

**Driving
change
for better
cities**

How to write good applications using storytelling techniques

Webinar - 29 May 2026

URBACT

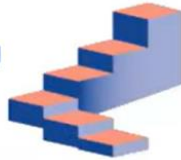


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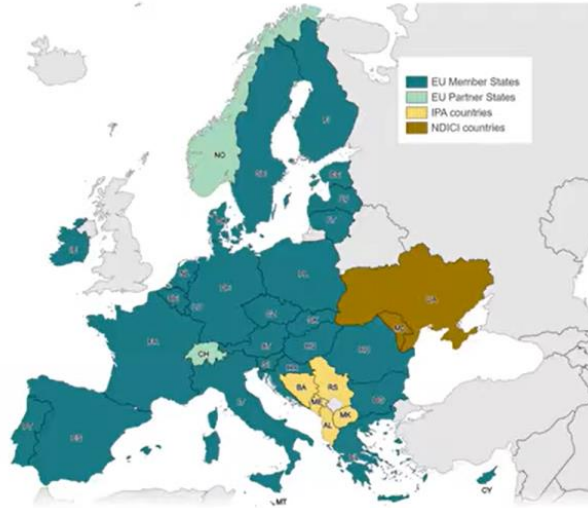
Our three main activities

Networks of European cities

Capacity building activities & tools



Programme Area



Limites administratives: © EuroGeographics, © FAO (ONU), © TurkStat
Cartographie: Eurostat - IMAGE, 07/2024

Knowledge uptake and sharing



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URBACT Call for Action Networks

Open until 17 June 2026

<https://urbact.eu/get-involved>



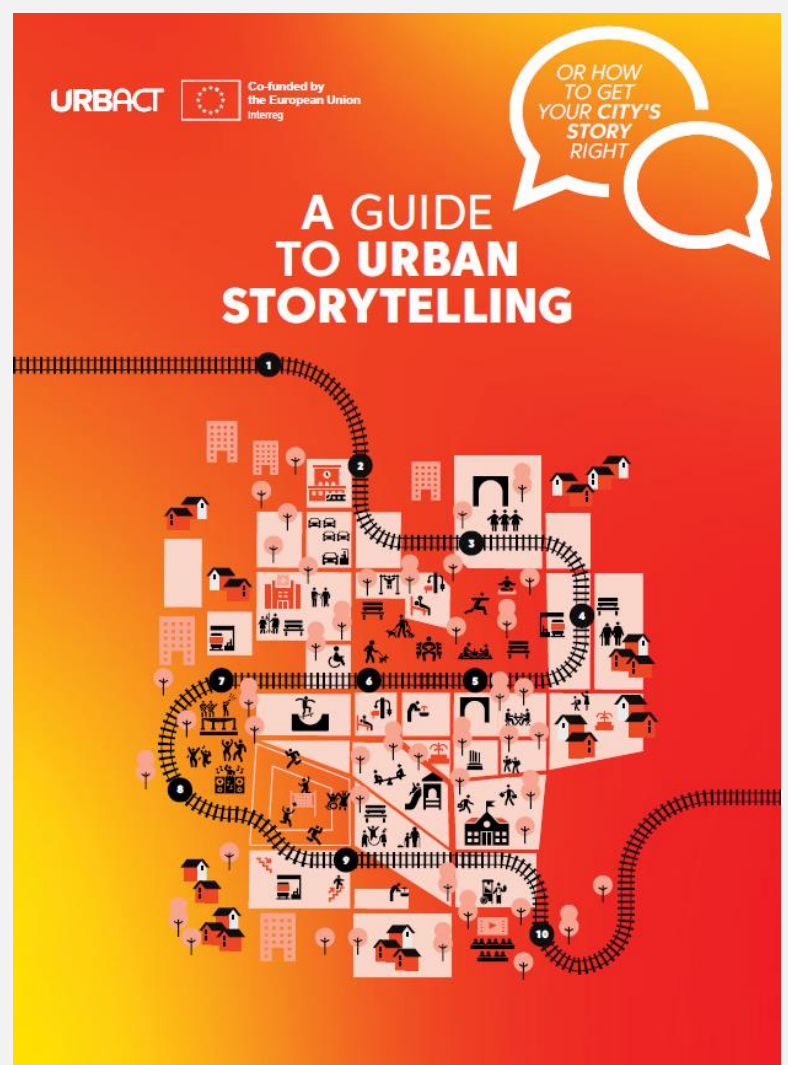
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Just released!

