

# MONEY TO BURN

Behind the scenes of a  
cross-border investigation



# 16 journalists from 8 countries

## Reporters

### Estonia

Piret Reiljan — Freelance journalist

Teet Konksi — Videographer, ERR

Liis Treimann — Photographer, Äripäev

Nele Aunap — Freelance cinematographer

### The Netherlands

Sophie Blok — Journalist, Argos

Ties Gijzel — Partnership developer, Argos

Emiel Woutersen — Journalist, Investico

Daphné Dupont-Nivet — Journalist, Investico

### Latvia

Zane Mače — Journalist, Latvia Radio 1

Anita Brauna — Journalist, Latvia Radio 1

### Germany

Paul Toetzsche — Freelance journalist

### Belgium

Catherine Joie — Freelance journalist

### Spain

Silvia Nortes — Freelance journalist

### United Kingdom

Hazel Sheffield — Freelance journalist

Ben Heubl — Data journalist at E&T Magazine

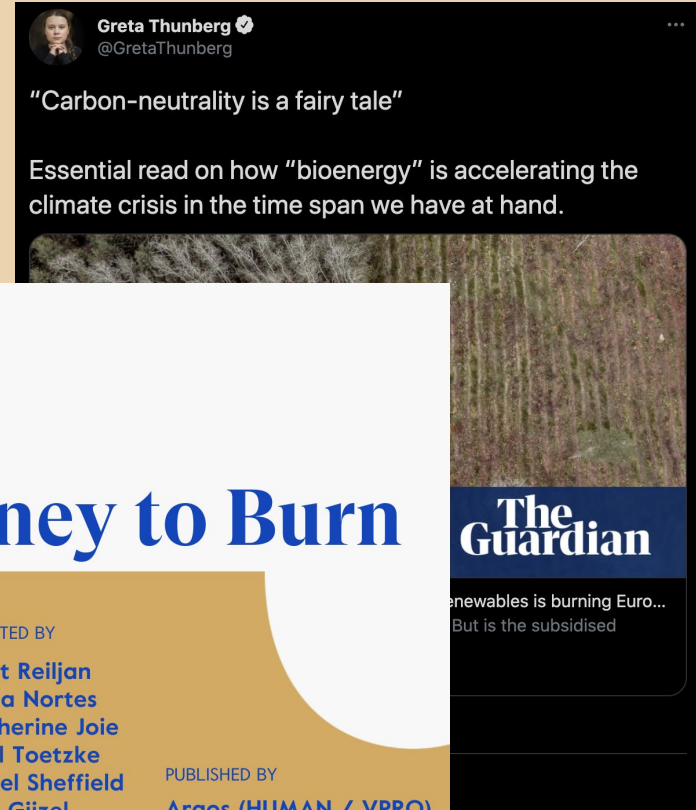
### Portugal

Carla Tomás — Journalist, Expresso



# Impact

- 27 publications in 8 countries
- 1 million unique European readers
- 2 mentions in national parliaments + European Commission
- 3 prize nominations
- 9 news articles about our project
- A close team that is already working on new story ideas and investigations





# Part 1 | How it all started

- Cross-border & collaborative journalism programme by German Toepfer Foundation;
- Raw topic with cross-border potential;
- Onboarding Dutch colleagues and VPRO;
- 50K grant from the IJ4EU fund.
- Working time: Sept 2020-Dec 2020.



# What did we find out?

- Tree felling in Estonia's protected areas is increasing;
- More than half of the raw material for pellets comes from roundwood;
- Burning woody biomass for energy is heavily subsidised by Western European countries;
- Estonia's land sector is expected to switch from storing to emitting carbon by 2030;
- The certifications system of the sector is vague.





# Estonia - pellet producers' paradise

- A lot of mature forest full of “low quality” wood;
- Peaking felling volumes;
- 80-85% of felling volumes comes from clear-cutting;
- From 2015 Estonia has loosened the rules in protected Natura 2000 forests, so that more and more clear-cutting is allowed there too.



# Europe's Pellet King

## Graanul Invest

- Europe's no. 1 and world's no. 2 pellet producer;
- Estonia's 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest private forest owner;
- 85% of its raw material comes from Latvia and Estonia;
- 54.4% of the raw material is roundwood.

