nag, knock on every door and try to achieve it. There's not a lot of thought around how we can change our own narrative to help people who wouldn't share our perspective at the beginning to, in the end, support us. We need to think about how to recruit more allies, about how we can help people empathise more with our position. «

**/ As a result of the Lab, Sophie now takes a different approach to media interviews, aiming to find points of connection with the audience by focusing on values and highlighting shared experiences. /**

» As a PR person, I obviously try to be quotable, but now I also try to reach a broader audience, to create some point of contact that they [middle audiences] would probably also agree on.

Shared values was a big point in the Lab – finding entry points [and] not just sharing a story that leaves people thinking, ‘Well, that doesn’t apply to me’ but thinking, ‘Oh, that actually is me as well’ [...] For example, a trans-woman’s struggle might be unique. It has to do with gender, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia as well. There are so many layers and these affect other people too, just in a different way. You want to build that bridge to make them aware, ‘This is partly me. This is a problem I face, just on a smaller scale.’ «

**/ Sophie encourages other activists to build common ground for their causes through a narrative change approach. /**

» A lot of the challenges we face in the world are a result of division and power dynamics – from climate to resources in general, how people use them, who gets what. Narrative change, I think, can help people understand how the other side thinks.

Whenever I talk to other people who are political activists, I ask them to think: ‘How can we be successful?’, ‘How can we help people understand?’ [...] It’s not necessary to be an organisation that just works to reach the middle. We can still be an organisation that is working for our base [...] But we should change our narratives to be wiser and more strategic about the way we talk. I think we’ve come to a point where everyone is defensive and it’s difficult to have a conversation where people are open. We have to think about the issues that are dear to our hearts in a more strategic campaigning way, trying to influence the so-called ‘other side’ or broader audience. I think there are a lot of overlaps already. It makes me think there’s still hope that we can have a conversation. It’s not enough for me to talk, I want to be listened to and bring about change. «

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31 [www.deutsch-plus.de/](http://www.deutsch-plus.de/)



**Alice is a freelance journalist who has been working in media since 2005. She has also worked with several NGOs and continues to collaborate with 'New German Media-makers' (Neue Deutsche Medienmacher\*innen)<sup>32</sup>. Alice is a strategic communications trainer, certified by ICPA to share the approach more widely.**



**Alice Lanzke**

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## Coming to ICPA workshops, you can expect to be part of a group effort, hopefully to change the narrative.

**/ The Lab began at an ideal moment for Alice, when she was struggling to advise NGOs on how to address the negative and polarising tone of the German migration debate. /**

» I had started working for New German Media-makers and also started my project, which is called Media Trainings: we train NGOs in dealing with the press. At the first trainings, participants were always complaining about the tone of the migration debate in Germany, asking me, 'How can we influence that?' And I was saying, 'Well, I can tell you how to deal with journalists, but to be honest, I don't know how to change the tone of the debate.' Then Lisa's invitation to the Lab came and it was like, 'Wow, somebody heard my prayers!'.

After the first workshop I was electrified! I was really, totally convinced [...] The approach was something never offered in Germany at that time [...] When it comes to strategic communications, we all do it on a side note and because of a gut feeling, but we don't have the time and resources to really do the research like ICPA did. «

**/ Seeing the value of the Lab, Alice introduced new tools and approaches to the team at New German Media-makers, which they incorporated into both their organisational communications and trainings. /**

» Frank Sharry [from America's Voice] presented the message building concept, and we had to try it and build narrative houses. I was so impressed. I was sitting there thinking, 'Wow, that is working, that's definitely working!'.

I brought the concept back to the New German Media-makers. We had a workshop together. The whole team built little narrative houses [...] Then we built one big house all together, and that was hanging in our conference room for two years. Our conference room is also where we eat lunch. So, when we were really stressed, we could look at the Messaging House and think, 'Ah, yeah, that's why we do this.'