<https://urbact.eu/knowledge-hub/storytelling>



What this webinar will help you do

Understand how evaluators experience applications



Avoid common proposal writing mistakes



Write stronger summaries and problem statements



Use storytelling to improve clarity and credibility

What to expect this morning

- Focus on assessment
- Experience from a successful applicant city
- Hints and tips for your applications
- Questions & Answers



**But first, let's get
to know you**



[Focus on assessment (process, experience from assessors)

**By Clémentine Gravier,
Head of Unit, Networks and Capacity-building, URBACT
Secretariat**

Assessment process for URBACT applications



URBACT call for Action Networks: Focus on the implementation of action(s)

→ **Crucial to describe the cities' strategies/action plans**

- Which priorities at local level?
- What is the rationale for these strategies?
- How they have been built?
- Their objectives?

→ **What's the story behind?**

When reading an application, assessors get...



- Poor use of AI
- Several people involved (change of tone)
- Repetitions
- Level of commitment



- Interesting topic
- Nice & varied partnership
- Clear objectives
- Structured application
- Smooth reading

Any questions?



[Storytelling hints and tips for your applications

By Brian Marrinan, URBACT expert

What makes an application memorable?

1

**A clear and urgent
problem**

2

**Concrete examples
and evidence**

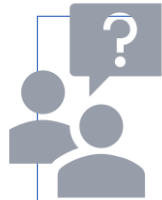
3

**A credible and
distinctive local
story**

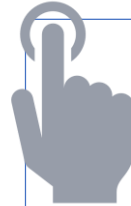
4

**A strong narrative
flow from
challenge to action**

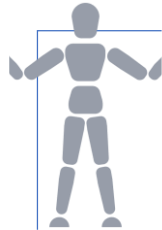
What storytelling means in most applications



