COLLECTING DIGITAL STORIES OF MIGRANTS

Report

“It feels good to tell your story and somebody listens.” - participant during individual session

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Sammanfattning


Summary

This is the report on a four weeks pilot project on capturing the stories of immigrants who arrived in Blekinge in South Sweden in 2015. The objective of this report is to inform about the procedures undertaken and the lessons that can be derived from them for a project continuation. A digital storytelling workshop was conducted with nine participants and finally six videos were produced. The project team bases the methodological justification on previous research which has found storytelling workshops to be an ethically adequate tool that gives migrants the opportunity of self-representation. The qualitative data on perceptions of the procedures was derived from observations of the project team and unstructured informal interviews with the participants, translators and other stakeholders. The main findings are that digitally documenting the self-narrated stories of migrants was received as a positive outlet to create awareness within their community by both social integration communicators and migrants, while the most restricting factor for this kind of project is the participants’ time. The report is concluded by recommendations for future projects.
Introduction

“I never knew that these things happened to her. She was my student and she was always laughing. I didn’t know she was hiding all these things.” – Mohammed Abdu Al Amir, Civic Communicator at BIU, after translating in individual session

Throughout the past two decades, a considerable global increase of armed conflicts has been evident. When armed conflicts emanate, not only are everyday activities stalled, but poverty alleviation and human security provisions are brought to a standstill. Many scholars argue that the human cost of armed conflicts, political oppression, and climate disasters have been immense and led to global migration and population displacement. This notion is also shared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

By the end of 2015, the climax of the so-called “refugee-crisis”, European countries hosted 1.3 million asylum applicants who fled their home countries due to the conflicts, violence, terrorism, poverty, and human rights violations. In Sweden alone, by the end of 2015, the IOM documented more than 156,000 asylum seekers. Many of these migration flows have been directed through the Asian and African coasts of the Mediterranean Sea to the wealthier and safer Europe. The migrants used overcrowded boats to cross these points of passage with the risk of drowning, which has captured the attention of the media.

Many of these tragedies and stories of migrants have created a considerable dialogue among scholars to enhance the awareness of these crises. Additionally, they have gathered migrants’ stories and belongings and later displayed them in exhibitions and museums to keep the migrants’ memory alive. The intention is to “give consistency to migrants’ material and immaterial heritage and to create new heritage”. The idea of displaying the belongings and stories of migrants is important in the relationship between society and heritage which transform their tragedy into art and education and allows people to see migration as a phenomenon related to history.

The impact of digital storytelling therefore is to enhance self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of belonging in a new social context. The stories also give access and opportunity for participants to make an impact in their new social context and to create

1 O’Malley (2018).
2 IOM (2017).
3 Melotti (2018) (p.19)
a new network with the other participants. Sharing a personal story with others generates trust and mutual empathy that goes beyond barriers and stereotypes created among people.

It also provides a wealth of knowledge to the host communities about the migrants’ values, aspirations, talents, fears, and the challenges faced by them. This helps the host community understand and identify the migrants’ needs and changes within education and migration policies which will align with the qualities that migrants could bring to their new societies⁴. The potentially culture-clashing events put pressure to adapt on the local community, but in this sense, they also give the opportunity to learn from each other. To find and create a link between the migrants and Ronneby community, this project’s aim is to collect and present digital stories of migrants who came to Sweden in 2015, in a corporation with Blekinge Museum and Blekinge Integration and Education Center (BIU). Furthermore, to keep the migrants’ stories alive, this project also aims to collect related artefacts to form an archive for documentation of this charged moment in Swedish contemporary history and to enable knowledge sharing and inspire community dialogue by making the stories public.

**Stakeholders**

As the Blekinge Museum has priorly undertaken similar ethnological documentation of previous groups of migrants to the county, for example Russian-Jewish refugees at the beginning of the 20th century, Finnish workers in the 1960s and refugees from the Balkans in the 1990s, the archiving of the new migrants’ stories is of utmost interest to and makes the museum one of the main stakeholders of the undertaken project. The museum’s own description can be found in the Terms of reference (Appendix 1). These stories should further be supplemented by artefacts in order to create a tangible experience for the museum’s audience. Since previous similar workshops with migrants have found that “[m]ost of the participants opted for personal objects rather than pictures”⁵ as a visualization of their stories, this was considered an opportunity rather than a constraint. Additional motivations include the extension of the museum’s outreach and increased publicity through the project and by displaying the resulting stories. This is hoped to be achieved through a public presentation at the end of the project.

