

Winning the narrative

Re-taking the space and building new narratives

Context: Threats to our democracy and rule of law

For a number of years we have witnessed an unprecedented attack on NGOs, particularly those working on migrant and refugee rights, with an intensity that has called into question the basic values and principles of our democratic society. This threat to the fabric of our society has been evidenced through:

Criminalization of Solidarity: Since 2015, we saw an increase in defamatory campaigns and police operations targeting those who help migrants and refugees. Whether done through search and rescue operations at sea or through reception or distribution of food, housing and services, charity workers, rescuers, journalists, priests, volunteers and NGO members have been portrayed and treated as criminals.

Divisive Politics: A divisive political climate remains, despite the fading occurrence of parties in Government identifying migrants and NGOs as the main protagonists of their toxic narratives.

Attacks on the Freedom of the Press: Journalists and newspapers have been attacked for any government criticism and a CIVICUS Monitor report in 2018-19 highlighted the existence of a “climate of fear for journalists and activists” in Italy. Disinformation has been rife – spreading through the media at breakneck speed.





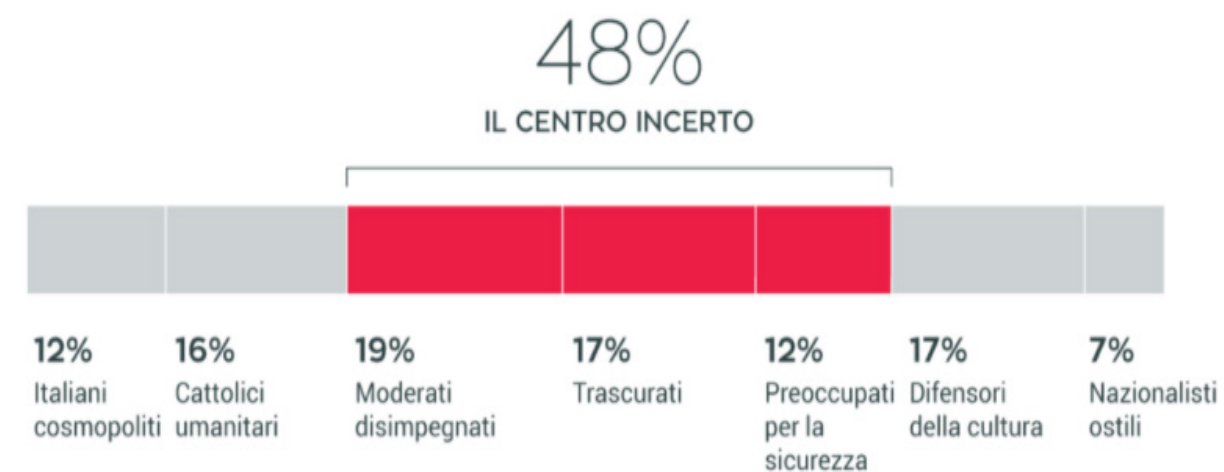
Regressive Legislation and a Shrinking Civic Space: Parliament has, on more than one occasion, passed laws that severely affected minorities, migrants and vulnerable groups and the CIVICUS Monitor report cited above placed Italy among the countries that “have reduced the space for civil society organisations critical of the state”, where “very often, the objectives of these restrictions are social movements, environmental groups or support groups for refugees and migrants”.

Targeted Acts of Aggression: Dozens of attacks on black people, Roma and Sinti people, human rights lawyers and charity workers have been recorded in the past year, triggering the UN to publicly condemn the Government.

Our starting point: Emerging hope – How we can win

Despite all this we still have hope. When it comes to national identity, refugees and migrants, an Ipsos More in Common research study entitled “Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy” (funded by the Social Change Initiative) has shown that while 24% of Italians are hostile to open society values, 28% do stand with us in this respect and 48% are part of a silent, anxious and undecided “middle”. It is in winning over that “middle” that a narrative change is most imperative. We will win the narrative, and in doing so, win those prospective allies.

La segmentazione della popolazione italiana



Fonte: More in Common, Ipsos Italia





Challenging rhetoric has always been at the heart of CILD's work

When the CILD was born in 2014, Italy was at risk of populism and xenophobia becoming mainstream. Since then it has become evident that this is no longer a potential risk, but a reality that is constantly rearing its head. Populist and xenophobic attitudes have dominated the political agenda – while too often a deafening silence has been the response even of the most progressive politicians. The excessive focus on negative and xenophobic narratives highlights a real and urgent need to counterbalance these views.

