

1. Tensions that can arise in conversations related to expanding narratives about a place

a. Common concerns people often express:

- “We don’t want to make anyone uncomfortable.”
- “We’re afraid of alienating people.”
- “We don’t want to look bad.”
- “We’re afraid of making a mistake.”
- It’s important to move through these sorts of concerns and not let them become roadblocks. Because the truth is that people are already alienated and uncomfortable. And as organizations work to address issues related to narratives, mistakes will happen. Organizations have a responsibility to learn from these mistakes and to be accountable so that the mistakes don’t continue to be repeated.
- Remembering that needs for expanding narratives of the Erie Canal are going to be different in different contexts. Organizations also have a responsibility to connect with local communities in their context in work around expanding narratives, because these narratives affect those communities directly.

b. I would also begin by asking everyone here why they’re interested in expanding narratives and if they’re bringing certain expectations (such as not looking bad) into the space of expanding narratives (expectations that might be hiding). Developing awareness around things like expectations, personal interests, and biases can bring more honesty and accountability to conversations around expanding narratives.

c. Connecting storytelling to landscape architecture and planning:

- “The erasure of discriminatory actions in planning history substantially influences the cultural history, context, and stories about places from which we seek inspiration [that] we then embed in the designs we generate” (Low, 2020: 130).
- In that sense, the stories we tell about a place can reinforce discriminatory actions but also help effect change. However, we have to be willing to tell different stories and to recognize what has been invisibilized through storytelling and address the consequences so that again we (hopefully) do not continue to make the same mistakes, which will most certainly happen if we continue to ignore and erase discriminatory actions in these narratives.

d. I want to talk more specifically about the importance of emotions, ethics, and critical self-reflection in the implementation of expanding narratives.

2. Emotional dimensions of the Erie Canal narrative and some points to consider with respect to implementation

a. The politics of the positive and the negative

- The dominant narrative of the Erie Canal is overly positive and seeks to evoke feelings of marvel, joy, and celebration for the canal, ignoring the violence, both social and ecological, and illegal foundations of the canal’s construction.
- As I’ve been researching the marketing of Erie Canal heritage tourism and recreation, it systematically denies anything negative to do with the canal and works to reframe negative things in a more digestible, “positive” light
- It’s important to recognize that the stories we tell about the Erie Canal aren’t neutral. We need complex, more holistic stories that break beyond positive/negative binaries
- Have your organization ask: what is being ignored, how is it being invisibilized, what aspects of history are being erased in favor of preserving others, and what are the implications?
- Issues with heritage storytelling practices are systemic. Intentionality behind storytelling is not as important as the impacts of the stories we tell. It’s not really relevant whether erasures/misrepresentations are intentional or not because this is not about anyone as an individual.
- At the same time, individual preservationists have a *responsibility* to acknowledge and address that which is being actively erased because of these ongoing systemic harms in which we operate.

b. Ethics of expanding narratives

- Stories have real, physical, and material impacts; stories are not just stories, they are not innocent; they can cause harm even when well-intentioned.
- It's important to consider who is able to tell the narrative/who is involved in what ways (power dynamics) as well as how are those involved holding themselves accountable to the communities implicated by the narrative they're choosing to tell.
 - How local residents and communities who feel totally misaligned with the dominant Erie Canal narrative might be impacted?
 - How might a tourist or recreationist feel if they were to learn the more complex history of the Erie Canal that includes the negative aspects—angry, upset, misled?

c. Critical self-reflexivity, awareness of emotional responses to different narratives

- Stories are issues of environmental justice, urban renewal, gentrification, displacement, etc.
- Often, when people challenge a narrative it's because they understand how it causes harm
- Part of re-storying work is recognizing the different emotional responses we have to certain stories
- If denial or anger or confusion arise, it does not necessarily mean a story is incorrect even though it may challenge one's own pre-existing knowledge
- And, if a story evokes feelings of joy, happiness, or excitement, it doesn't necessarily mean that story is correct or better than others
- Everyone is going to have different emotional responses so it's important not to invalidate those who question a particular narrative, such as the dominant narrative of the Erie Canal, but rather, to listen
- Our emotional responses can serve as guides in helping us unlearn harmful patterns of storytelling, but we have to be willing to listen compassionately, including when our own perspectives are challenged

3. Future of preservation and the Erie Canal

- Uncomfortable, must be willing to sit with discomfort in work around expanding narratives
- Not rushing to urgently "make it right"; rather, having humility, slowing down, and moving at the speed of trust (brown, 2017), because we need trust as we expand narratives
 - self-reflection can support the establishment of trusting relationships
- Reflective questions: What aspects of the Erie Canal history make me feel happy, angry, nauseous, and/or indifferent [also insert other emotions]? Where are these responses coming from? How do these emotional responses affect the narrative of the Erie Canal I prefer or choose to tell? How will expanding narratives of the Erie Canal require me to confront the limitations of my own perspectives and biases? And how can I get more uncomfortable with what I think I know about the history of the Erie Canal?
- This work can be done at both the individual and organizational scale
- If we can work with a sense of emotional awareness, it may open us to futures we can't yet imagine to be possible