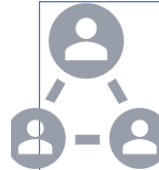
Helping evaluators understand quickly



Making challenges tangible and specific

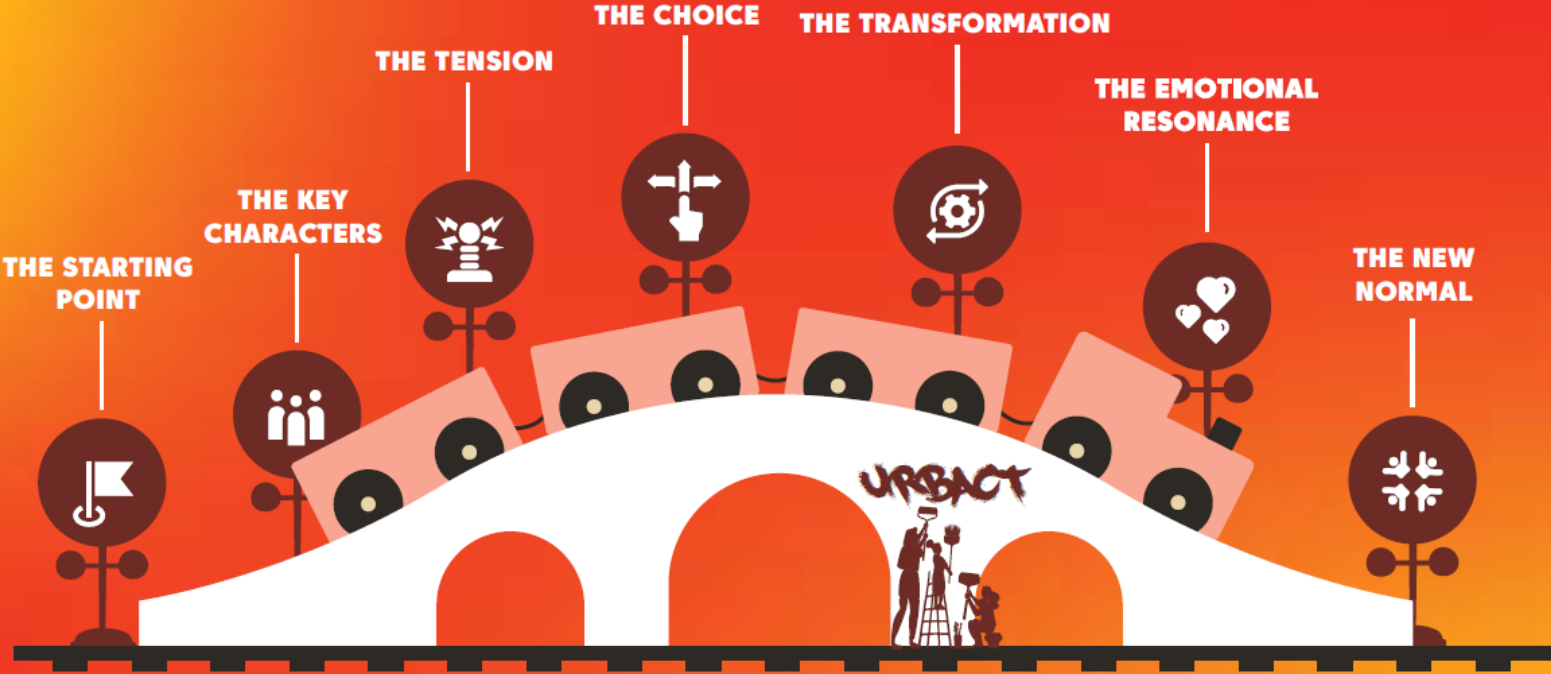


Showing why action matters now

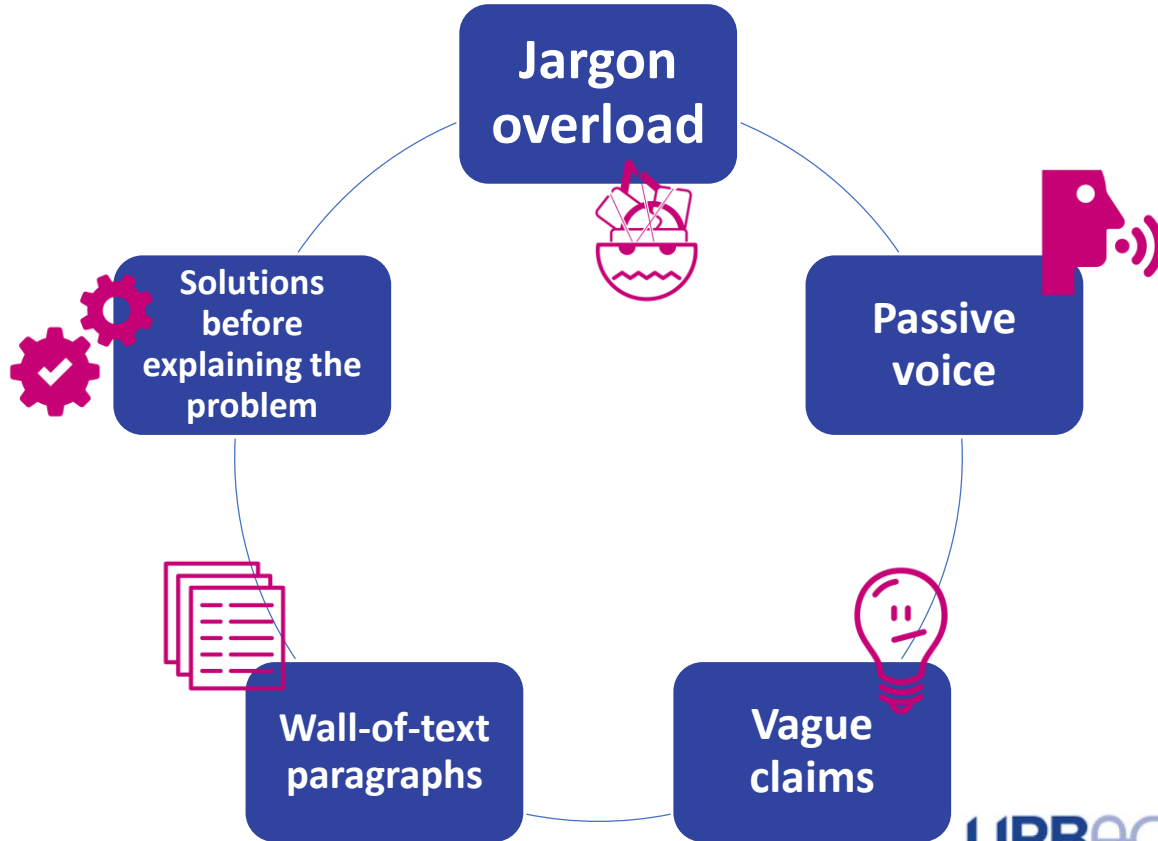


Connecting evidence, stakes, and momentum

The URBACT Story Bridge



Common writing mistakes



[One voice matters

Many contributors can weaken consistency

One editor should oversee tone and flow

Strong applications feel coherent from beginning to end

Consistency creates confidence



Section 1.2: The summary

Your elevator pitch

State the problem clearly

Explain why the issue matters

Show why this network is the right response

Introducing the MèreMer Network

In Cobh, historic docklands that once connected the town to the world are increasingly disconnected from everyday community life.

Across Europe, maritime cities face similar challenges: ageing waterfronts, disappearing maritime skills, and younger generations with little connection to local heritage.

MèreMer will help cities reactivate maritime identity through culture, tourism, education, and public space renewal.

Maritime heritage is an important resource for many European coastal cities.

MèreMer will create opportunities for partner municipalities to collaborate in addressing challenges related to heritage preservation, tourism development, and sustainable urban regeneration through cooperation, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder engagement activities.

[Section 2.1.1: Policy challenge

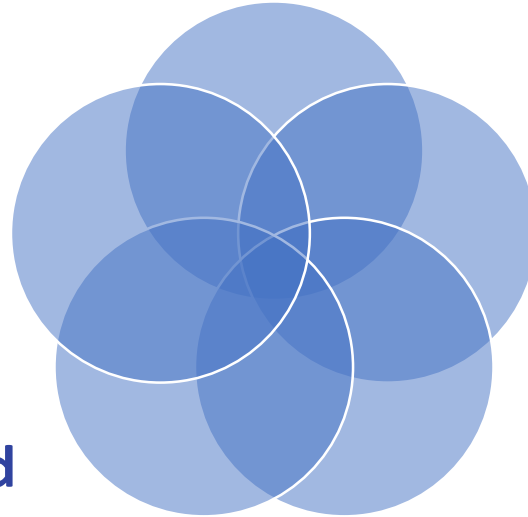
Hook

Your city's
distinctive
angle

Context

Stakes and
implications

Evidence



Introducing the MèreMer Network

Example 1:

Maritime heritage is an important asset for many European coastal cities and represents significant opportunities for tourism, culture, and economic development. However, many municipalities face challenges related to the preservation and promotion of maritime heritage within changing urban environments.