Rhetoric spreads faster than fact

We quickly came to realise that policy change would be impossible without a change of narrative. Fact-checking and in-depth analysis, which CILD has always done (for example, through our Open Migration platform), are fundamental aspects, but unfortunately are not enough to counterbalance traditional negative narratives. Strategic communication, however, can facilitate new and compelling narratives. In this area, we have focused most of our efforts on carrying out narrative change projects.

What is the “Winning the Narrative” project?

In delivering this project the main activities surround:

- 1) Holding national conversations to engage key stakeholder groups and facilitate buy-in;
- 2) Increasing capacity within CSOs to develop and deploy positive narratives built around workable solutions, core national and constitutional values, and a sense of civic engagement, belonging and togetherness, via:
 - Producing and disseminating specialised narrative change/strategic communications resources;
 - Providing strategic training and workshops focusing on development of shared language, deployment of effective narratives, and planning of tactical interventions to co-develop and deploy positive narratives.
- 3) The gathering of intel on areas of Italy which are considered key in terms of need for narrative change;
- 4) Connecting people and civil society organisations, both at local and national level, across different backgrounds and broader constituencies, via mentoring opportunities (particularly targeted towards migrants, second-generation and other underrepresented groups), events and a community of practice.

Work done in this respect is led and coordinated by CILD, in close collaboration with two main partners: The Good Lobby and Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa, which both act as executional assistance providers and members of the Winning the Narrative steering committee.

Partners: CILD, OBCT e TGL



Cild: Founded in 2014, the Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (or CILD) is a network of civil society organisations which protects and expands the rights and liberties of all, through a combination of advocacy, public education and legal action.



OBC Transeuropa is a think tank focused on South-East Europe, Turkey and the Caucasus which was launched in the year 2000. Over time, OBC Transeuropa expanded its scope and now reports on the socio-political and cultural developments of six EU member states, of seven countries taking part in the EU Enlargement process, and much of post-communist Europe, which is included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).



TGL: The Good Lobby is a non-profit organisation committed to making the society in which we live more democratic, united and fair. They are a movement of people convinced that every citizen can mobilise to defend the interests of the community.

Our goals

The overall goal of our project is **the emergence of new, positive immigration and civic society narratives**, which become entrenched in the political, cultural and societal context of Italy. These core narratives need to move hearts, minds, and policy across sectors and constituencies, at both local and national levels. We also aim to expand the impact, scale and coordination of communication and advocacy activity in the migration field, by focusing on capacity building, content strategy and leadership development.



We want to ensure that:

1

Practitioners (CSOs and activists) are assisted to improve their communication and advocacy practices and adopt strategic communication approaches;

2

New narratives about migration will emerge within the field and across sectors, at local and international levels;

3

Underrepresented or unheard **messengers and voices will be amplified**;

4

Increased opportunities for sector-based interaction will lead to greater collaboration amongst CSOs and professionals;

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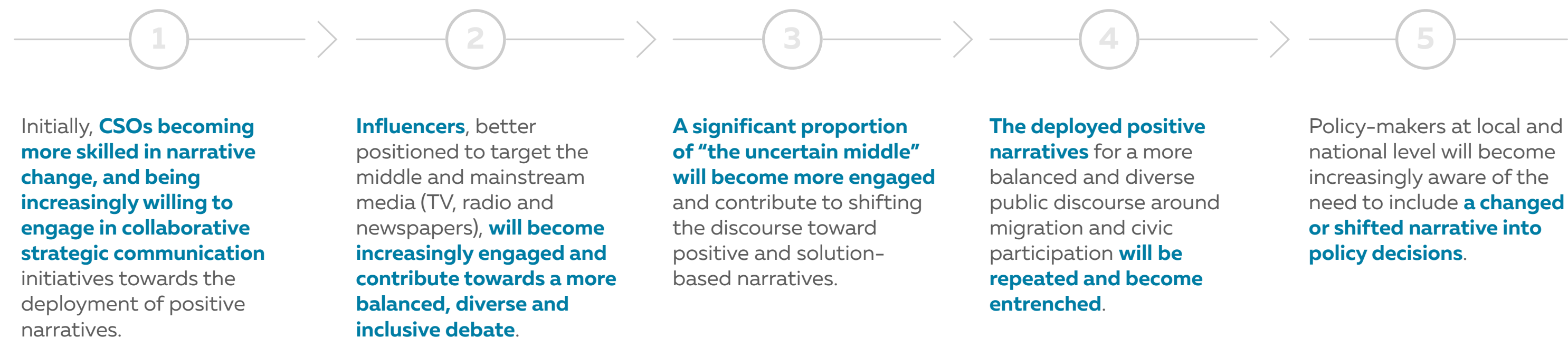
Strategic communication activities would be positioned effectively so as to attract new investment into narrative change.



