2.2 Empathy, Communication & Storytelling

sage

CEIPES ETS

age

Introduction

Why talk about sustainability and what do we mean with this word?

Sustainability → *Meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

It means finding a balance between three key dimensions:

Environmental – protecting natural resources and the climate

Social – ensuring rights, well-being, education and equal opportunities

Economic – creating growth and jobs without exploiting people or the environment

https://toppartners.it/pillar-sostenibilita-aziendale/

The climate crisis is also a *social issue* (health, work, equity) and the involvement of young people is fundamental because they are not only the recipients but also the agents of change:

- they will **experience the effects of climate**, **economic and social changes** for a longer time
- they will **inherit the consequences** of today's choices
- they represent the generation that can **change models of consumption, production and culture**

Small exercise:
The green transition concerns both everyday choices and professional futures.
Try writing down three words that you associate with sustainability in your daily life. And why these words in particular?

age

Empathy, Communication, Storytelling

Empathy, communication, and storytelling are deeply interconnected: stories foster empathy by allowing us to experience others' perspectives and emotions. By putting a human face on information, storytelling builds trust, enhances understanding, and makes messages more memorable and impactful across fields like business, education, and healthcare.

Storytelling Activates Empathy: Engaging stories trigger mirror neurons, making us feel the characters' emotions as our own, and release oxytocin, fostering trust and connection.

Empathy Fuels Communication: Understanding an audience's thoughts, feelings, and concerns (using tools like empathy maps) allows for messages that resonate deeply, avoiding jargon and addressing "*hot buttons*" ➔ the topics, needs, or worries that matter most to your audience and trigger strong emotional reactions.

Communication Shapes Stories: Empathetic communication designs stories to be audience-centric, focusing on relatable struggles and shared human experiences to increase impact and authenticity.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0007681323000058

age

Storytelling
Why it works?

- Stories create emotional connections.

- They make complex topics understandable and memorable.

- They trigger identification: "That could be me."

https://daassuite.com/blog/en/importance-storytelling-in-brands/

Mini-Task:
Write a mini-story (max 100 words) or a script for a social media post about the topic of sustainability and your experiences with it.

Prompt:
"*A sustainable choice that improves people's lives*"

Example:
Greenpeace – Global environmental organization known for campaigns on climate, forests, oceans, and biodiversity, active on social media with strong, visual content.

Take a look at their website and Instagram page and pay attention to:
- how they do visual storytelling (photos, videos, graphics)
- what key messages they use to engage their audience
- how they link concrete actions to personal values

age

Example of Storytelling:
Why I Live a Zero Waste Life - TEDxTeen
Lauren Singer

Personal account of how and why she adopted a "zero-waste" lifestyle, with reflections on change, daily choices, and personal impact.

Small Exercise:
After watching the video, try to answer the following questions:

* What zero-waste habits did the protagonist adopt?
* Which of these practices do you think could be applied in your daily life?
* Why do you think reducing waste is important for the planet and for people?
* In your opinion, what prompted the girl to change her lifestyle and what values emerge from her story?
* What "storytelling tools" did she use (concrete examples, emotions, images, humour, data)?
* What struck you most about the way she communicated her message?
* What "hot buttons" (important concerns or values) do you think the video touched on?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pF72px2R3Hg

sage

Communication
From message to action

Why it matters?
Effective communication **prevents misunderstandings**, **captures attention**, and makes the **message impactful**. It is essential for building trust and transforming complex information into something understandable and accessible to everyone. In the case of sustainability, it helps people understand the urgency of the issue and can motivate small, concrete changes in behaviour, contributing to a real positive impact.

Earth Overshoot Day – WWF

Earth Overshoot Day, the moment when humanity has used up all the resources that the Earth can regenerate in a year.

We can all play a small part to create a more sustainable future.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHDC31Dt0FY

What makes communication effective and of good quality?

- It is **clear** and **easy to understand**.

- It is tailored to its **target audience**.

- It uses concrete and **understandable examples**.

- It engages through **emotion** and **empathy**.

- It is based on **credible information**.