MèreMer aims to support cooperation between cities in order to exchange good practices and improve policy approaches related to heritage valorisation, stakeholder engagement, sustainable tourism, and integrated urban development.

Example 2:

Historic harbours and docklands often remain visually attractive, but economically fragile and socially underused outside tourism periods.

Cobh has already begun testing new approaches through local festivals, school programmes, and small-scale public space initiatives linked to maritime culture such as shanty singing. However, the city lacks structured methods for connecting these isolated activities into a long-term regeneration strategy.

MèreMer will allow Cobh and partner cities to explore how maritime heritage can actively support inclusion, learning, cultural participation, and sustainable waterfront renewal.

Section 3.1.1: Local Challenges

01

Use vivid local examples

02

Make the challenge tangible

03

Describe consequences clearly

04

Avoid abstract policy language

Introducing the MèreMer Network

Example 1:

Cobh has a rich maritime identity shaped by emigration, trade, naval history, and waterfront culture. However, despite strong tourism visibility, many local maritime assets are insufficiently connected to community life, education, and year-round economic activity.

Local stakeholders identified three key challenges: fragmented cultural programming, limited youth engagement with maritime heritage, and underused waterfront spaces outside tourism seasons. Existing initiatives demonstrate strong local interest, but coordination between municipal departments, schools, tourism actors, and cultural organisations remains limited.