As defined by the Opportunity Agenda, a “Core Narrative” is a set of broad themes and values that help to connect with persuadable audiences and build support for change.

The ‘Winning the Narrative’ Theory of Change

At the conclusion of the project, we anticipate and envisage a multi-level and cross-sector change, facilitated by:



How we are achieving this

The narrative change we have set as our final goal is a goal built from the bottom up, starting from an accurate knowledge of the actors and the problems of local realities, involving political decision-makers and national actors.

For this reason the project has foreseen:

- The mapping of key cities: together with the OBCT partners we have started a detailed mapping, in different key areas of the country, of the main actors that can participate in the creation and change of the narrative. This work has been done so far in the cities of Trento, Ventimiglia, Trieste, Bari and Padua.
- The realisation of workshops and civil society consultation meetings: together with The Good Lobby we have held live and online meetings involving activists, communication professionals and ordinary citizens interested in learning about and applying new strategies that lead to narrative change;



- The organisation of national conversations: during the year we acted as an intermediary between Italian civil society and international institutions. The Council of Europe has chosen us as Italian partner in its monitoring work on civil society. With the highest representatives of the Council of Europe's NGO Conference, we opened a dialogue with CSOs – especially those dealing with migration – in May 2019. Subsequently, we made their demands on Italian institutions.
- The creation of our Narrative Lab: to crown the activities carried out at local and national level and to connect people and civil society organisations throughout the territory, the creation of our Narrative Lab followed. Through this tool we want to build a community that goes beyond different contexts and specific skills while providing resources, training opportunities, tutoring and meetings. The Narrative Lab will then independently produce its own campaigns and initiatives.



Emphasis on mapping



In order to understand the many forms of narrative contrary to the values of solidarity and hospitality, **we have mapped the protagonists of civil society in the cities of Trento, Ventimiglia, Trieste, Bari and Padua**. In this way we have created a complete picture of those who contribute to the spread of narratives and policies that fuel xenophobia and division, and those who oppose them.



After mapping the local stakeholders, **a consultation process was conducted with interested parties to identify some relevant**, often overlooked, aspects that can help to create a new narrative of solidarity and inclusion in the localities concerned. The consultation involved a wide range of actors and stakeholders, divided into three focus groups: the world of associations, the world of research (including foundations and museums) and the world of entrepreneurship and cooperation.

Awareness Raising & Capacity Building among CSOs and active citizens

Alongside partners of The Good Lobby, we have carried out a series of workshops, in which we have involved and brought together journalists, activists, researchers, semiologists, members of civil society, activists and interested citizens.

We started from the assumption that media and social bubbles amplify prejudices and reduce exposure to opinions different from ours – thus naming the workshops “Outside of the Bubbles”. These bubbles represent a phenomenon that contributes to increasingly marking the distance between the real world and the perceived world, where the latter now often appears to be conditioned by feelings of intolerance towards all forms of diversity and complexity.

Together, during these meetings, we tried to answer questions including:

Which words should we abandon and which ones should we rediscover in order to give a voice in the public debate to those who do not give in to hatred and intolerance?

Which interpretative frameworks are most effective in conveying speech which conveys values such as equality, respect and empathy towards others?