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⁵ Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018).
The civic communicators of the BIU were very involved in the project as facilitators (participant acquisition, translation and facility provision). One driving factor for this collaboration is the possibility of the presented method aiding in achieving increased integration and well-being of the migrants by creating a link of knowledge sharing and understanding between them and in their new community. This enhances the relevance of the findings of this report because they can be used by the BIU to expand the project in the future. Other driving factors are the immediate effects that the process of sharing possibly similar life stories with other migrants has on the migrant community. Researchers claim that the initial phase of the digital story telling workshop method offers an experience of inclusion and belonging.\(^6\)

Project participants have an interest to share their experiences and have their voices incorporated into Blekinge Museum, because this is an opportunity to present an owned alternative to the unvaried public image of refugees portrayed in the media. Displaying their stories in the museum creates awareness about the multidimensional personalities who are now part of the local community, about the changes that participants have undergone during their journeys to and settlement in Sweden and about what they bring to the Swedish society. However, it is not sufficient to merely allow the voicing out of stories and experiences. Pivotal to furthering the interest of the storytellers is the facilitation of institutional structures within the community willing and eager to contextualize and recognize these acts.\(^7\)

The project team and their supervisor from the Masters Programme in Peace and Development of Linnaeus University are also stakeholders in this project. Our main interest is to learn and gain tangible experience in field research methods through actively engaging in a community-oriented project. The main tasks were to collect different possible approaches, experiment with these approaches in order to assess the successes and areas for improvement. Our interest included producing a set of recommendations for the successful implementation of the planned larger project. Lastly, it is in the interest of the students and the university to partake in initiatives that strengthen community relations.

\(^6\) Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018).
\(^7\) Gubrium and Harper (2016).
Research Objective and Questions

Taking all of these interests into consideration, the objective of this report is to inform about the procedures and methods applied during this project, their applicability and functioning in the specific Blekinge context. Accordingly, answers to the following research questions will be delivered:

- How can the digital storytelling process be used effectively to gather refugee stories?
- What kinds of artefacts might refugees want to donate to the museum, or have documented for the project?
- What are implications for time and costs of different collection methods?
- What practical and emotional issues need to be addressed for the collection process to respect refugee voices and intentions?
- How and where do migrants usually tell their stories?
- Who are the audiences for these stories?
Methodology

“Storytelling is meant to be a collaborative art.” – Joe Lambert

Method Justification

Digital Storytelling

A digital story is a two to five minutes long video clip, containing an audio recording of someone telling their own story, supported by visual material in the form of photos, short videos and sometimes text. As Joe Lambert, one of the founders of this method, explains, there are seven central elements of successful digital storytelling: 1. the point of view or central premise of the story, 2. a dramatic question which creates suspense and in the best stories plays with the audience’s expectations, 3. an emotional content that contrasts with the opposite of what is desired. 4. Is the so-called “gift of your voice” which means that the story is told in first person narrating by the author him or herself and preferably recited rather than read. The 5. Element is the “Power of the Soundtrack” because background music has a strong influence on the perception of visual information. Economy, the 6. Element means following an economic minimax principle where the richest possible story should be told within a limited number of words (max 1,5 pages) and with only few pictures (max 15). And finally, 7. The pace or rhythm in which the story is told, using pauses and fast sequences as stylistic devices.

Digital stories are typically developed and produced collaboratively in a group during a workshop that takes two to three full days. Teaching the workshop usually requires more than one facilitator due to participants’ “sometimes intensive and overlapping needs” and because they can complement each other’s skill sets. Several projects in the past have used digital storytelling with migrants as participants of the workshop. Especially feminist researchers have come to appreciate this method because of its emphasis on a non-hierarchical trust relationship between the

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8 Lambert (2006).
11 Alexander (2017). (p.188).
12 Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018).
13 Lenette et al. (2019).
14 Brushwood Rose (2019).
15 Bonini and Baldini (2019).
researcher and the participants, on dialogue and on the use of narratives. Apart from being an ethically appropriate tool for engagement with refugees, digital storytelling is considered to hold significant potential as a modern equivalent of oral storytelling traditions to preserve cultural heritage. Moreover, digital storytelling initiates processes of remembering, meaning making and the re-constituting of lived experiences which can have a therapeutic effect when participants open up and deal with difficult situations in their past while narrating. Another reason for its popularity is that digital storytelling workshops provide the opportunity of self-representation for the participants which is especially important for “disadvantaged groups, such as LGBT, minorities, refugees, poor, prostitutes etc., who do not have the opportunity to represent themselves in the mainstream media, where they may be exposed to discrimination or have prejudices expressed against them.” This is in line with the participants’ needs identified in the stakeholder analysis.

“In community-based projects, digital stories are often explicitly posited as counterstories or alternative interpretations of the world, others, and oneself that “counter” dominant narratives. [...] In the field of refugee studies for instance, the importance of counter-narratives through digital stories is crucial to challenge the largely negative and deficit-focused connotations attached to the label “refugee". (de Jager et al. 2017)

The sequencing of workshop activities can be separated into three different phases. An introductory phase where digital storytelling is presented, its elements explained, and examples are shown. A pivotal component during the initial steps of the workshop is progressively introducing the group to one another, including the facilitators, to establish reciprocal trust and create a safe space for sharing the stories. This can be achieved through a number of small group or pair exercises. Another important component of this phase is finding out about the expectations that participants have towards the process and outcomes of the workshop and their significance for them. This is expected to inspire a sense of relevance and therefore motivation in the participants. This initial phase is concluded by a small group
discussion about story ideas, called a “story circle” because the participants and facilitators sit together in a chair circle. This starts community and peer learning, making the digital story idea more evident, and helps the facilitators getting to know the participants.