Example 2:

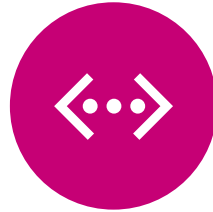
The local challenge relates to the need for a more integrated approach to maritime heritage management involving public authorities, civil society organisations, tourism actors, and educational stakeholders.

Maritime heritage represents an important opportunity for Cobh in relation to tourism development, social inclusion, local identity, and economic growth. However, additional cooperation and policy coordination are required to maximise these opportunities.

Section 3.1.2: Strategic framework



**Show momentum
rather than aspiration**



**Connect existing
strategies to proposed
actions**



**Demonstrate
commitment and
readiness**



**Highlight partnerships
and governance**

Introducing the MèreMer Network

Example 1:

The municipality therefore sees MèreMer as an opportunity to strengthen implementation capacity with a more coordinated delivery framework linking coordination structures between cultural organisations, tourism actors, schools, and municipal departments.

This includes developing shared planning methods, joint programming approaches, and long-term coordination mechanisms for waterfront and heritage-related activities.

Example 2:

The municipality's strategic framework recognises the importance of maritime heritage in relation to tourism, sustainability, and local identity. The proposed network will contribute to strengthening these strategic priorities through cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Through transnational cooperation, the municipality aims to improve policy integration and sustainable urban development approaches.

Ask yourself

- Can the evaluator picture the problem clearly?
- Are the stakes explicit?
- Does the text sound concrete and credible?
- Could this proposal belong to any city?

If you use Artificial Intelligence, use it wisely!

Helpful

Simplifying language

Reducing jargon

Some translation

Careful

Removes local specificity

Makes it look the same as others

Frustrate evaluators



AI should support writing, not replace thinking

Final reflection

If evaluators remembered only three sentences from your proposal, what would they be?



Any questions?



 Experience from Komotini (EL), a successful applicant city

By Katerina Paschalidou, City of Komotini, co-author of the CALL application form

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CALL “Accessible Cities for ALL”

URBACT IV Transfer
Network



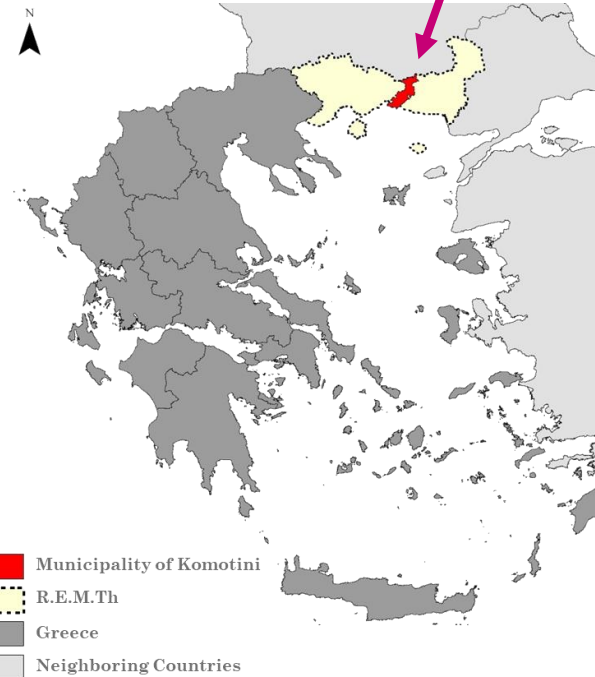
Social cohesion

Local economy

Climate adaptation

Komotini , Greece

Size of city : 54.272 inhabitants



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MUNICIPALITY OF KOMOTINI

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Project partners

GREECE – KOMOTINI (LP)