## Raul Kirjanen

- The main owner of Graanul Invest;
- One of the richest Estonian;
- Head of the wood sector lobby.





# How we worked in Estonia

- Statistics, legislation, reports;
- Land register: mapping Graanul Invest's forests  
(+satellites);
- Interviews;
- 1 week sprint in Tallinn;
- Visiting clear-cut Natura 2000 forests;
- Following Graanul Invest's pellet ship (vesselfinder.com, vesseltracker.com).



# The Pellet King got offended

- They went after our sources;
- Raul Kirjanen returned his business award to one of our Estonian publishers.
- But the boom continues, Graanul Invest plans a new factory to Latvia ...



## Part 2 | How we collaborated across borders



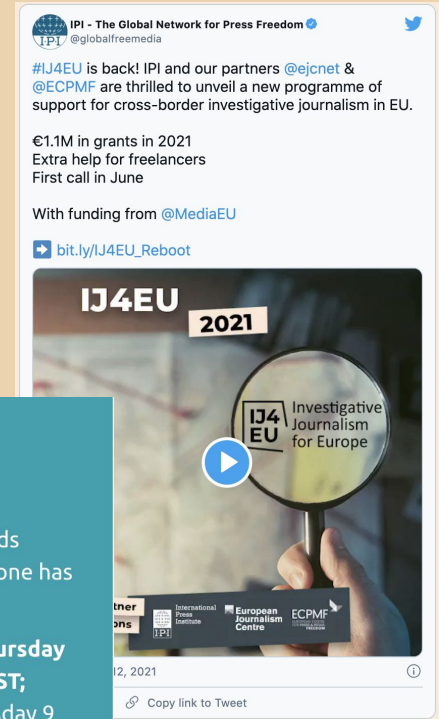
# First, you need money

- Investigative Journalism for Europe (IJ4EU):  
<https://www.investigativejournalismforeu.net/>
- Journalismfund.eu  
<https://www.journalismfund.eu/>
- Opportunities based around your topic  
<https://docsociety.org/climate-story/>

NEXT DEADLINE  
20 May 2021

There are 4 application rounds scheduled in 2021. The first one has passed:

- The second deadline is **Thursday 20 May 2021 at 12 pm CEST**;
- The third deadline is Thursday 9 September 2021 at 12 pm CEST;
- The fourth deadline is Thursday 4 November 2021 at 12 pm CET.






# How to (safely) organise a cross-border investigation

We used a suite of open-source, encrypted tools.

- Nextcloud: <https://nextcloud.com/>
- Docuwiki: <https://www.dokuwiki.org/dokuwiki>
- Rocketchat: <https://rocket.chat/>
- Signal: <https://signal.org/en/>

# What is a docuwiki?

Pellets wiki

Logged in as: hazel (hazel) [Update Profile](#) [Admin](#) [Log Out](#)

Search

[Recent Changes](#) [Media Manager](#) [Sitemap](#)

Trace: [start](#)

## Website

[draft](#)

## Reporting

[EU](#)

[Global](#)

[Certifications](#)

## Countries

[Belgium](#)

[Estonia](#)

[Switzerland](#)

[Germany](#)

[Latvia](#)

[Netherlands](#)

[Portugal](#)

[Spain](#)

[UK](#)

## Admin

[Minutes](#)

## Welcome to the pellets wiki

Having a wiki allows us to cross-check facts, consolidate our reporting and build on one another's work.

[Edit](#)

### How to use the DocuWiki

1. To add to the wiki, select your country from the sidebar and click the pencil icon on the right to "edit this page".
2. To add a document, find the right section.
3. Select heading 3 or === heading === and use the following format for headings:  
September 3, 2020, Publication: Title of document
4. Undemeath, select the external link icon or use [External Link](#) to add a link to the document.
5. **Using normal text, add a short summary of the document or list the key points. If the document is not in English, write a summary or the key points in English.**
6. To upload whole reports, interview transcripts and other documents, first create a space for them in the NextCloud in your country file, and then share using an **internal link** to that file in the DocuWiki, listing the date, title and a summary of the document in the same way. By using internal links, only team members with access to the file can read the document, otherwise it's an open URL.

