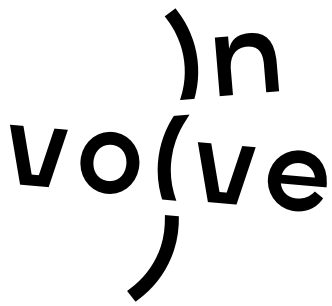




## **Paper**

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# **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS Assessments of Cross Talks in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland**

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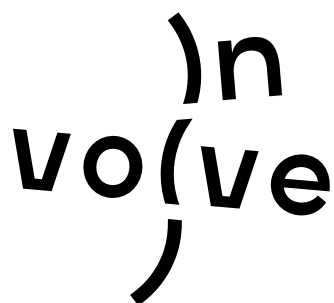
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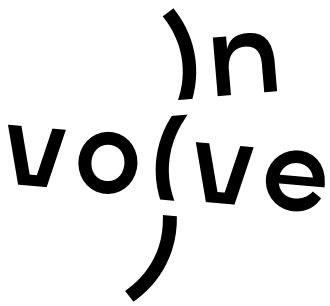
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# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

## Assessments of Cross Talks in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland

**Core question** To what extent did the Cross Talks create a temporarily level telling field and translate it into supported, actionable and followed-up recommendations?

# 1. Executive summary

## Main conclusion

Across all eight cases, the method performs strongly as a relational and empathy-building intervention, but unevenly as a decision-making and implementation method. The assessments provide substantial evidence of listening, perspective-taking and respect; evidence of equal influence, formal prioritization, ownership and follow-up is much weaker.

The most consistent success factor is the carefully validated experiential narrative. When participants could correct their vignette and stakeholders read those stories or responded directly to them, recognition, empathy and a more open conversation emerged. The physical setting - a small group, circular seating, a neutral or familiar venue and informal food - supported this in nearly every case.

The principal structural weakness is that procedural equality did not automatically create equality of power. In Italy, stakeholders dominated parts of the conversation; in Portugal, some participants remained inhibited; in Germany, tension arose around individual responsibility; and in Ireland, some institutional stories reverted to organizational rhetoric. Belgium further shows that language proficiency already determines, before the session begins, who can participate as a speaker. France similarly found that practical solution-building was led mainly by a stakeholder and facilitator, while non-native speakers may be less confident with reading and writing.

Of the eight cases, Ireland comes closest to the “afterlife” that Debruyne et al. regard as essential: a concrete proposal received unanimous support, a government department assumed leadership and co-researchers were invited to join a working group. Portugal produced the broadest set of recommendations, but without prioritization or a formal selection. Italy deferred prioritization. Poland generated broadly shared recommendations and a concrete commitment to build an inter-union network, although policy ownership, priorities and deadlines remained limited. France reached agreement on recognition of prior experience, access to information and needs-based guidance, but ended without an authorized policy owner or follow-up route. Switzerland and Germany generated directions but few recorded implementation commitments. Belgium reached consensus on concrete proposals, but no decision-makers were present.

**Decision for future rounds:** the narrative core is the core, but add an explicit second half: setting priorities, appointing a person in charge, assessing feasibility, setting a deadline and organising feedback. Without this bridge, Cross Talk remains primarily a valuable meeting rather than a complete participatory change cycle.

## 2. Assignment, sources and method

This report compares the submitted assessment and feedback documents in terms of preparation, composition, setting, delivery, power balance, common ground, recommendations, closure and follow-up. Findings are assessed against the conceptual and process framework of Debruyne et al. (2025), How to Establish a Level Telling Field, synthesizing the findings of the OPPORTUNITIES project<sup>1</sup>.

| Document                   | Use in the analysis                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Belgium (2026)             | Substantive case: integration and housing; limited language access.                                                                       |
| France (2025)              | Substantive case: migrants' access to employment and training guidance; recognition of prior experience and information access.           |
| Germany (2025)             | Substantive case: vulnerable young people, education and activation.                                                                      |
| Focus Ireland (2025)       | Substantive case: lone parents/migrants experiencing homelessness.                                                                        |
| Italy (2025)               | Substantive case: public and private social/employment services.                                                                          |
| Switzerland (2025)         | Substantive case: young people, education and labour-market integration.                                                                  |
| Portugal (2025)            | Substantive case: public/social services; two identical files treated as one case.                                                        |
| Poland (2025)              | Substantive case: care-sector workers, trade unions and social dialogue; English assessment and Polish meeting notes treated as one case. |
| Assessment protocol (2025) | Blank questionnaire used to assess comparability and reporting gaps.                                                                      |
| Debruyne et al. (2025)     | Normative and analytical reference framework for CTM/LTF.                                                                                 |