The second phase is entirely dedicated to the writing and co-construction of the stories, the conclusion of this phase being the voice recording. Story circles are repeated after individual work on the scripts, recording, picture selection and editing and additionally in the beginning and at the end of each workshop day because this inspires teamwork and cultivates a sense of community as the group is encouraged to provide comments and constructive critique to the works in progress. The sense of community and belonging established during this phase serves the BIU’s interest, identified in the stakeholder analysis, of creating a network between migrants and furthering their integration.

The third phase then deals with the practicalities of creating a digital story; sound editing, sourcing or creating the right images, choosing a soundtrack and video editing the short clip. The workshop is concluded by a collective screening of the produced videos. Which can be followed by a public screening which would broaden the scope of impact onto the audience. A public presentation was considered important to serve the museum’s interest to attract publicity and a greater audience. At the same time, this provides an opportunity to further dialogue, understanding and acceptance between migrants and the Swedish community, therefore serving again participants’, civic communicators’ and the university project team’s interests. Deriving from these previous experiences of working with migrants, we considered the storytelling workshop method appropriate to satisfy the needs expressed by the different stakeholders.

30 Brushwood Rose (2019).
**Experimental Design**

In order to adapt the theory to the specific context in Ronneby and to develop best practices for future continuation of the project, we set out to test different variations in the story production process in an experimental design. Variations involved different workshop settings: place, time and number of participants, facilitators and or translators present, but also slightly different processes: selection and sequencing of exercises, temporal emphasis on different workshop phases, and different approaches to story creation with more or less involvement of our team or the civic communicators.

The place of the workshop and of the public screening had been found to influence the extent to which the participants trust the facilitators and open up and therefore the content of the stories. If the workshop for example takes place at the house of a facilitator, this can create a shared sense of intimacy. But also the capacities and behavior of the staff involved in the process of creating the story influence the final content, the established relationship between trainer and narrator being a key factor.

"We remain aware that the digital stories produced by our participants are not absolute truths. On the contrary, they depict partial and inter-subjective truths which are a result of different layers of co-production: the researchers’ agenda, the role of the DS external facilitator, the story circle and its multifaceted interpretations of the stories, the personal urge to produce a story rather than another, the role of the emotions that are mobilized in order to make the story palatable, and the discursive strategies that are enacted when the story is disseminated in the public sphere."

(Vacchelli and Peyrefitte 2018)

A possible variation in story creation approach is starting with the script or with the photo sequence, this is up to different peoples’ intuition. Another embraces the idea that a happy ending is not obligatory nor signals a finished story. Allowing for varying approaches and outcomes is rather contributing to the quality of the participatory method. This experimental design serves the project team’s need to test different theoretical approaches about their suitability for the future project’s context.

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32 Bonini and Baldini (2019).
33 Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018).
34 Bonini and Baldini (2019).
36 Brushwood Rose (2019).
**Procedure**

“It’s a fruit salad of different languages and cultures. This [project] will help everyone to be closer and closer” – participant, after the story circle

**Introductory meetings**

As can be seen in the schedule attached in appendix 3, the first project week was used to acquire the participants and familiarize them with what the project will be about and how a digital story could look like by showing samples from previous similar projects. This was done both individually with participants already selected and sent to us by civic communicators from BIU and in front of Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) classes, where after a short project presentation, interested students were invited to join a more excessive introduction. In these we presented and explained the consent form (see appendix 2) containing our ethical considerations and the potential participants were given the opportunity to ask questions.

During these meetings, we got to know the potential participants as well as an idea of their potential stories and we also presented ourselves to them in order to create trust. We provided a small fika in the beginning of the meetings to give it a less formal character. The getting to know each other was supported by small exercises where interesting facts like hobbies were shared to create a common ground. The introductions were visualized with a small power point presentation. The preferred language was Swedish but in the case of the SFI classes, translation into Arabic by a civic communicator and into Dari by one of our group members was necessary. Translation into Arabic and Somali was also provided in cases where otherwise the Swedish skills would not have sufficed for informed consent.

In three cases we had a little bit more time to start the story inspiration and creation process. So, we did an exercise called “Tree of life" where participants draw representations of their roots or past, their present situation and their future dreams and hopes in order to give their stories a possible structure (see pictures in appendix 5). An example tree drawing of one of the facilitators was presented to explain the exercise and connect over the very personal content. During this phase we recognized that time would become a restricting factor for the project, because the participants had different prior commitments which impeded full day participation. In order to make collective meetings possible, potential time slots were derived and a preliminary schedule for the second week created. We ended all introductory meetings by giving
some take-home inspirations to think about until the next meeting concerning their story, photos and personal objects.