If you have any questions or need a run through, please shout.

[Edit](#)

start.txt · Last modified: 2021/03/19 08:02 by hazel

## Interviews

**March 17, 2020, Linde Zuidema, EU policy advisor, Fern, Florence**

[Linde Zuidema, EU policy advisor, Fern](#)

Zuidema is a researcher on biofuels for Fern, an organisation with one simple aim: to put forests on the EU agenda. She says deforestation is not an issue as most EU member states have a plan to replace cut wood, but management of forests is a much bigger issue with shortening rotation periods etc.

**March 13, 2020, Duncan Brack, environmental policy analyst, Chatham House, London**

[Duncan Brack, environmental policy analyst, Chatham House, London](#)

"We're effectively paying to increase carbon carbon emissions in the atmosphere – this is clearly a bad thing. Biomass is eing out competed, solar and wind is much cheaper now. I do not think there will be much more support for Biomass in the UK, but the emerging problem now is Bio-energy with carbon capture and storage [BECCS]and whether the government will start subsidising that, it's a brief introduction."

**April 21, 2020, Satyen Sinha, a consultant in the UK doing some work for the Natural Resources Defense Council**

[April 21, 2020, Satyen Sinha](#) The US doesn't account for its carbon on the ground so when it's counted a being carbon neutral the carbon is being accounted for elsewhere – it isn't. Also the way the carbon is accounted for, it doesn't account for the counterfactuals, so if the trees stayed there, how much carbon will be absorbed, if you replant there is carbon debt.

In a UK setting the government has ben reliant on the Renewable Energy Directive which has guided UK policy. The UK can go stricter and it has done on biomass, because the UK went heavily in for biomass so it's tightened up. **The UK government has realised its mistake. It has announced this year that it will end all subsidies for biomass under contracts for difference, which makes there will be no more subsidies for biomass after 2027**, we think that's took long. We thought the government should reallocate subsidies under renewable allocation subsidies. That's our major call. We have ha some conversations where the former minister asked for solutions. **Clare Perry**.

Our fear is that although the government will end subsidies for Biomass, if it continues subsidies for BECCS for wood pellets, you're effectively subsidising wood pellets again.

# How to organise your time

Psychology of limitations:

We had three months of IJ4EU money, so we organised our time (and money) over three months

- Month one: country-specific research and reporting
- Month two: cross-border research and reporting
- Month three: putting it all together



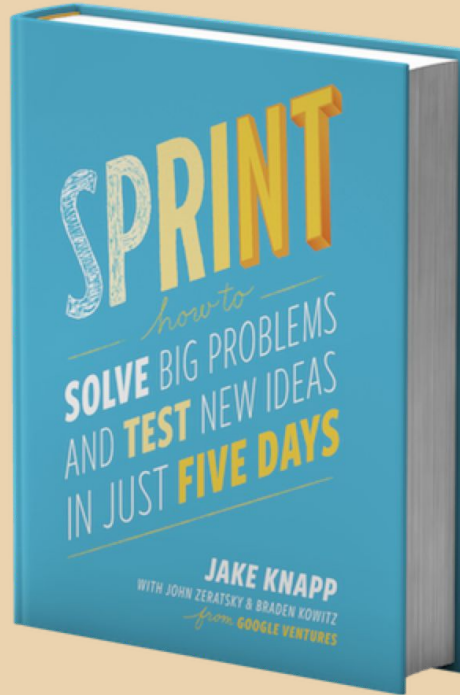
# How to find a publisher

- Start talking to publishers early – as soon as you can
- Use your relationships
- Offer something new
- Be flexible on the date
- Don't worry about it!