### a. Analytical framework: from speaking space to influence

Debruyne et al. place CTM within Participatory Action Research: participants are not data sources but co-producers of knowledge and change. The process includes planning and trust-building, interviews, co-creation of shareable stories, the public Cross Talk event, and the "afterlife" through which dialogue affects relationships, practice and policy (Debruyne et al., 2025, pp. 7-18).

| Dimension           | Assessment question                                                                                    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Trust and ethics | Are privacy, safety, expectations, voluntary participation and participant control secured in advance? |

<sup>1</sup> [www.opportunitiesproject.eu](http://www.opportunitiesproject.eu)

| Dimension                        | Assessment question                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Narrative agency              | Do participants have final say over the content, wording and use of their story?                  |
| 3. Accessibility                 | Can language, literacy, time, care, transport or speaking anxiety restrict participation?         |
| 4. Representative storytelling   | Do stakeholders demonstrably adopt participants' perspective by reading or voicing their stories? |
| 5. Dialogue on equal footing     | Are hierarchy, technical jargon, speaking time and institutional routines actively moderated?     |
| 6. Common ground and difference  | Does connection emerge without suppressing real conflict or minority positions?                   |
| 7. From recommendation to action | Are choices prioritised, assigned to an owner, scheduled and reported back?                       |

Limitation: the assessments are self-reports with different levels of detail; there are no uniform observations, participant measures or transcripts. The comparison therefore assesses the reported process and plausibility of effects, not causal impact.

## b. Comparative overview

| Case    | Participation                                         | Facilitation / power                                                                                            | Storytelling                                                                         | Common ground                                               | Decision / follow-up                                                       | Notable                                                                                   |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Belgium | 2 active participants; small trusted circle           | Internal facilitator; stakeholders lacked decision authority                                                    | Validated by participants; no reciprocal stakeholder stories because of language     | "Relatable"                                                 | All proposals accepted; no owner or deadline                               | Strong privacy; language selected speakers                                                |
| France  | 3 discussion-group participants; 8 total; no audience | Two Grdr facilitators; trusted setting, but practical solutions mainly discussed by stakeholder and facilitator | Reading phase adapted with photo cards; no documented validated reciprocal vignettes | "Pressure/s/stress", "recognition" and "access/information" | Recommendations agreed; no policy owner, deadline or formal feedback route | Small familiar circle; non-native literacy concerns; participant co-facilitation proposed |

| Case     | Participation                                                                                                                               | Facilitation / power                                                                 | Storytelling                                                                                        | Common ground                                                                  | Decision / follow-up                                                                                                         | Notable                                                                    |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Germany  | 3 active young people + 1 in audience; 9 stakeholders                                                                                       | Two researchers; mixed subgroups                                                     | Yes; carefully anonymised and allocated                                                             | “Listening”; conflict about personal responsibility                            | More resources/quality; follow-up campaign intended                                                                          | Explicit protection-n-versus-depth dilemma                                 |
| Poland   | 22 active participants, including 8 earlier research participants; unions, employers, local authorities and ministry; no spectator audience | Two COZZ facilitators; closed-door setting and three deliberately mixed small groups | Research findings and workers’ stories, but no documented reciprocal reading of validated vignettes | Shared problems and solutions developed in mixed groups; no single common word | Similar recommendations recorded and circulated; volunteers and an inter-union network proposed; no policy owner or deadline | Strong networking afterlife; ministry present; detailed care-sector agenda |
| Ireland  | 6 co-researchers; 19 total                                                                                                                  | Independent facilitator; government present                                          | Departure: stakeholders often read own story; facilitator read participant stories                  | Pre-developed recommendations; no word phase                                   | Support resource unanimous; Housing Department leads; working group                                                          | Strongest policy afterlife; weaker fidelity                                |
| Italy    | 9 participants + 6 stakeholders + 1 audience                                                                                                | Project coordinator; actively restored balance                                       | Partly reciprocal; short experiential extracts                                                      | Emotional commonality; word round too slow                                     | List agreed; prioritisation deferred                                                                                         | Stakeholder dominance; language/digital/bureaucracy central                |
| Portugal | 6 participants + 6 stakeholders; no formal audience                                                                                         | Two facilitators, deliberately restrained                                            | Positive and negative validated vignettes                                                           | “Empathy”                                                                      | Broad list; no formal selection due to time                                                                                  | Rich output but inhibited voices and overload                              |

| Case            | Participation                                 | Facilitation / power    | Storytelling                                     | Common ground                  | Decision / follow-up                | Notable                                              |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Switzerland and | 5 young people + 4 stakeholders + 13 audience | Two project researchers | Individually co-produced and rehearsed vignettes | Free reactions; no chosen word | Concrete ideas; no formal selection | Large audience ; participant dialogue before opening |

