Storytelling, global change and social-ecological systems resilience. From the ‘integration of knowledge forms’ to the ‘mobilisation of knowledge actors’.

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Abstract

Before the advent and supremacy of written and electronic forms of information, the pooling and communication of different forms of knowledge and experiences necessary to deal with complex problems was often re-created through the making of stories. Traditionally, storytelling has been a major way of expressing the complexities of social-ecological systems functioning and to translate such complexity into collective meaning and action. In the present times, storytelling still constitutes a fundamental form of knowledge transmission and understanding. The making and sharing of stories, some factual but others based on pure imagination, is central in enhancing the necessary creativity to find imaginative pathways and options for sustainable development. Appealing stories on sustainability can play a crucial role in the articulation of common wisdom and social reflexivity in the face of the present accelerated global environmental change. In this paper, we review the anthropological and historical applications of storytelling in natural resource use, and look at its potential in supporting the management and resilience of social-ecological systems. To this aim, we focus on the functions of applied drama and other narrative participatory techniques to produce and convey poignant stories about social-ecological systems’ change and to extract sense conducive to pro-active action. We present a flexible methodological approach combining these techniques to trigger community engagement and social learning. Through storytelling complex forms of knowledge and practises are embodied in particular individuals; and in this way, stories can be fundamental in moving from the abstract notion of ‘integration of knowledge forms’ to the ‘mobilisation of knowledge actors’.

Keywords: Storytelling, Applied Drama, Social Learning, Knowledges, Participation, Community Engagement, Collective action

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