I started to incorporate the concept into my own workshops and the feedback was great. It's now one of our most popular workshops among the media trainings. «

**/ Being exposed directly to people in the movable middle through observing focus groups and in her own trainings was especially formative for Alice, highlighting the importance of reaching beyond the base, but also how hard it can be. /**

» The focus groups deeply affected me. It was hard to see real people discussing the migration issue in the way they did. It was hard to listen to unfiltered opinion and get a glimpse into what they are really thinking, to hear some of the arguments. [...] But on the other hand, it really showed me the bubble in which I'm moving, because usually I work with the migrant NGOs and we are all on the same page. Of course, we have different perspectives, but in general we have the same values and opinions. The message testing showed me, 'That's fine, but if we really want to reach a broader audience, we have to leave our bubble'.

I was convinced and tried to communicate this to migration NGOs. But often the feedback was, 'Yeah, that's fine, but we don't want to deal with racist arguments.' That led me to be a little bit hesitant about the concept myself because at the same time I was doing trainings on politically correct language and I had discussions with people, possibly in the middle, who said things that were offensive to me. «

**/ At one point, Alice felt disillusioned, but after pausing and then working to engage the middle with more empathy, she found she had renewed energy. /**

» I started to feel, 'I don't want to deal with this. Narrative change is fine, but let other people do it.' I needed a break. [...] I took a break from giving the workshops. Then one of my first workshops back was a message building workshop. And the feedback was great. [...] That was because after the second or third ICPA workshop, I incorporated some exercises where participants characterise the segments to identify their values. People had so much fun doing it, it brought back the fun for me.

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## If we really want to reach a broader audience, we have to leave our bubble.

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I also changed my training approach for middle audiences. Frank Sharry told us that when he started his work, people from the middle were getting the impression that they were being called racist, stupid or narrow-minded. And I had the same experience. Sometimes, after I did a lecture, people came up to me and said, 'It's not nice to say this. I mean, how should we know? Now I feel stupid.' And I was like, 'Oh, it wasn't meant to be like that!'. So, I changed my approach [...] Now, when I give a workshop about language, I don't start with 'These words are racist.' I take them by the hand to explain why language is important and then bring in examples which, to begin with, don't have anything to do with the migration debate. «

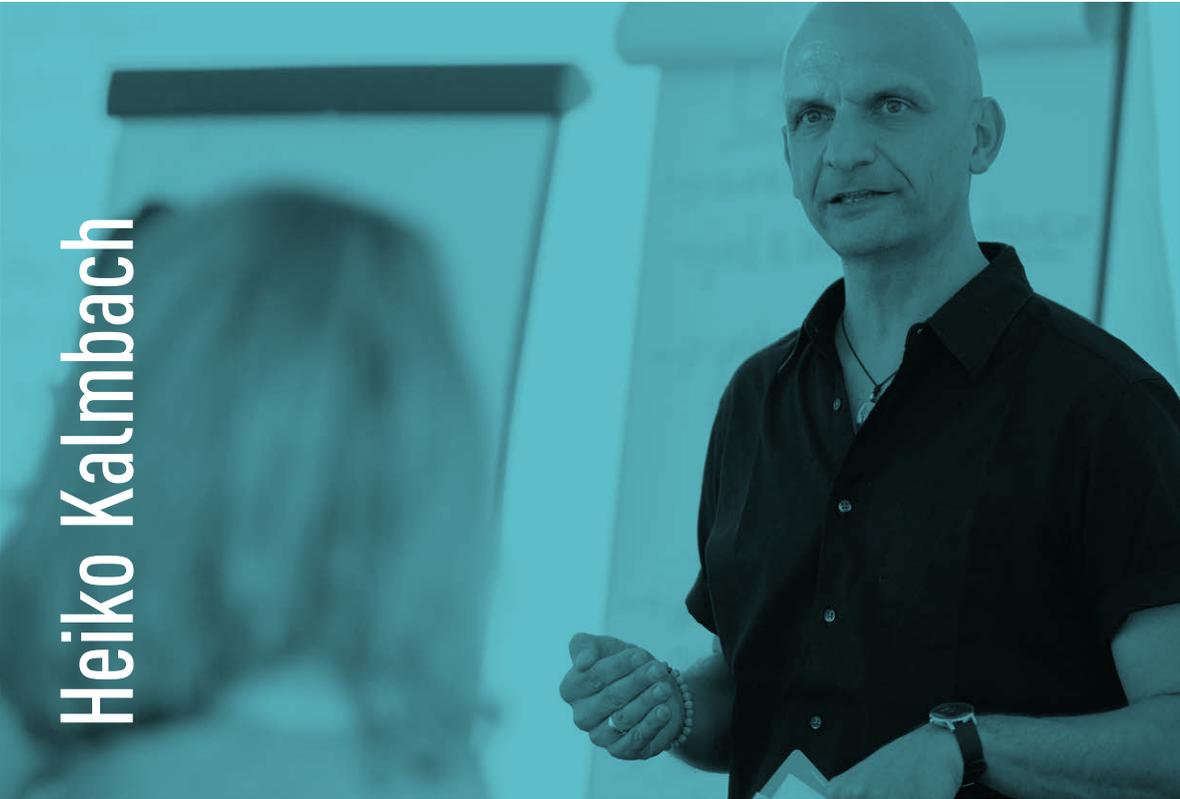
» Alice advises activists and campaigners to become part of a community of practitioners who provide peer support and remind you of the overall purpose. /