## c. Similarities: what works across the cases

### C.1 Stories humanise systems

All substantive cases report attentive listening, recognition, emotion or empathy. The strength lies not only in “giving voice”, but in enforced perspective-taking: professionals hear or voice the experience of the person subject to the service. This directly reflects Debruyne et al. on representative storytelling and narrative empathy (pp. 15-16).

### C.2 Co-creation and validation are widely embedded

Belgium, Germany, Portugal and Switzerland clearly describe researcher-edited vignettes being returned for correction. Ireland allowed co-researchers to revisit earlier stories. This approaches the requirement that storytellers retain final authority (Debruyne et al., pp. 14-15). Italy describes sharing and reworking, but less systematically for all participants. France used earlier discussion-group work and adapted the reading phase with photo cards, but does not document a separate process of co-created and validated vignettes. Poland relied on the research report, prepared stakeholder contributions and workers’ current stories rather than documenting such a process.

### C.3 Small, informal and hospitable settings support safety

Circular or horseshoe seating, familiar or neutral venues and refreshments recur throughout. Belgium, France and Portugal limited the audience for privacy; France used the group’s familiar meeting room and deliberately mixed participants, stakeholders and facilitators in a circle. Germany chose a cafe-like room; Ireland used the familiar community venue. Poland used a closed meeting at the Warsaw Center for Social Dialogue, U-shaped seating, refreshments and mixed small groups to support candour and lower tension. This operationalises the advice to keep attendance low and the atmosphere encouraging (Debruyne et al., p. 16).

### C.4 The method is context-sensitive and appropriately adapted

No case followed the protocol literally. This is not inherently a weakness: the five steps are not a rigid procedure. France, for example, replaced a conventional reading phase with photo cards to support a more horizontal and potentially more accessible exchange. Adaptation becomes problematic only when an essential mechanism disappears without compensation, such as reciprocal perspective-taking, balanced speaking time or a traceable action cycle.

### C.5 Time is a scarce design resource

France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland explicitly report that stories and reactions required more time than expected or that time constrained closure. In France, a late start and one participant’s need to leave shortened the exchange. Prioritization or depth was consequently reduced. Sessions are structurally overloaded when emotional processing and policy production must occur in one uninterrupted block.

## d. Differences and explanatory contrasts

| Contrast                              | Cases                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Interpretation                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Method fidelity versus policy outcome | Ireland departed most from representative reading and common-ground steps, yet achieved the clearest policy commitment.                                                                                                                                                  | Fidelity is not an end in itself, but the equality mechanism replacing any departure must be explicit.         |
| Decision authority in the room        | Ireland included a government department that assumed ownership; Poland included a ministry representative and developed a union-network commitment, but no public authority formally owned the recommendations; Belgium involved network actors but no decision-makers. | Consensus without an authorised owner has far weaker implementation value.                                     |
| Audience                              | No formal audience in France, Poland or Portugal; very limited in Belgium/Italy; medium in Germany/Ireland; large in Switzerland.                                                                                                                                        | An audience may increase dissemination and legitimacy, but also intimidation, performance and power asymmetry. |
| Facilitator position                  | Independent in Ireland; project-based in the other cases.                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Independence helps, but competence in power-aware intervention matters more than formal distance.              |
| Common-ground technique               | One word in Belgium/Portugal/Germany; three linked themes in France; slow or unsuccessful in Italy; mixed-group problem and solution mapping in Poland; free dialogue in Switzerland; pre-formulated proposals in Ireland.                                               | The word is a tool, not an outcome. Forced consensus may conceal conflict and minority voices.                 |

| Contrast        | Cases                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Interpretation                                                                              |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access barriers | Language dominates Belgium; literacy and non-native confidence are explicit concerns in France; speaking comfort Ireland; work/family/health in several cases; continuity especially Germany/Switzerland; Poland reports no specific access measures or barriers. | Exclusion starts before the dialogue. Attendance and speaking data should be core outcomes. |