- Includes a **call to action** when necessary

Mini Task:

After watching the video, try recording a voice message (max 1 min) explaining what Overshoot Day is, using the language and characteristics of effective communication.
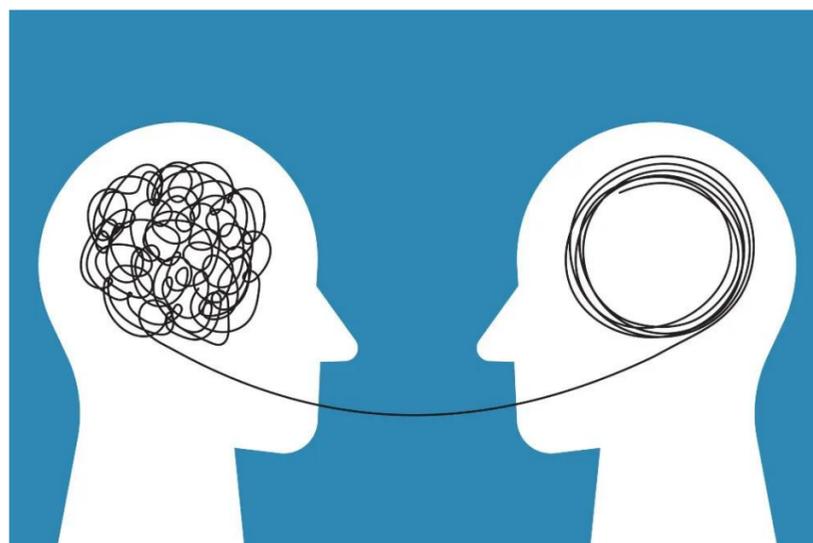
Empathy

But what do we mean by empathy? What are the key concepts?

Empathy is the **ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of others**, putting yourself in their shoes without judging.

It allows you to **communicate more authentically**, **build trust**, and **engage people**. It helps to better understand complex issues and motivate responsible behaviour.

How to use it in communication:

*   Tailor the message to the audience and their needs.
*   Use stories, examples, and images that bring the situation to life.
*   Show the consequences of actions on people, the environment, or the community.
*   It helps create an emotional connection, making the message more memorable and persuasive.

For example, empathy is key to environmental sustainability and a **just transition** → the shift to a green economy that leaves no one behind.
By understanding the real impacts of climate change and climate policies on people and communities, we can create inclusive solutions that protect the planet while ensuring fairness and social justice.

https://robertglazer.com/friday-forward/sympathy-empathy-compassion/

Empathy
Practical exercise: empathy map + storytelling

Following the guidelines in the previous slides, now try to put yourself in someone else's shoes, using empathy and its characteristics.

Imagine you are a person, an animal, or a plant, and try to empathize with their possible experience with regard to environmental sustainability issues.

What impact does climate change or pollution have on their life?

What emotions do they feel?

1) Build and complete an **empathy map**: you can use the template on this slide or build one of your own using digital tools such as **Miro** or **Canva**.