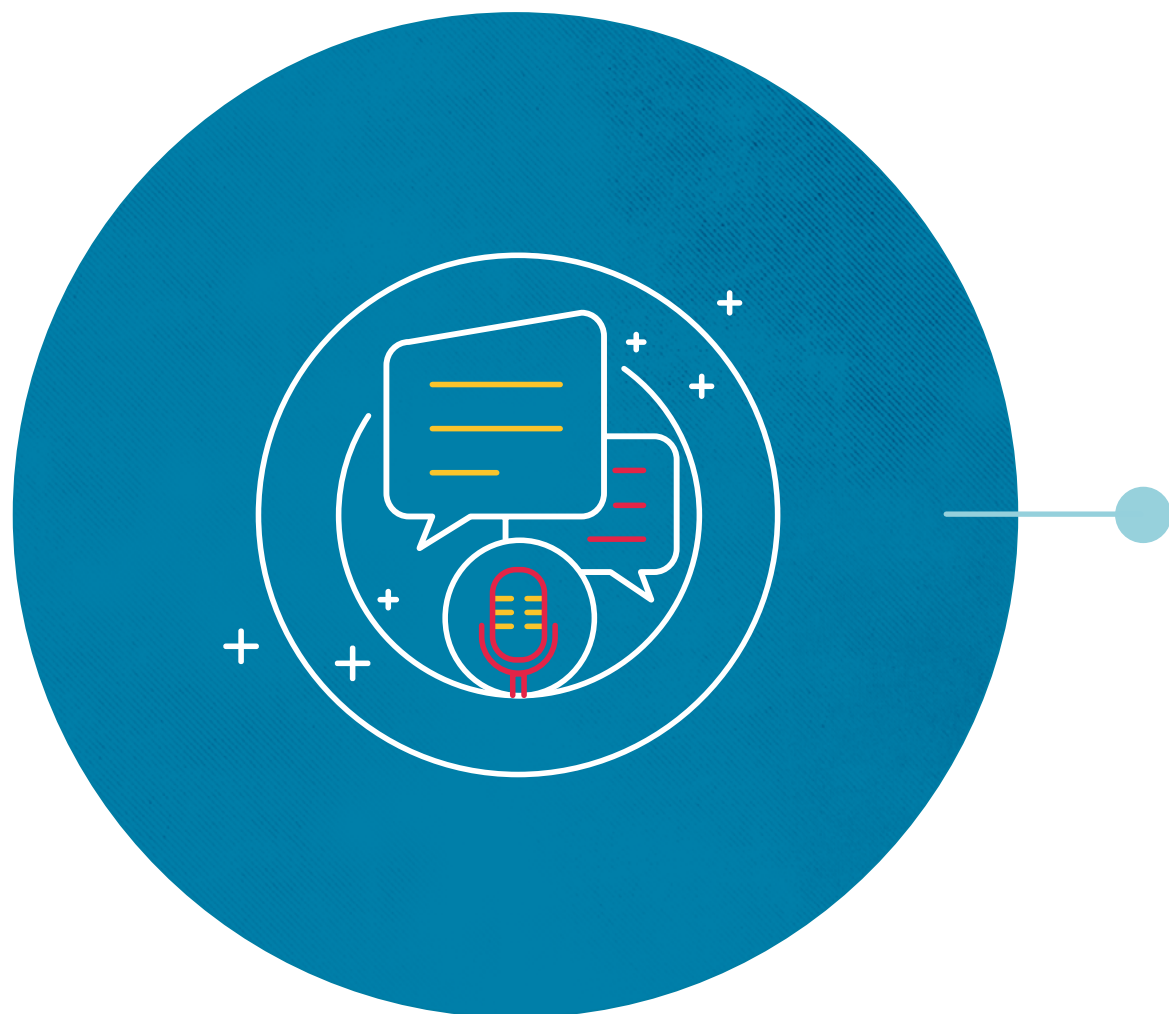
**Riprendersi gli spazi,
costruire nuove narrazioni.
Perché la solidarietà
riguarda tutti.**

8 luglio 2020
ore 17.30 - 19.00 | Webinar Zoom

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|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| Rossella Vignola Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa | Annalisa Camilli Giornalista | Paola Barretta Ricercatrice | Agostino Zanotti Rivolti ai Balcani |
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Info e iscrizioni su **THEGOODLOBBY.IT**

THE good LOBBY Osservatorio Centro per la Cooperazione Italia-Europa-Mediterraneo CILD



Narrative Lab

Training workshops, forming part of our Narrative Lab, will be delivered in a COVID-safe way in the identified locations, bringing content, best practice, case studies and experiences aimed at increasing the capacity of civil society in those areas to life, covering topics including:

- Communication, Human Rights, and COVID-19
- Communications in times of Crisis
- Strategic Communications for the Social Sector
- Narrative-based Communications and Migration

We will also grow the Narrative Lab's community of practice and in 2021 commence the Narrative Lab's mentoring component, with a particular focus on migrants, second-generation and other unrepresented or misrepresented groups.

What's next in Winning the Narrative? Civitates 2021

In 2021 CILD will implement the second phase of this project, wherein we will venture beyond assisting largely NGOs with narrative change. We will focus on enabling CSOs to use strategic communication to become stronger and more active participants within the COVID-19 recovery process, following the adoption of the New Generation EU fund.

Our aim is to both build visibility and representativeness, broadening the capacity of civil society to build a strong agenda, and propel the government to introduce policies that will make decision-making processes for the use of the recovery fund as participatory as possible.

This will in turn also build the resilience of CSOs, such that they will be able to withstand future attacks on Italy's civic space.

We will continue to do the important work we have been during the first phase of this project: developing and deploying positive narratives and connecting people and CSOs at local and national levels, across different backgrounds and broader constituencies. Our methodologies and effective approach will remain.

Importantly, however, we add to this work efforts to increase the number and diversity of organisations engaging with the Coalition's work and the number of stakeholders and policymakers endorsing our call to the government to make the decision-making process for the recovery fund as participatory as possible. This will set the groundwork for the ongoing involvement of CSOs in major national and local decision-making processes.



Join us and stay tuned!
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In cooperation with The Good Lobby and Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa,
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