**Digital Storytelling Workshops**

During the second project week we focused on - where possible collaborative - story creation and perfecting and on recording. Since the recording represents the spine of the digital story video, having this step done was considered a major milestone. We managed to organize one big story circle round with five participants present, three men and two women. The whole project team was present during the workshop to contribute to the story development, but two fluent Swedish speakers were selected as main facilitators, since participants’ at least medium Swedish level was the criterion for selecting them for this collective meeting. Attendees had different nationalities: Armenian, Kurdish, Afghan and Eritrean.

After a quick presentation round, where the participants got to know each other, as an icebreaker, we engaged the participants in a small exercise in which personal fun facts about themselves and the facilitators were written on small papers and exchanged randomly within the group. Then, attendees guessed which fact belonged to which person. A second exercise involved whispering a word or short sentence from one attendee to the next around the circle, the last person saying the resulting word out loud. In this manner “kaffe” turned into “perfect” and inspired a discussion about how the meaning of a statement changes when being repeated by many people and is potentially lost in translation.

This discussion transitioned into the next phase of conscientization, where participants compiled reasons for why telling their stories and therefore this project is important and explained their personal motivations for taking part. After these short introductory exercises - short because we only had two hours to conduct this workshop due to time restrictions of the participants - we started the story circle. Starting with a volunteer, everyone was given roughly 10 minutes to tell their story and to receive comments and constructive critique from the other storytellers and facilitators.

During the rest of the week we met the participants again individually or in pairs to work more on their stories and finally record. These sessions were conducted by one or two project team members, depending on language skills and on who had already established the best connection to the particular storyteller. Every time we had given
the instruction to bring an artefact or personal object, photos and a written script to the
next meeting but these were ignored to a large extent. These sessions were prolonged
into the beginning of week three due to sickness and rescheduling of some of the
participants.

**Finalizing videos**

In the third project week we focused on finalizing the videos. Due to the corona virus
thread, this was mainly done from afar without meeting the participants directly.
Unfortunately, the crisis had an extensive impact on the final outcome of the project
because many participants cancelled scheduled meetings at the last minute or didn’t
show up at all due to sickness. However, we collected translations into Swedish for the
recordings in Arabic and Somali. Pictures that should provide the visual material for
the stories were sent to us rather than fit into the video collaboratively. The editing of
the videos was then carried out by the project team in Växjö but in consultation with
the storytellers.

**Qualitative Interviews on Process**

Pre-, during-, and post-workshop interviews with participants can be used to gain
perspective and evaluate the story production process. We decided to continuously re-
evaluate and if need be adapt our procedures by asking participants and facilitators
about their opinions of the process. This qualitative data was collected in informal
interviews or as part of the workshop itself and gives important insights for future
projects. A list with preliminary guiding interview questions can be found in appendix
4.

**Limitations**

As already mentioned, time was the main restricting factor for this project. Firstly,
because the project time frame was only three weeks and because the project steps
sequentially built on each other, there was not much room for flexibility. Second, this
flexibility would have been necessary because the participants and other potential
participants who were interested in the project had different previous engagements like
school, work and child care, that impeded them from being able to work with us for a
longer time at a stretch. Accordingly, some of them were only available in the mornings
while most others were only available after 4 o’clock. Contrarily, the BIU closed at 6
o’clock and translators were usually only available until 5 o’clock. The distance from
Växjö to the project site Ronneby of one and a half hours by car had further implications
for the time limitation, because we tried to keep the number of days on site as small as possible due to environmental and economic reasons.

Connected to the time issue is the limited sample size and sample diversity. The sample of participants is limited to in total nine, three women and seven men. The ages ranged between 19 and 45 years. Two were from Syria, four from Afghanistan, one from Somalia, one from Armenia and one from Eritrea. Due to scheduling issues and the restrictions following the corona outbreak, only six participants completed the whole digital storytelling process. While the sample does not lack nationality or gender diversity, the age group above 45 is not represented in our sample.
Findings: Interviews, Experiences and Observations

“That was a heavy phrase. The Arabic phrase he just spoke has depth and I think the english translation doesn’t do it justice.” – Husam Alfadhli, Civic Communicator at BIU, during translating an individual session

In each project phase we observed distinct reactions to our procedures. Different comments and reflections were voiced by participants and communicators regarding their experiences. Lastly, we encountered some unforeseen difficulties which we tried to mitigate. In this chapter, we address the research questions listed above, provide detailed accounts of our work during the past three weeks and establish a basis of our recommendations.

Introductory phase:

During the first meeting with the BIU staff, some skepticism and concerns regarding our project were noticeable. Specifically, regarding the amount of time that we would be demanding from the participants and our ability to provide emotional support. These concerns were mostly based on precast views of interviews with refugees and an expression of the feeling of responsibility for the participants’ well-being, since the civic communicators were in charge of selecting participants and sending them to work with us. This potentially presented an obstacle for the project because the communicators’ opinion influences the way they present it and therefore how motivated participants are to take part. We therefore decided to present our method and procedure to them again in a more in-depth manner and also show them a personal example video of one of the team members. Following this presentation, the atmosphere changed, and the civic communicators supported and helped us immensely.

