

Teixeira, P. (2020). *See the change! - using visual storytelling in NGO strategic communication*. Abstract from 2nd Lisbon Winter School for the Study of Communication: Media and Uncertainty, Lisboa, Portugal.

At a time when change seems to be the norm and all human systems seem to be permanently and persistently changing at a faster pace than ever, one of the key capacities needed for organisations to survive, grow and evolve is to change and adapt to change. This fast paced ever changing world makes it difficult for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), specially those that work for social inclusion or that advocate for social causes, to make people stop and see what is, in the vast majority of cases, invisible and distant to them. All over the world, XXI Century NGOs battle to make social issues and the positive social change that they accomplish seen, understood and given importance by donors, actual and potential, and society as a whole. As one might imagine this is not an easy task, social problems are complex, uneasy realities, that usually don't appeal to those not involved and social programmes, projects and interventions are full of technical and social data (indicators and metrics) not easily decoded and understood by those who are not trained in social sciences. Even more, this is an area where populism, demagogic rhetoric and even hate speech are more present each day, posing more and new challenges to these NGOs communication. In this paper we will look into the use of photography and photography based visual storytelling in strategic communication by NGOs (in this case Portuguese NGOs) to give visibility to social issues and communicate the social change or even social impact that they are able to promote through their projects and interventions. We will start by discussing the, already mentioned, challenges that all NGO Communication Strategies must address, and look into the importance of having a strong strategic communication, aligned with organisational purpose and mission, to achieve goals like awareness, engagement and fundraising. Then we will suggest that Storytelling is a communicational tool that is being used more and more each day by organisations and managers and a fundamental tool for successful NGO communication. History and stories are how most, if not all, of us have learned and retained most of the information, concepts and social codes that have been passed on to us, and that we have retained and operationalised in our socialisation practices and processes. The narratives create a context of "interest" and involvement that captures the attention and a mental imagery facilitating the passage of information. It is for this reason that storytelling and narrative creation can play such a relevant role when we want to "pass" strategic messages. In this paper we will focus our attention on how the use of the visual elements, in this case photography, can enhance the, already significant, power of storytelling. Authors such as Shani Orgad explore the dimensions and roles that strategic communication and the use of visual storytelling can have at different levels within NGOs, creating bridges between their mission and functions such as fundraising or advocacy. As photography supported visual storytelling is the focus of this paper, we will reflect on the power of photography to impress, pass emotions and involve viewers, specially when we talk about social problems and social change. From the ideas of Susan Sontag on the power of photography to the specific use of photography to impress and engage audiences on social issues, presented in works by authors like Alice Baroni, Lillie Chouliaraki, Jane Davison, Tiffany Fairey, Marta Zarzycka or Barbie Zelizer. We will look into the specific role that photography can have in passing stories and emotions that can be fundamental both to make the invisible visible and to raise support, tangible or intangible, for social causes. It is with that framework in mind that we analyse how three Portuguese NGOs use (or not)

photography and visual storytelling in their websites and social media and if those uses are in line with their purpose, mission and objectives. Finally we will present some main conclusions on the use of photographic visual storytelling by these NGOs and draw some reflections on what could be done to maximise their impact and make them more inline with the theoretical framework used in this paper and is part of a broader research for a PhD in Communication Studies.