» I think the most important part is to network, to have regular meetings to exchange experiences, to unload and feel better afterwards. The atmosphere and creative environment which ICPA creates – the feeling of community – makes it a place where you can get support [...] Every time we meet it's like a class reunion! It's a very, very special atmosphere.

Coming to ICPA workshops, you can expect to be part of a group effort, hopefully to change the narrative. You can know that what you're doing is important, it's important for the bigger picture. «

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32 [www.neuemedienmacher.de/information-in-english/](http://www.neuemedienmacher.de/information-in-english/)



# Heiko Kalmbach



**Heiko is a filmmaker, theatre director and video artist. He makes documentary installations, teaches students spatial design and facilitates expressive arts therapy. He has also supported the creative development work in ICPA's strategic communications projects in Germany and Kazakhstan.**

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I love finding the shared ground and values. I always feel like that's where energy, life and growth happen.

/ Heiko became involved in ICPA's narrative change work when he directed a video on 'How progressives can do better in the migration debate'<sup>33</sup>. He was especially interested in the approach as a response to the burgeoning threat of populism and right-wing extremism. /

» My Lab experience started in 2016 when Lisa Quinn told me about a project ICPA was doing on narrative change and asked if I could help make a short video explaining the method. It started with an extensive process of understanding the research behind the approach and eventually gave me a sense of the whole subject.

When the work started, Trump hadn't happened, Brexit hadn't happened [...] A lot of changes around us – in Europe and overseas – hadn't happened yet. And yet they seemed to be in the air. So, there was a sense of urgency right from the beginning, of 'What can we do?' «

/ Heiko understood the theory quickly, but he noticed that it took longer to become part of his practice and the work of other Lab participants. ICPA's staged and patient approach to skill-building proved crucial for him. /

» I realise that it took me years to internalise ideas, thoughts and observations that, being confronted with them for the first time, seemed so common-sense. [...] After the first workshop, people were like, 'Wow. I really learned a lot and this was great.' And then I remember participants trying to apply it and going through different phases and, as time went by, I realised that this needs time. It was important to be reminded by ICPA to be vigilant, but also to move steadily and slowly – to trust that this stuff has to develop over time and go into your blood and bones. «

**/ As part of the work of the Creative Hub, Heiko supported Nadia (see p. 32) and Karim (see p. 44) with the creative development and production of JUMA's campaign /**

» Working with JUMA on 'Together Human' was a big adventure. My role was to somewhat support them through all steps of creative development, production and post-production. This included the process of developing and sharpening the key message, defining resonant visual vocabulary to carry the message, and the overall mood and creative design of the video pieces, poster campaign and accompanying social media campaign. The passion of the JUMA team and their individual strengths and experience enabled them to boldly and successfully navigate through an intense process of creative development, hiring and collaborating with a video director, cinematographer and editor, and finally the content production, all within a fixed budget and on a tight schedule.

I am still really impressed with their dedication, alertness and endurance. The results in my opinion are awesome.