Precast negative views of interviews translated into certain expectations also of the potential participants themselves, possibly due to the communicators’ skepticism. This led to them being tense instead of open-minded in the beginning of the introductory meetings. In order to calm them down and build trust, the selected ice-breaker and fun-fact exercises seemed to work quite well. For example, some male participants and facilitators connected over their liking or disliking of certain football clubs. Further, it was conducive to establishing trust, to have someone in the room who is able to communicate in the participant’s native language, even if his or her Swedish level would have sufficed. This person could either be one of the facilitators or a trusted
translator from the BIU. Our experience was that the more we as facilitators opened up and shared personal details about our lives, the more the participants did the same.

Showing the sample video with the story of one of the facilitators, that had been produced priorly, was generally perceived very well. This fits into our assumption of the more personal, the better and we would have liked to be able to show them more personal samples. This became especially evident when we screened the digital story video of Omid, an Afghan immigrant to Sweden, as another example. The very subjective and controversial content of the video where he talked about converting to christianity was negatively perceived by a group of potential Afghan participants. Unexpectedly, it was further necessary to give potential participants (especially women) time to consult with their families about whether or not they can take part in the project. This might have been a reason for why some, who showed interest at first, didn’t take part in the end.

Workshop phase:

Holding the workshops at different places was not perceived necessary because it became obvious during the introductory phase that participants were positively connected to the BIU and had previously established trusting relationships with its staff. Instead, keeping all meetings in our own room provided by the BIU for the whole duration of the project, offered a sense of stability and proved to be practical.

In the course of the story circle session, the ice-breaker and trust building exercises were well-received and allowed the participants to engage more freely and feel comfortable. The selection was therefore affirmed. As these activities were followed by the ‘process of conscientization’ exercise, the atmosphere became more serious due to the questions being asked in a formal manner. This shift might have come too early but was necessary due to time restrictions.

This exercise was followed by the story circle; certain participants were less forthcoming in the group, compared to the individual introductory sessions when the facilitators spoke their language. Certain participants also mentioned during the informal interviews that they had felt more comfortable in the individual sessions. Nevertheless, the group experience offered the opportunity to engage and connect with other migrants and inspired a sense of community and belonging, evident from the informal interviews.
But participants who arrived late and did not attend the icebreaker sessions or the exercises mentioned above, were not comfortable at all to engage more openly. Additionally, one participant had strong political inclinations and voiced it freely. Such circumstances present possibilities for discomfort, intimidation or confrontation. The project team acknowledged later, that presence of another participant with opposing views would have at the very least created a tense atmosphere during the session, but luckily this had not been the case. Despite having an ice-breaker and trust building exercises prior to the story circle, a few participants remained reserved and were visibly uncomfortable with the situation. When they shared their stories in the circle, they either omitted certain sections or changed their stories from those they previously told in individual sessions. Reservations along with unwillingness to participate freely were visible.

While sharing their stories, language barriers became more evident. Certain participants could not read or write their native languages despite being interested in telling their stories in said languages. In one specific case, this affected the gravity of the story/video due to the story having direct relation to the freedom to use his/her native language in the country of origin.

A scenario related to languages and scripts also occurred during a different project phase. One participant, who did not attend the story circle, insisted on recording his story in his native language without priorly preparing a script. As a result, the recording was much longer than recommended and limited the ability of the facilitators to revise, discuss or edit the script alongside the participant.

In general, almost all participants were very reluctant to write their story down, either because of language barriers or because they did not have the time. The best option in the end was close collaborative work with one of the facilitators. Either writing while the participant was telling the story, translating into the language in which they wanted to tell their story or which they were able to read, or simply sitting next to them while they were writing, providing comments when needed.

Which facilitator was selected for this close one-on-one work, depended on who the participant had established the closest relationship with during the introductory phase. This could be traced back to common understanding of the same language, similar experiences, shared hobbies, emotions and political inclinations. When it comes to
emotional support for the participants, it was found that they were in general quite open with their emotions. By being supportive, understanding and open to share their own personal details, facilitators - in contrast to other participants - were able to achieve that the participants felt comfortable telling their story.

During our session with two participants who had volunteered in an SFI class to partake in the project, we encountered another problem. Guiding advice, derived from sections of their own stories, was communicated by the facilitators and led to an unintentional perception on the part of the participants about what type of story should be told. Unintentional leading remarks led to the participants being swayed by the facilitators possibly from the desire to appease. The result of this was that the story turned out to be very one dimensional, instead of just having a focus. One core cause of this dilemma could be insufficient time, not only to clarify the purpose or erase misunderstandings but to build confidence that these are ultimately their stories being shared and it is the participants themselves that own these narratives. Time also influenced this incident because the session was interrupted into two parts on different days because the participants had to leave. The time to overthink may have led to selective remembering and to the advice being perceived as instructions.