## Part 3 | How we pulled it all together



**Believe it or not, we were inspired by Google**





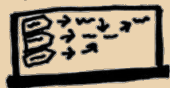
# EDGES OF EUROPE



AreWeEurope

- Start at the end

## • Map



- Ask the experts
- Target

- Remix & improve

## • Sketch



## • Decide



- Rumble
- Story board

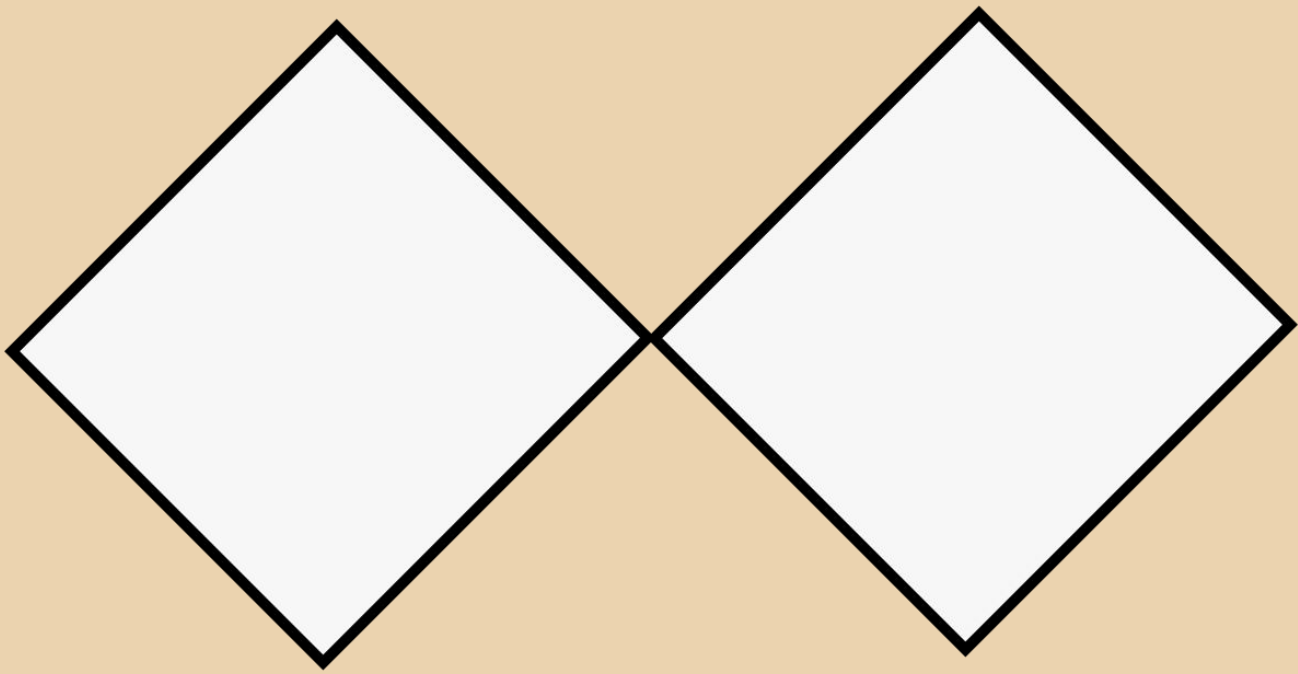
## • Proto-type



## • Test

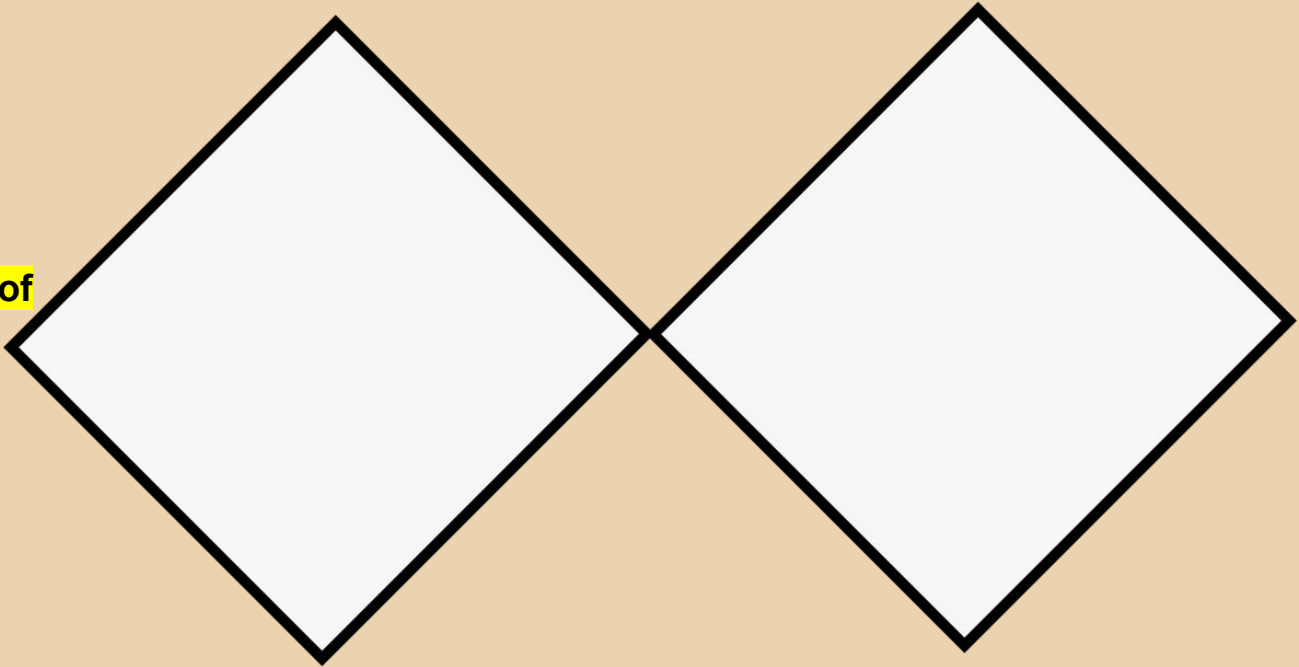


- Learn



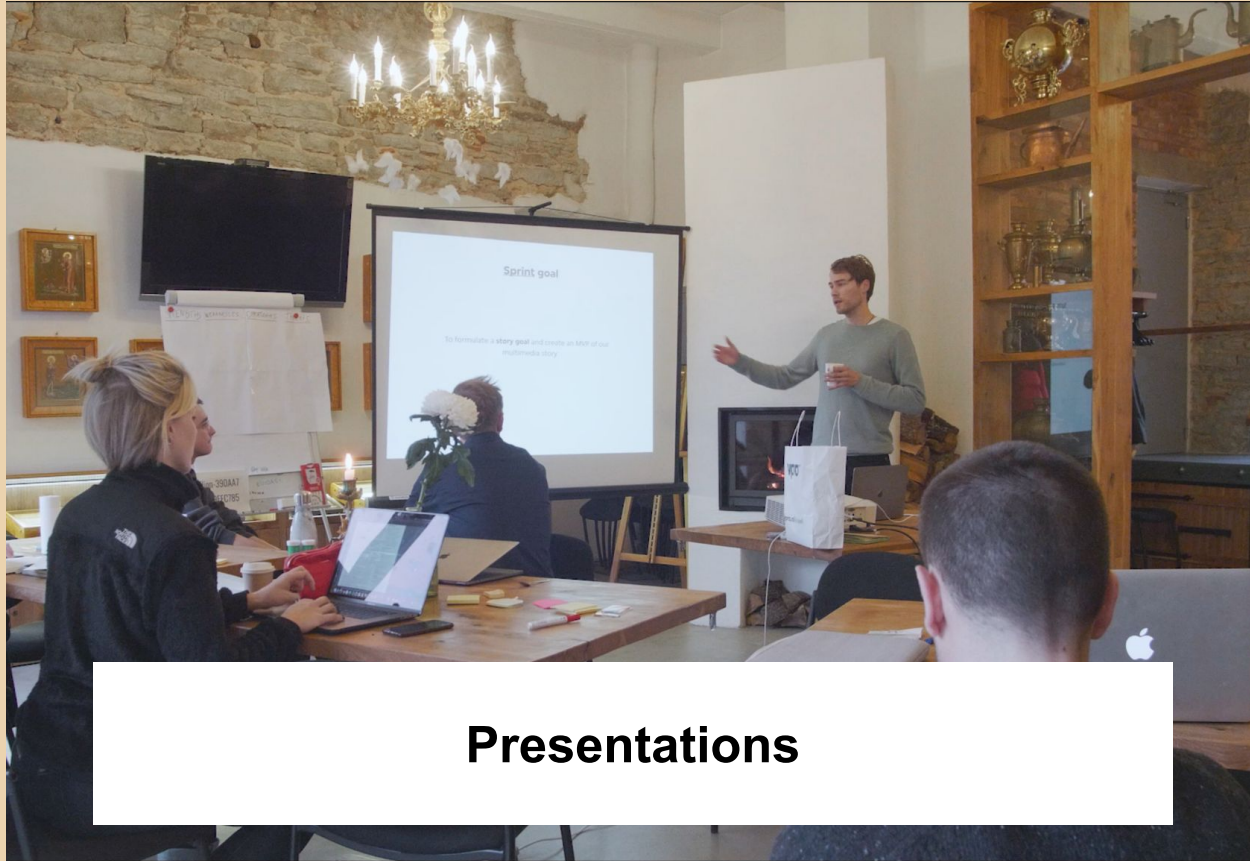


**Add 3 months of  
research + 16  
journalists**





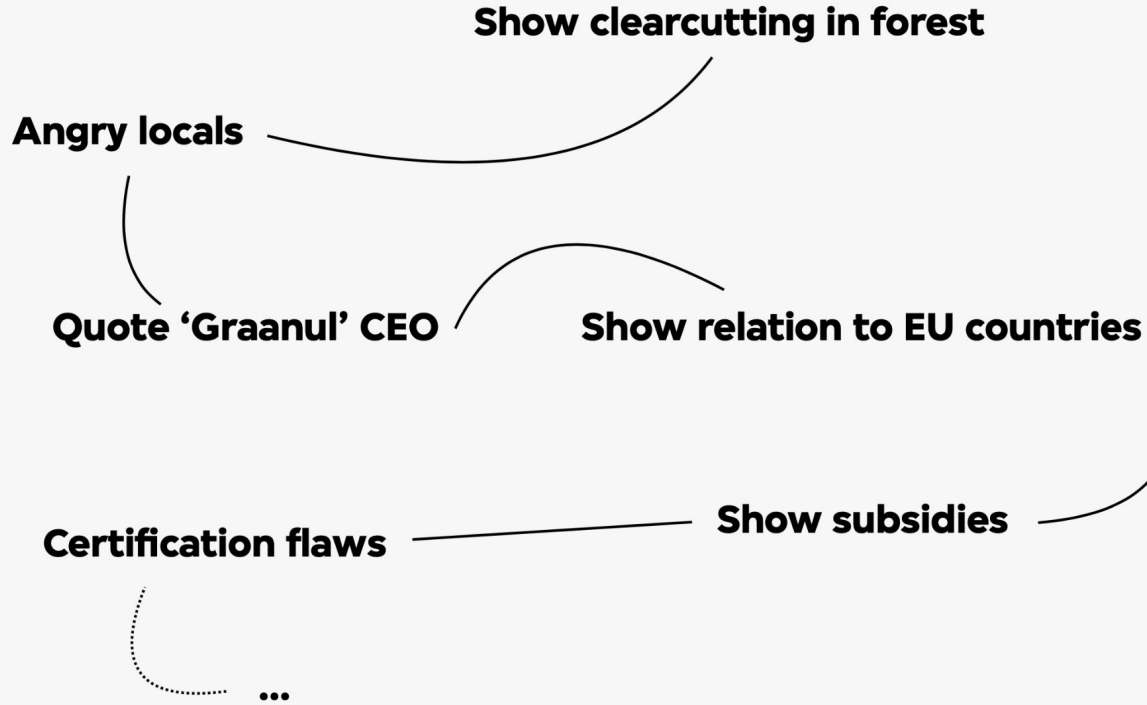