ICPA provided us with some treasures on the way. Early on in the process we all were able to witness focus group testing and reflect on reactions by members of our target audience to a mock-up poster campaign. Through the whole production phase this experience would be a guiding light for all of us to stay on track with the strategy while venturing out into the creative aspects. I am truly proud of JUMA's accomplishments, and we can draw many useful lessons from this experience to support future projects. «

**/ Heiko has incorporated the analysis of target audiences and shared values into his teaching, encouraging art students to better define their communication goals and develop a strategy for how they will achieve them. In his own art he also aims to reach middle groups and invite dialogue. /**

» I apply narrative change thinking frequently now. When I teach at art school, for example, there are always the questions of who, why and what: 'Who is your audience and what do you want to talk about?' Most people don't want a narrow audience – they want to go wide. But then, 'How wide can you go, whilst still being true to your vision and actually communicating certain ideas?'

I try to help students see their audience is not homogenous and not to be afraid to create art for different groups, but at the same time to be aware that there are lots of different views on certain things and to look for the shared values [...] Without saying that we need art with a message or art to be a bridge-maker, we can try and have an aspect of consolidating, healing or creating understanding. I want my work to be a

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**What I very much liked about this new field was realising that we're really just trying to talk with each other as a society.**

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potential space of opening for people. I want it to connect with the 25-year-old and I would also like my aunt to take a look. What I very much liked about this new field was realising that we're really just trying to talk with each other as a society. «

**/ Heiko has seen how a narrative change approach can help people with different perspectives find points of connection and, ultimately, increase social cohesion. /**

» A lot of people, when they are on their own point of view, don't even see that somebody else is in front of them [...] It's kind of like the grass is too high between people. We're trying to push the grass away a little, help them see each other and not freak out [...] What drives all of this is that the bridge, even if it's just the tiniest bridge, will exist. I mean, there's so much we share! «

We can strengthen our individual values and strengthen our own bubble, but then what does that mean for the big bubble, in which we all live together? I strongly believe there is a big bubble and with narrative change and ICPA, I'm working on helping out the big bubble. We need to take better care of our togetherness [...] I love finding the shared ground and values. I always feel like that's where energy, life and growth happen. «

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33 Watch on YouTube at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kU\\_QnYX0Su4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kU_QnYX0Su4)

Astrid Ziebarth is shown in a professional setting, likely a conference or meeting. She is standing and holding a small card or slide that displays the 'jumot' logo. The background is a large screen showing the same logo and the text 'MANAGEMENT'. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent pink filter.

**Astrid is senior fellow tech and society in the Berlin Office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States<sup>34</sup>. She brings together different policy stakeholders to discuss migration policy and works with elected officials, civil servants, researchers, private sector organisations and international NGOs, supporting them with strategic communications in policy design and delivery. Astrid is also a Narrative Change Associate, trained by ICPA to share the approach more widely.**

Astrid Ziebarth is seated at a table in a meeting or workshop. She is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a dark top and is gesturing with her hands while speaking to others. The background shows other people and a blurred setting, suggesting a collaborative work environment. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent pink filter.

**Astrid Ziebarth**

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## People joined the circle of trust and were not just students, but in the end became teachers.

**/ Astrid knew about narrative change thanks to her work with international partners and was delighted to see the approach shared more widely in Germany, particularly with an emphasis on practice. /**

» I was already a great fan of this type of work, which I had the privilege of knowing about through my job. When I heard about ICPA taking up this work here in Germany, I was really excited! Then, when the Lab started, it was great because it's not an approach that you can get easily from the get-go. You need to fully understand what it's about and what it's not. It's not putting words in someone's mouth – it's really thinking strategically about what you want to change.

I appreciated very much that the Lab brought in experts from the US and the UK – for example, on how to lead difficult conversations. It was helpful to show that this is not just theory, but that it can be applied. «

**/ Participating in the Lab, Astrid realised that introducing diverse organisations to the approach was helping build mutual respect and broad-based support for a range of different tactics, especially for the untapped potential of engaging middle groups. /**

» At first I thought, 'Don't we actually need to involve organisations that already have a reach within the middle rather than migrant organisations that right now don't have any exposure?' But then I got that it is part of the strategy. This realm can be quite contested and people or organisations can be distrustful of each other. The workshops made sure that people – even if they never used the approach directly – understood that it is okay to for others to do so. It built acceptance about what people are trying to do – that they're playing in the same league.