In the end, the involvement of the facilitators in the story creation process was considerable for every participant, instead of varied. Even though the project team tried to minimize it, especially after the incident above mentioned occurred, this turned out to be very difficult because participants were expecting us to help them. The participants reacted negatively to open instructions that leave space for own decisions, especially concerning story focus. They continuously asked for advice on which was the most important part of their journey, or the most important story to tell. Hesitant at first but driven by the time restrictions and the participants’ expectations, we gave our opinions in the end. We are aware that this has shaped the project’s outcome. The impact of the civic communicators on the story creation process was smaller and only applied to participants where direct translation was needed throughout this phase. Their small but visible reactions, on what the participants were telling, have most likely influenced the selection and focus setting in the stories. It is also possible that their involvement led to omitting parts of the stories, although no evidence for this was noticed, because of the trusting relationship between civic communicators and migrants.
As a result of interviews conducted with the communicators, we were able to gain their reflections and comments. Three of them stated that the project was a positive learning initiative that allowed for recreating the image of migrants in the community. They believe that this project aids in displaying the differences in the individual stories of migrants and provides a shift from the common images of migrants in Swedish and global media outlets. They further stated that the project will strengthen community relations, help fight racism and prejudice as it allows visitors to see, hear and follow the stories told by the migrants as told by themselves. Lastly, they mentioned that they were very surprised by the stories they translated for the participants and added that certain translations were difficult for them due to the emotional weight of the content.

Participants stated that the project was a positive outlet to tell his/her story and share their history and experiences with their community and beyond. There was an inclination from two participants towards individual sessions rather than group interactions. On the other hand, two participants stated that the story circle was helping to bring people together and build networks. They said they expect to keep in touch with the other participants in the future. Additionally, one participant perceived having a flexible communication line and a contact person from the Linnaeus university team as positive.

**Final phase:**

Due to the restrictions connected to the corona virus spread, findings from observations during the final phase are limited. Participants were largely not involved in the editing process, which did not seem to pose a problem for them. Rather, they were overall happy with just sending us some pictures. This even did not seem to be only connected to the risky health situation but a general lack of interest in or confidence for doing the technical part of the video creation. It may also be connected to the problem identified in the previous section, where it became clear that we did not manage to get across that the story and resulting video belongs to and is for the participants themselves. Therefore, they might have been expecting us to do the editing part on our own or at least the way we need it to be done, anyways.

This may not only be viewed in a negative light. Delegating this task to one or two people for all videos gives the opportunity to fit them into a common more uniform frame, for example by choosing the same beginning and end title design. The outcome of a project like this is then one whole rather than a number of unconnected videos.
This corresponds more to the team work character of the story circle. Additionally, it is a sign of trust.

The involvement of the civic communicators as translators was again given in this phase because they helped considerably in providing subtitles to the videos that were not in Swedish. No participants expressed any problem with this or showed signs of discomfort with their involvement. Again, this is probably due to the previously established trust relationship between the BIU staff and the migrants and can not without problems be transferred to a different scenario. Finding pictures and music for the videos that satisfied our quality demands and is license free was a greater challenge than expected. Having planned a budget to purchase licenses would have helped enormously during this phase.

The idea of presenting the report and the videos in front of the stakeholders, press, participants and their friends and families was very well perceived from all sides, which makes it an even higher pity that this was not possible due to the social distancing obligations. In place of the big public presentation we organized a small screening of the videos to the participants only, which will give them the opportunity to reflect on them as a group.

The prospect of having their stories in the videos displayed at the museum was not observed to be a restricting factor but rather an opportunity to be heard and better understood by the community. As one of the participants said in an introductory meeting, “they [the community] need to know what is happening down there”. We saw that the driving factor for being eager to make the videos public was less personal but rather political.

Unfortunately, this positive response did not include personal objects or artefacts. Whenever we brought them up, participants’ first response was that they did not bring anything with them to Sweden because of the circumstances of their escape or journey. Giving examples of what such an object could be, did help to some extent because it made participants consider more varied possibilities. However, the contradiction of this object being something of great importance to them and possibly “must” be handed over to the museum, seemed to preclude further consideration. A different approach from our side, giving the personal object more importance throughout the process and connecting it more to the story, might have been better. An exercise that could be
included in the beginning of the story circle or during the introductory meetings is “Three things you would save when your house is on fire”. This may produce more ideas. Also, eliciting the object first and talking about how it could be made accessible in the museum later, would possibly have been conducive.