**Preparation: Team A, B and C**

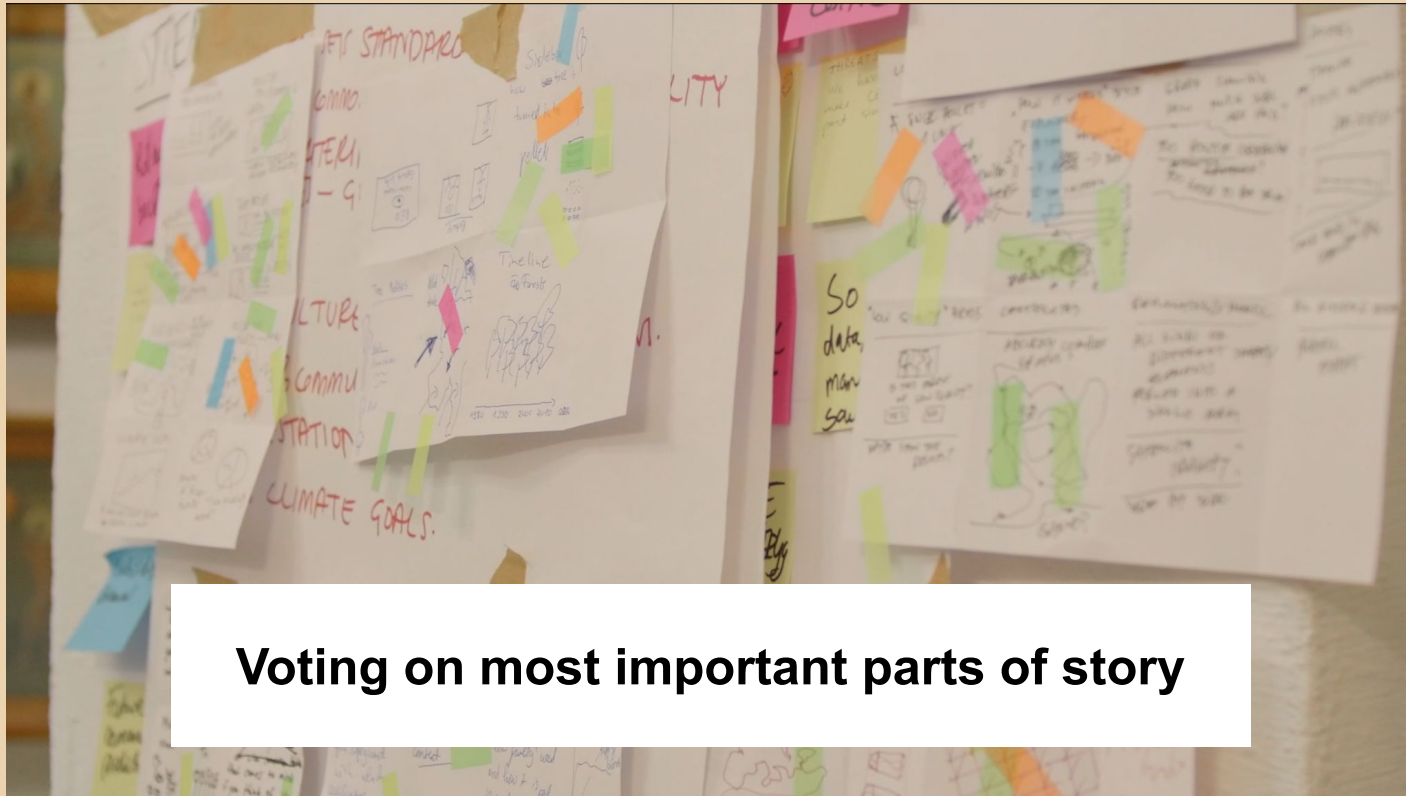


## **Presentations**



# Money to Burn







**Create a storyboard**



**Voting on best visualisations of the story**





**Made one collective storyboard**





**Reporting**

**And weeks of editing...**

**Missing picture** of a determined Hazel  
editing our 10.000 word interactive



# Thank you.

Questions? Or interested in collaborating?

[preiljan@gmail.com](mailto:preiljan@gmail.com)

[t.gijzel@vpro.nl](mailto:t.gijzel@vpro.nl)

[hazelsheffield@protonmail.com](mailto:hazelsheffield@protonmail.com)