IRELAND - GALWAY CITY

CROATIA - DUBROVNIK

PORTUGAL - PENTÁGONO

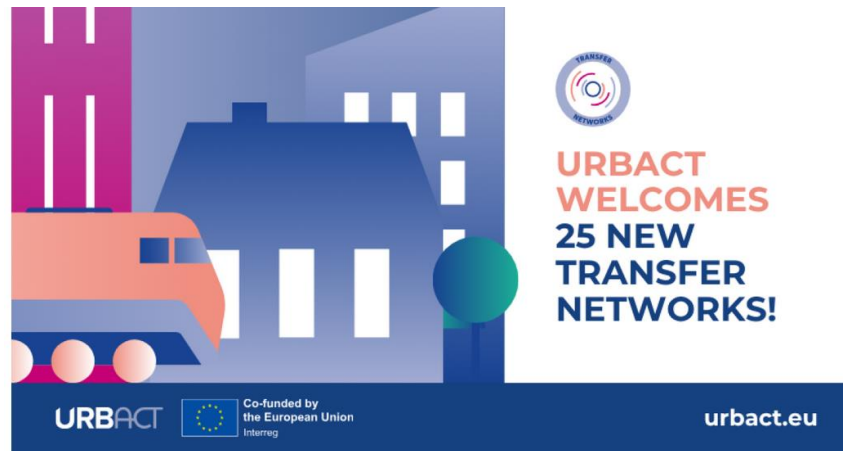
URBANO

SERBIA - ZRENJANIN

SLOVAKIA - BRATISLAVA

POLAND - JAROSLAV

ITALY - SAN LUCIDO



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Team evolution...it takes some people to make it work!

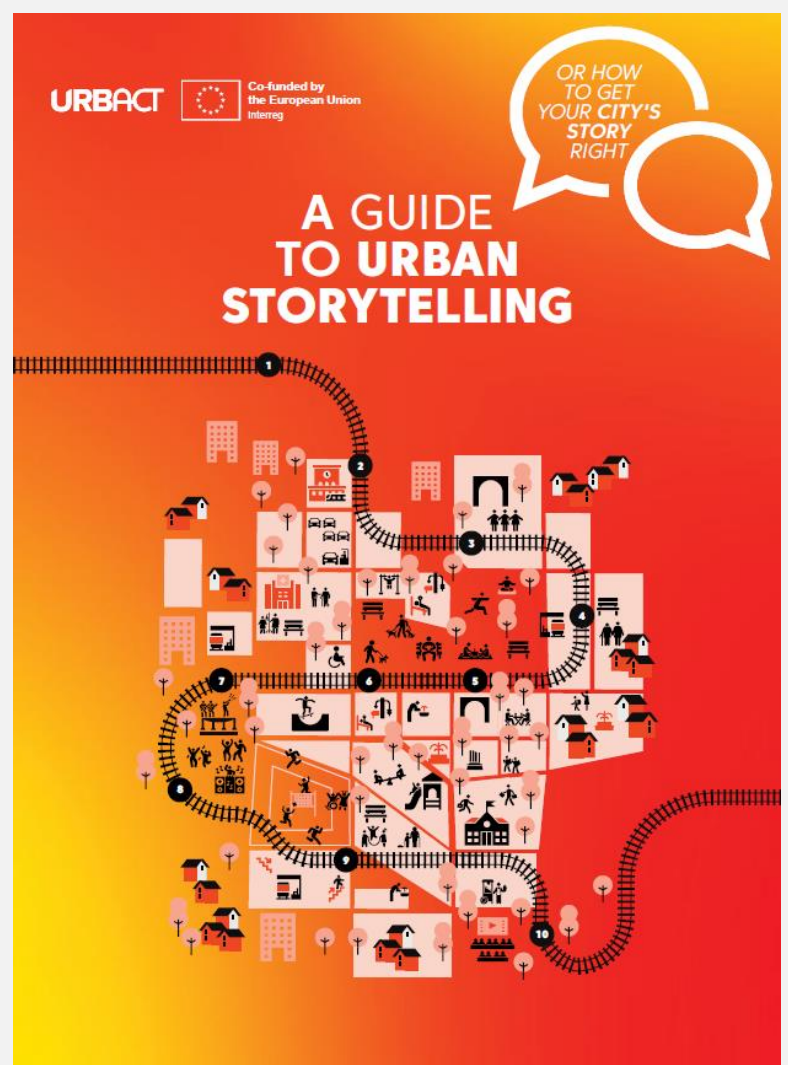


Any questions?



More about storytelling?

<https://urbact.eu/knowledge-hub/storytelling>



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