There's room for everyone: there are people who target those who are anti-migrant and racist, and there are organisations who talk to the base. The space in the middle is often left alone, so we try to figure out how we can reach middle groups who have not yet become part of the polarised debate. «

**/ For Astrid, the Lab created a unique atmosphere, which provided space for open and generous collaboration, embedding the narrative change approach in a network of people who became its ambassadors. /**

» While ICPA was the main driver, it felt owned by many – co-owned in a way. ICPA built an atmosphere in which everyone could bring their strengths and concerns. I don't know what the magic is, but somehow ICPA keeps in mind that people or organisations can have a say and bring in their ideas. I think ICPA had an idea of where to head, which provided direction, but were still open enough [...] I only encountered people who were eager and willing to share access – to their networks, to their resources. You don't see that often – it was a very generous feeling [...] People joined the circle of trust and were not just students, but in the end became teachers. «

**/ The collaboration between donors funding the Lab made an impression on Astrid because it enabled each to play to their strengths, while ensuring unity of purpose. /**

» It was really interesting and helpful to see how funders collaborated in this project. Some funded the message testing, which can be expensive. Others funded the research, which was the basis for the target group analysis. Other funders feel more comfortable building the capacities of NGOs, so they bring their forte, with great reach into the NGO world. To bring all of this together really worked well. Throwing together the different funder perspectives, networks and expertise – all pushing in the same direction – was what made it so powerful. «

**/ Astrid has brought lessons from the Lab into her workshops, conferences, and practical support to policy stakeholders. She advises those working for policy change to clearly define goals, understand the target group and lead with positive solutions. /**

» We've infused strategic communication modules into our workshops. We are working with policy stakeholders, so they are obviously communicating. Whether it's elected officials or their staffers, NGOs or people in ministries, they have to explain why they do their work in a way that really gets the point across.

We need to be strategic in our communication. But what does that really mean? To understand that it's not public relations, and not to design a new website, but that it starts from the top of any project – really, from the get-go, to know what you want to communicate and what you want to achieve.

In terms of the cognitive science, we discuss how to really think about the wording you use as messaging. We work on knowing more about your target group: 'What values do they have, and which of those values unite me with them?' You need to 'Walk a mile in their shoes,' as it says in the Reframing Migration toolkit<sup>34</sup>. We think through the question, 'What would the middle say?' Of course, it's not a monolithic block, but, 'What could be some valid arguments, concerns

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**We cannot afford to let these debates slip away [...] We need to lay the groundwork again for us as a society.**

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or hesitations, and how would we react to them?' I also encourage focusing on the solutions – I hear surprisingly little on what can be done about things. There's a time for analysis, but there are also people who are brave and have implementable ideas to share. «

**/ For Astrid, strategic communications are essential to meet the challenges in today's diversity and migration debates. She encourages the sector to professionalise practice and build up an infrastructure to sustain the approach. /**

» We all know that we're living in a time where debates have become much more polarised, be it by populists or others. We're lacking the space where we can really interact and have conversations. Here and now, it is so important to have the skill, knowledge and patience to really lead conversations. Even though you might have different views – when it comes to diversity, migration and integration – you can learn to bring in their viewpoints, but in a way that invites conversations and broadens the views of the people you're talking to. We cannot afford to let these debates slip away [...] We need to lay the groundwork again for us as a society.

We've come to understand that it's important – now we're ready to professionalise. This means applying the approach a lot more regularly, so it's more institutionalised, and building capacity, so that we have structures and people in place – be it in NGOs or Ministries – who really know their way around strategic communications. «

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<sup>34</sup> <https://gmfus.org/>

<sup>35</sup> [www.narrativechange.org/de](http://www.narrativechange.org/de)





For updates on our strategic communications work  
and new resources, check out:

[www.narrativechange.org/incubator](http://www.narrativechange.org/incubator)





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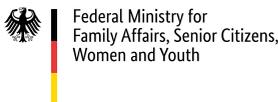
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