The feedback given from participants on the finished video edits was overwhelmingly positive. They said, they were happy with the results and felt that the videos were portraying them in a right way. The group workshop method also contributed to the reinforcement of participants’ sense of belonging in their new social network, as the workshop provided by the coordinators allowed participants to build their confidence and expand their relationships with other participants. It also built a mutual trust and empathy among the participants that goes beyond the stereotypical barriers and allowed them to share their challenging experiences with each other and respect each other’s stories.
Recommendations

“I’m not afraid. I will tell all the details.” participant during individual session

Following our positive experiences and feedback from all stakeholder groups, we highly recommend a future continuation of this project. In order to learn from our findings, the following recommendations are to be taken into consideration. Firstly, if possible, the age group above 45 years should be included in the project, as they may have a different approach to storytelling and add another perspective of migration experience, which has not yet been heard.

Secondly, example videos shown to the participants should be carefully selected to be in line with the principles that they adhere to. We recommend using some of the videos that were produced within this pilot for the continuation of the project because they provide a closer relation to the future participants. Additionally, future facilitators should be prepared to share personal details because this has proven to be very conducive in the introductory phase and to establish the close relationships necessary for the story creation phase. If possible, all of them should produce their own digital story beforehand.

Guidance or advice communicated by facilitators to participants needs strong caution as specific phrases or structural direction can be easily misunderstood as advice that needs to be necessarily followed. Even though a certain theme is provided, it is crucial to allow participants to express the parts of their lives and memories in the manner they see fit. The priority of the project should be establishing what stories participants want to tell. Sufficient time, focus and availability are paramount in allowing the participants to determine which narratives they want to represent them.

Writing at least a draft script down is of utmost importance. Challenges could arise from the inability of participants to read or write their (native) language but still preferring to tell their stories in said language. A possible solution to this problem, if time allows, would be providing a translator to engage in writing down the story of the participant and recording it so that the participant can then proceed to record the story by listening to and repeating the recording of the translator.

An additional matter to consider are strongly polarized political and ideological inclinations of participants particularly during conducting the story circle. Preliminary dialogue and experienced facilitators are necessary to control any disagreements.
arising during the session. The budget for the project should contain licenses for pictures and music, along with snacks, drinks and travelling expenses.

The collection of artefacts or personal objects needs to be approached differently. Possibilities include the “house on fire” exercise, framing the entire story around “something that migrants have brought to Sweden” with the possibility of making this an object or something immaterial like for example hope or finding a different way of providing a tangible experience related to the story like for example a drawn portrait of the migrants.
Conclusion

“We must think of what migrants have to offer the society instead!” – Henrik Lövgren, head of BIU

In conclusion, the four-week pilot-project to produce and document the digital stories of migrants provided an opportunity to test and assess various methods that could be applicable for the planned undertaking. The methods tested during the project yielded clarity on which have been successful, and which have not and the reasons why. It has therefore elicited, how the digital storytelling process can be used effectively to gather refugee stories. The best way to elicit and document artefacts for the museum has not been found out yet. Possible solutions have been suggested.

A duration of three weeks has been found an insufficient time frame to produce more than six digital stories. All three project phases should have been prolonged but especially the creative story scripting and focus finding process need considerably more time to give a respectful opportunity for full self-representation.

The BIU facilities were found to be a perfect venue to conduct the project and the involvement of the civic communicators an invaluable support. Emotional issues were handled careful with their help.

The stories should be made public as soon as possible in order to reach not only the Ronneby and Blekinge community but also wider audiences nationally and beyond. This is expected to inspire dialogue and mutual understanding of what migrants bring with them.

Additionally, recommendations have been provided on how to rectify errors made and improve the methods employed to acquire better results. Lastly, this project allowed the stakeholders to cooperate, clearly identify roles and responsibilities and more importantly create the necessary network to carry out a similar project in an efficient manner. We are confident that by showing these videos, both the local communities and the wider society can benefit.
References


Appendix

1. Terms of reference (ToR)

This project will pilot a process for collecting and presenting stories of migration to Blekinge on behalf of Blekinge Museum & BIU, with focus on migration to the region in 2015.

Sponsoring organisation

The project is offered by Blekinge Museum (the regional museum in Blekinge), and Blekinge Integrations - och Utbildningscenter (BIU) in Ronneby, with the co-operation of the Migration Platform at Linnéuniversitetet.

Background

During 2015 a large number of refugees came to Blekinge, in South East Sweden. Many of these came from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, with the ambition to set up a new life in Sweden. These events put pressure on the local community and meant many changes. As the county museum, Blekinge Museum has undertaken ethnological documentation of previous groups of migrants to the county, for example Russian-Jewish refugees at the beginning of the 20th century, Finnish workers in the 1960s and refugees from the Balkans in the 1990s. There is an intention now to collect and preserve migrant stories from the new refugees, concerning their background and the journey and arrival in Sweden, and hence to form an archive of a charged moment in Swedish contemporary history. The collected stories could also provide background material to exhibitions and publications as well as being a source of knowledge for future researchers, searchable in the museums archive.

Task

The task is to pilot a process for gathering digital stories and collecting related artefacts, to support a funding bid for this work. The group will produce 6-10 digital stories with migrants connected to BIU, and make recommendations on a process to collect further stories, and to deal with the issue of associated artefacts. You will also consult closely with members of the refugee community and those who work with them on the project and report their perspectives on the idea of collecting stories back to the project sponsors in your report.

