

Personal Stories in Flooded Futures

Climate-related water risks are rising, but Dutch citizens remain largely unaware. These futures often feel abstract or already “under control” due to past water management success. Current science communication rarely connects these risks to daily life.

Collaborative Future Storytelling (CFS) offers a more personal approach. In CFS workshops, citizens create stories set in plausible future scenarios, grounded in familiar routines and places (Figure 1). This helps make abstract risks feel real and relevant, increasing awareness.

Literature and an exploratory test show the following key ingredients for an effective CFS workshop: Ground futures in science, connect them to personal experience, lower barriers to participation, and balance structure with creative freedom. Engagement should be behavioral, emotional, and cognitive, supported by interactive design and flexible facilitation.

The workshop was tested five times seen Figure 2, resulting in the structure seen in Figure 3.

CFS can also supports research by making future thinking accessible to non-experts. It can reveal deeper insights into public values and concerns, enabling more inclusive and grounded development.

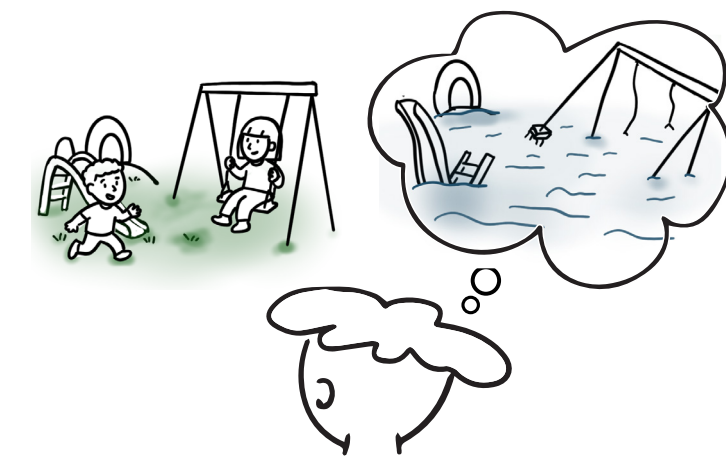


Figure 1



Figure 2

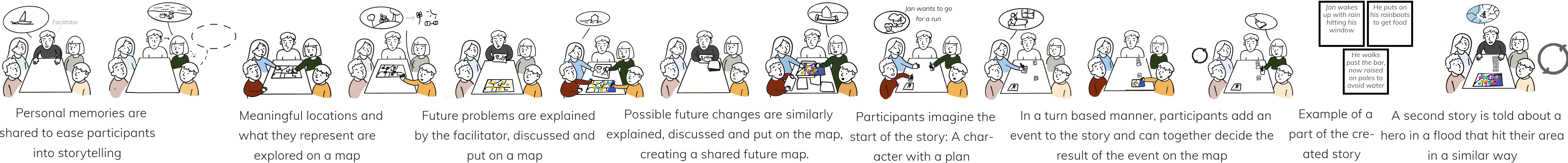
Participants imagined futures where daily life adapted to water. Stories explored future elements like floating towns which needed to be secured during storms, and running or surfing through a flooded Rotterdam.

Common surfaced themes were adaptation and resilience. Uncertainty also surfaced, including fears of being forced to relocate. Values like community support and staying active appeared frequently, showing what mattered most.

The workshops showed that Collaborative Future Storytelling (CFS) can connect abstract climate scenarios to lived experience. Through emotionally grounded, co-created stories, participants explored future risks in concrete, personal ways—imagining routines like school drop-offs or pub visits under new conditions. These narratives helped translate distant futures into meaningful, value-based reflections, reinforcing the power of storytelling found in the literature.

Future workshops should involve more diverse groups and explore longer-term impact on awareness. An alternative storytelling format may also support stronger immersion.

Figure 3



Gijs Voorhoeve
Personal Stories in Flooded Futures
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Strategic Product Design

Committee
Chair: Roy Bendor
Mentor: Laura Barendregt
External mentor: Negar Moghtaderi Asr
Company
Deltares