2) Using the map, **write a short story or message** as if you were the character, trying to communicate an environmental problem and, if possible, suggest a concrete action.
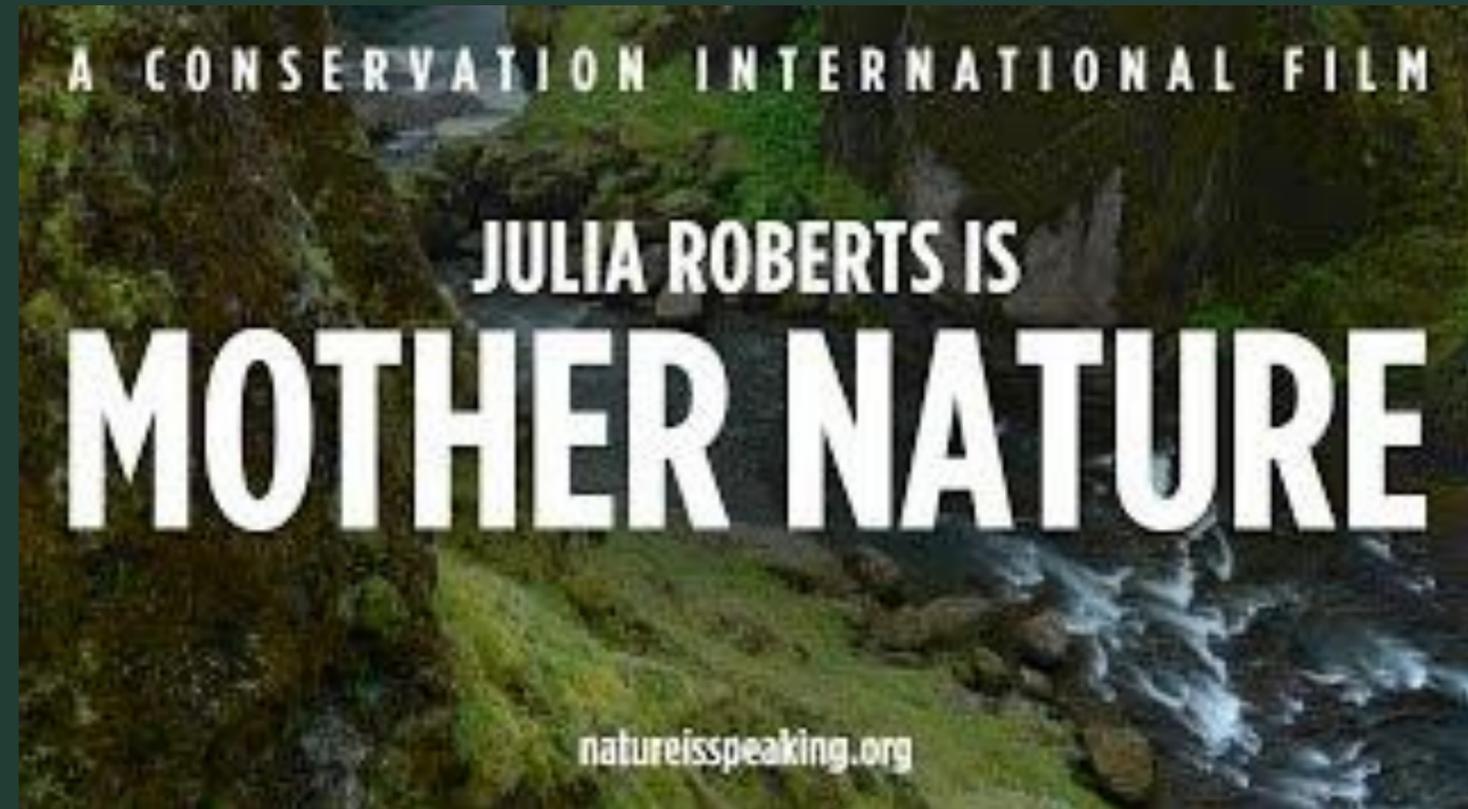
Empathy Map

Character / Subject: _____

What does the character think and feel?	What does the character see?
_____	_____

What does the character say and do?	What does the character hear / do? perceive from others?
_____	_____

age

Green transition is a story about people and with people.

Nature is Speaking

Is an environmental awareness campaign by Conservation International that was launched in 2014.

Through the voices of actors, natural elements are given a voice of their own, reminding us that sustainability is not only a scientific or political issue, but a deeply human one. **This piece shows how communication, empathy, and storytelling can transform environmental messages into emotional experiences**, helping us connect, care, and ultimately act to protect our planet.

A CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL FILM
JULIA ROBERTS IS
MOTHER NATURE
natureisspeaking.org

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmVLcj-XKnM

Small Task:
After watching the video, **try to describe how you felt**. What emotions did it make you feel?

You can also try to create one yourself!
Choose a natural element that you feel most connected to and try to give it a voice by telling its story, the difficulties it faces, and the impact that human presence has on it.

sage

From Action to Collective Impact

Graphic novels and **animated short films** are **powerful tools for communicating** environmental sustainability in a simple and engaging way.
Thanks to **visual storytelling**, they transform complex concepts into accessible stories that capture attention and stimulate emotions.

The use of graphics and images makes it easy to understand environmental issues and the consequences of our actions, while characters and stories **encourage empathy** and identification, prompting people to reflect and take action for a more sustainable future.