#### e. Assessment against “How to Establish a Level Telling Field”.

| Case    | Ethics / trust | Narrative agency | Access   | Perspective / dialogue | Common ground | Afterlife | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------|----------------|------------------|----------|------------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Belgium | Strong         | Strong           | Weak     | Moderate               | Moderate      | Weak      | Safe, small-scale and validated, but language excludes and decision-makers are absent.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| France  | Strong         | Moderate         | Moderate | Moderate               | Strong        | Weak      | Careful preparation, a familiar small circle and adaptable materials supported trust and recognition; unequal participation, undocumented vignette control and the absence of an owner, deadline and policy route limit equality of influence and afterlife.   |
| Germany | Strong         | Strong           | Moderate | Strong                 | Strong        | Moderate  | Careful anonymity and mixed groups; follow-up intention not yet an action plan.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Poland  | Strong         | Moderate         | Moderate | Strong                 | Strong        | Moderate  | Trusted closed setting and mixed groups supported candour and common problem-solving; workers' stories affected decision-makers and a network was initiated, but vignette control, accessibility measures, policy ownership and deadlines were not documented. |
| Ireland | Strong         | Moderate         | Moderate | Moderate               | Strong        | Strong    | Concrete policy afterlife; less reciprocal storytelling and a pre-set agenda.                                                                                                                                                                                  |

| Case        | Ethics / trust | Narrative agency | Access   | Perspective / dialogue | Common ground | Afterlife | Rationale                                                                             |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|----------|------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Italy       | Moderate       | Moderate         | Moderate | Strong                 | Moderate      | Weak      | Open atmosphere, but stakeholder dominance and deferred prioritisation.               |
| Portugal    | Strong         | Strong           | Moderate | Strong                 | Strong        | Weak      | Careful co-creation and rich dialogue; no formal selection, owner or deadline.        |
| Switzerland | Strong         | Strong           | Strong   | Strong                 | Moderate      | Weak      | Good sequencing and broad engagement; recommendations not converted into commitments. |

*Legend: “Strong”, “Moderate” and “Weak” are qualitative judgements based on explicit evidence in the submitted documents. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence; it also indicates a reporting gap.*

### 3. Substantive recommendations emerging from the cases

Despite different target groups, the national recommendations cluster into five shared policy families. The thematic overlap is more meaningful than a simple count because reporting detail varies by case.

| Policy family                  | Recurring content                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Cases / examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Humane and competent services  | Empathy, respect, active listening, cultural and language competence, experts by experience in training, accountability for conduct.                                                                              | Portugal extensive; Italy continuity; Switzerland trust and recognition; Germany listening; France needs-based guidance and attention to professional “cultural codes”; Poland dignity, safety and recognition of care work.                                        |
| Access and comprehensibility   | Language support, intercultural mediators, earlier and simpler information, inclusive complaint channels.                                                                                                         | Belgium daytime classes/language support; France recognition of non-French qualifications and equal information access; Portugal mediators; Italy language/digital/bureaucratic barriers; Switzerland early information.                                            |
| Continuity and capacity        | More staff, supervision of frontline teams, relational continuity, protection after entering a pathway. Fair staffing ratios, secure contracts, adequate pay and occupational safety.                             | Portugal teams/supervision; Italy continuity; Germany resources; Switzerland support during training; Poland staffing, nursing coverage, pay and employment contracts.                                                                                              |
| System coordination and rights | Interoperability, inter-service cooperation, long-term strategy, reduced bureaucratic exclusion and continuity of rights. Coordination between social care and health financing and enforceable sector standards. | Portugal detailed; Italy bureaucracy; Belgium housing oversight; France links between migrants, guidance professionals, employers/HR and policymakers; Ireland integrated support resource; Poland care/health coordination, funding and sectoral labour standards. |

| Policy family             | Recurring content                                                                                                                                                 | Cases / examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Structural user influence | Regular user involvement in evaluation, co-researchers in working groups, further Cross Talks. Sustained trade-union and worker participation in social dialogue. | Ireland working group; Portugal recurring user input; Germany campaign; Switzerland repetition; France participant involvement in facilitation and stakeholder invitations; Poland inter-union network and public consultations. |

