IFSTAL
Innovative Food Systems Teaching And Learning

Workshop 2   Rich Pictures

What is a Rich Picture?

A rich picture[1] is a visual drawing, and problem structuring tool, that can:

- Take people out of their usual modes of expression (talking and writing), forcing them to think differently about what they want to express.
- Become a 'transitional object' to talk about constructively, when talking about the issue without the picture might result in conflict.
- Capture a lot of detail on one page, in a way that describing things in words can't.
- Capture information about interrelationships much more effectively than written text.
- Be easily 'scanned' by participants wanting to discuss an aspect of the drawing or identify what's missing.
- Be a focus for people's stories about the problem situation.
- Often provide a fun experience that brings a group together.

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)

SSM is a methodology used to help address complex issues involving multiple perspectives. The Rich Picture features as part of the SSM learning cycle, where we try to find out about a 'problematical situation' that we want to intervene in [2]. The rich picture can be used to inform three linked analyses that occur at the start of the learning cycle.

Analysis 1: The actors - Identify the key roles:

- Practitioners – the people carrying out the analysis
- Issue owners – possible persons (or groups) taken to own the issues addressed
- Client(s) – causes an intervention or change to happen

Analysis 2: The Social - Identify:

- Roles – social positions (formal and informal)
- Norms – expected behaviours associated with roles or organisations
- Values – standards by which behaviour gets judged

- **Analysis 3: The Political - Identify:**
- How is power expressed in the situation?
- What things/processes denote power?

Rules for Rich Picture Drawing[2]:

- The paper should be visible to the entire group – so everyone knows what is going on regarding components and linkages within the diagram.
- Everyone should have a pen and be able to contribute
- Text should be avoided. It takes up too much space and it is easier to describe things pictorially.
- Everybody has a pen and participates together.
- You don't have to be an artist! Nobody is judging your drawing, and stick figures are fine.
- When you draw something, explain it to other people.
- Link your parts of the rich picture to the parts drawn by others.
- Feel free to use symbols like arrows to show influences and connections; speech bubbles to represent people's different views; and make up your own symbols if you want (e.g., crossed swords to represent conflicts).
- If there is a disagreement, that's fine: represent both sides of the disagreement in the drawing.
- It doesn't matter if the picture gets messy: as long as you explain things, people will understand.
- Make sure you capture roles, norms and values as part of the picture.
- Consider boundaries: what is the context that will matter in terms of taking action?

What makes a 'good' Rich Picture?

Think about including the following elements[3] :

- **COLOUR** – variations in colour can be used to highlight different elements
- **KINETIC** – use lines of various thickness and other forms of connectors to demonstrate strength of linkages between elements of the picture
- **MOOD** – is there some coherence of narrative or story within the picture? Is there relationship between elements? Have different perspectives been captured?
- **FOCUS** – have you focused on the issue at hand?

References

1. Prof Gerald Midgley, University of Hull.
2. Checkland, P. and Poulter, J., 2010. Soft systems methodology. In Systems approaches to managing change: A practical guide (pp. 191-242). Springer London.
3. Bell, S. and Morse, S., 2013. Rich pictures: a means to explore the 'sustainable mind'?. Sustainable Development, 21(1), pp.30-47.