Small Exercise:

As a final activity, **try writing a short personal commitment** on the topics of environmental sustainability and green transition:

o   a story you want to tell
o   a choice you want to try out

Try writing it in the form of a comic strip, adding drawings and inventing characters, so that your message is more incisive and direct.
You could even suggest it as an activity for the **school newspaper**!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM
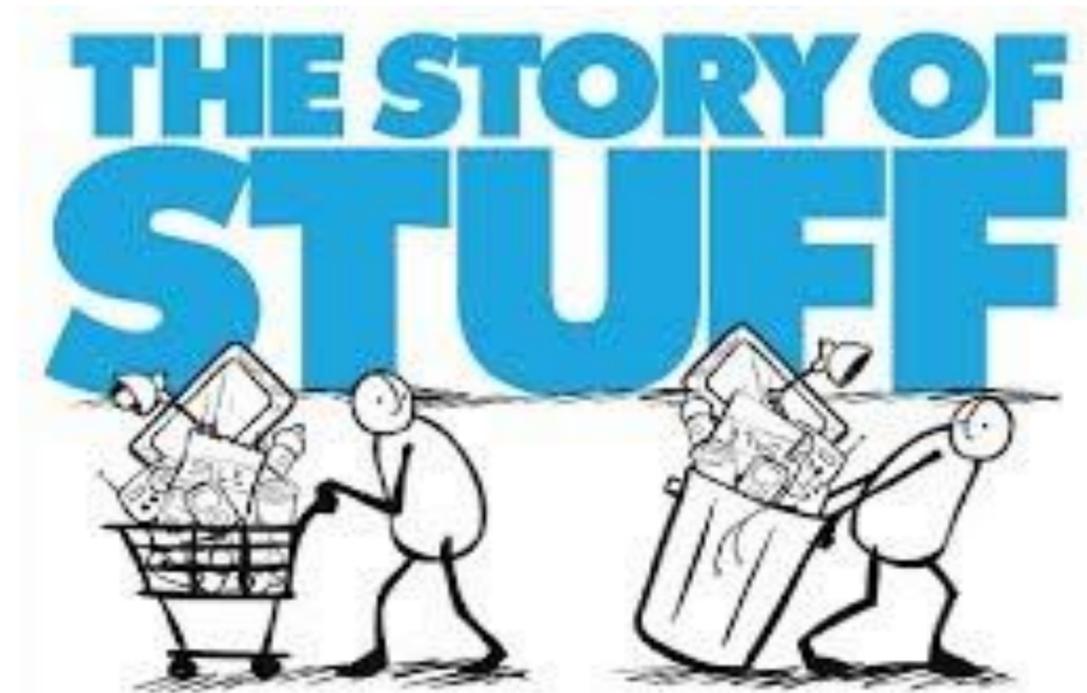
Example: The Story of Stuff

A 20-minute, fast-paced, fact-filled look at the underside of our production and consumption patterns.
The Story of Stuff exposes the **connections between a huge number of environmental and social issues** and calls us together to create a more sustainable and just world.

age

Sustainability in action:

What to remember

Talking about environmental sustainability is important because it allows us to understand the consequences of our actions, protect the planet, and build a better future for everyone.

To make these messages effective, data alone is not enough: **clear communication**, **storytelling**, and **empathy** are also needed.

Telling stories and putting ourselves in the shoes of people, animals, or natural elements helps to engage emotionally, make problems concrete, and motivate responsible behaviour.

Getting people involved is essential: *only when everyone feels part of the change is it possible to build a true green transition* and transform awareness into concrete action.

Summary pills of this module:

· **Sustainability** is a collective story

· **Communication** and **empathy** make transition possible

· **Young people** are not the future: they are the present

References and other material:

- https://instituteofsustainabilitystudies.com/insights/lexicon/storytelling-for-sustainability-crafting-compelling-narratives/

- https://toppartners.it/pillar-sostenibilita-aziendale/

- https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0007681323000058

- https://www.greenpeace.org/italy/?_gl=1%2Aorm3j7%2A_ga%2AMTIyMDk3MTI3OS4xNzY4NDA5Nzk5%2A_ga_YY7FES8KL3%2AczE3Njg0MDk3OTkkbzEkZzAkdDE3Njg0MDk3OTkkajYwJGwwJGg5MzIxMjM3ODQ

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pF72px2R3Hg

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHDC31Dt0FY

- https://www.conservation.org/nature-is-speaking

- https://robertglazer.com/friday-forward/sympathy-empathy-compassion/

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmVLcj-XKnM

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM

- https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1151868

- https://energyalliance.org/the-power-of-storytelling-communicators-as-catalysts-for-climate-action/

THANK YOU!