## 4. Recommendations for methodology and delivery

| # | Recommendation                                            | Practical application                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Intended effect                                                                                                                                                |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Make accessibility a design requirement                   | Offer language choice, interpreting, audio/visual formats, plain language and alternatives to reading aloud. Use France's photo-card adaptation as one option. Ask separately about comfort with speaking, sharing and public identifiability. | More active participation; less self-selection linked to language and literacy, as seen in Belgium and France, and speaking comfort, as in Ireland.            |
| 2 | Limit and structure narrative load                        | Use no more than 4-6 short vignettes per block; invite reactions after every 1-2 stories; place a break between emotional and operational phases; protect the closing time from late starts or early departures.                               | Reduces time pressure and memory loss reported in Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Switzerland.                                                                    |
| 3 | Secure reciprocal perspective-taking                      | Prefer stakeholders reading participant stories and vice versa. If a participant does not wish to read, use paired reading, audio or an authorised proxy; do not default to stakeholders presenting institutional narratives.                  | Protects the core mechanism described by Debruyne et al. and limits organisational rhetoric.                                                                   |
| 4 | Facilitate power visibly, not merely politely             | Monitor speaking time, let participants speak first, prohibit unexplained jargon, establish a stop rule for defensive responses and appoint an observer of power dynamics.                                                                     | Addresses dominance or inhibition in France, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Ireland.                                                                             |
| 5 | Treat common ground as a hypothesis                       | Record differences, doubt and minority positions alongside shared words. Ask: What do we share? Where do we differ? What must not be lost?                                                                                                     | Prevents a single word from producing false consensus.                                                                                                         |
| 6 | Close with a decision matrix                              | Select no more than three priorities using impact, feasibility, justice and influenceability. Record owner, first step, deadline, resources, risk and feedback date.                                                                           | Moves from list to action and prevents deferral as in Italy, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland.                                                                 |
| 7 | Invite authority and experiential knowledge strategically | Map who can decide, implement, block and legitimise. Let participants co-decide invitations and, where possible, co-facilitate; retain an audience only where its added function is explicit.                                                  | Combines the safety of Belgium/France/Portugal, France's proposal for greater participant ownership, Poland's ministry presence and Ireland's policy leverage. |

| #  | Recommendation                             | Practical application                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Intended effect                                                                                  |
|----|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8  | Design the afterlife before the event      | Agree a 30/60/90-day follow-up cycle, participant representation, a visible progress log and a mandatory response from the responsible organisation. Build on Poland's network commitment by formalising responsibility, milestones and reporting. | Operationalises Step 5 and prevents the dialogue ending with appreciation.                       |
| 9  | Use one core protocol plus context modules | Retain uniform minimum fields while allowing modules for language, privacy, target group and policy context. Record deviations, rationale, risk and compensation.                                                                                  | Improves comparability without losing necessary flexibility.                                     |
| 10 | Measure equality of outcome                | Measure speaking share, participant ideas prioritised, actions assigned, delivery after three/six months and participants' perceived influence - not only satisfaction.                                                                            | Reflects Debruyne et al.: equality of opportunity must lead towards equality of outcome (p. 18). |

## 5. Proposed minimum protocol for future Cross Talks

| Phase                     | Minimum requirements                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Before - 4 to 8 weeks     | Participants determine purpose, privacy regime and stakeholder profile; accessibility check; co-create and validate stories; authority map; baseline expectations/perceived influence. |
| Opening - 15 min          | Purpose, roles, confidentiality, right to pass and dialogue rules; facilitator explicitly names power differences and intervention rights.                                             |
| Storysharing - 45-60 min  | One or two vignettes per block; reciprocal or authorised proxy reading; brief individual response before open dialogue.                                                                |
| Dialogue - 35 min         | Shared patterns, differences and structural causes; participants speak first; observer monitors jargon and speaking time.                                                              |
| Decision - 35 min         | No more than three priorities; score impact/feasibility/justice; assign owner, deadline and evidence of progress.                                                                      |
| Closure - 10 min          | Check-out, consent for reporting/dissemination, safe aftercare and date of first feedback.                                                                                             |
| Afterlife - 30/60/90 days | Action log, participants in governance, written organisational responses, results returned to all participants, evaluation of realised influence.                                      |

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## 6. Conclusion

The assessments support the central proposition of Debruyne et al.: carefully prepared storysharing can temporarily suspend existing hierarchies and enable empathy, listening and new alliances. At the same time, they demonstrate the limitation identified in the paper: stakeholders may revert to administrative roles, and formal equality of opportunity to speak does not guarantee equality of outcome.

The next stage of Cross Talk development should therefore focus less on adding stories or enforcing a stricter word round and more on establishing a stronger institutional contract around the encounter. That contract should connect safe narrative agency with accessible participation, explicit moderation of power and a verifiable afterlife. Ireland shows what becomes possible when a proposal gains an authorised owner. Poland shows how a protected, mixed-group dialogue can generate a continuing network even without formal policy ownership. France shows the value of accessible, horizontal formats while also underlining the need to involve participants more directly in facilitation, stakeholder selection and solution-building. The best next version combines narrative equality, network-building and authorised implementation.

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## 7. Sources

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