Methods

Participatory Digital Storytelling workshops at BIU
Collecting artefacts which contain meaning and stories, recording and documenting them.
Qualitative interviewing and participant observation with migrants who arrived in Blekinge in 2015.

Guiding questions (examples)

How can the digital storytelling process be used effectively to gather refugee stories?
What kinds of artefacts might refuges want to donate to the museum, or have documented for the project?

What are implications for time and costs of different collection methods?

What practical and emotional issues need to be addressed for the collection process to respect refugee voices and intentions?

How and where do migrants usually tell their stories?

Who are the audiences for these stories?

Considering the stories that have been collected and that might have been collected: How can we typologies the different kinds of stories that refugees might tell? For example, their journeys, their life in Sweden, their origins, and so on.

What can the public learn about the refugees from adding these stories and artefacts to the museum collection?

**Deliverables**

6-10 Digital Stories for the Museum Collection

Final Report to be publically available in April 2020

Final Presentation in Ronneby by 26th March 2020

**Initial Contact:** Christoffer Sandahl, Head of collections, Blekinge museum, 0766-208399
christoffer.sandahl@blekingemuseum.se

Henrik Löfgren, BIU – Blekinge Integrations- och Utbildningscenter, 0457-61 85 16 | 0733-17 03 00
henrik.lovgren@ronneby.se

**First Meeting:** 25th February 2020 15:30-16:30
Softcenter Ronneby, BIU Fridhemsvägen 19-21, ingång 7, våning 3 i Ronneby
2. Consent Form

“Stories of migration to Blekinge”: A digital documentation project

You have been invited to take part in a workshop and/or interview and to share your story as a migrant to Blekinge. This is an opportunity to tell people about your background and home country, your journey to Sweden and/or arrival and beginning in Blekinge as your new home.

The purpose of the project is to collect and preserve migrant stories to document them as a part of Swedish contemporary history. The collected stories will be archived in Blekinge Museum and with your permission published in museum exhibitions, research publications and publicly presented in Ronneby on 26th March 2020 as a conclusion of the project. You are kindly invited to attend the presentation together with friends and family.

The project is using a method called digital storytelling, which means that we will audio record the story told by you, in the way and depth you want to tell it and then in collaboration with you create a short video clip that contains the audio.

The project can be seen as a pilot which if successful will be extended into a bigger project collecting more migrant stories. Through this pilot we hope to better understand the lives and experiences of migrants in Blekinge and the usefulness of digital storytelling in capturing these experiences.

The Team from Linnaeus University:

Habib Said
Laura Leypoldt
Lucas Olsson
Mary Kidane
Christopher High, Supervisor

Representative of Blekinge museum:

Christoffer Sandahl, Head of collections
I have been asked to take part in the above project.

By signing this form, I confirm the following:

- I have read the information sheet and the purpose of the project has been explained to me.
- I consent to be recorded for the project using a digital audio device.
- I understand that the use of the recording may include (but may not be limited to) publications in print, exhibitions and the World Wide Web and presentations.
- I understand that my voluntarily contributed personal photos will be used for my personal story video only and therefore be presented in presentations, exhibitions and publications.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without penalty. I can withdraw my contribution from the project at any point up to the 17th of March by informing a member of the project team that I no longer want to participate. If I withdraw, I can request that any information I have previously given is not used by the project.
- I understand that the project team will be making notes about the process, which will be shared with Chris High, our supervisor at the university, in order to improve their ability to do this kind of work in the future, and that I will not be identified as an individual in these notes.
- The notes will be supplemented by photographs taken during the workshops, but will not show my face if I haven’t given direct permission.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- I agree to participate in the project as outlined to me.

Name:....................................................................................................................................

Signature: ..............................................................................................................................

Date:......................................................................................................................................

Please sign two copies of this form, one copy is for you to keep.
3. Schedule
(February - March 2020)

Yellow markings signify that the project team was travelling to Ronneby on this day. In total, the project team visited the community ten times.

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<td>Introduction Planning</td>
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<td>Introduction and Presentation</td>
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<td>Prepare Workshop 15 h: Meeting with supervisor</td>
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<td>Report writing</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Big story circle workshop</td>
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<td>Individual Sessions and Interviews</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Individual Sessions, Recording and Interviews</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Translations, Recording and Interviews</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Editing, Analysis and Report writing</td>
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<td>SUBMISSION DRAFT REPORT</td>
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<td>Editing, Preparing Presentation</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>PRESENTATION of report in Seminar</td>
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<td>Revision of report, prepare Presentation</td>
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<td>Preparing Presentation</td>
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<td>FINAL SUBMISSION</td>
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4. Question Lists

Questions for Story Inspiration

- Why did you leave? The deciding moment, which route and transport form? Vad var det för anledningen att du kom till Sverige?
- Is there a personal object/artefact/item that you connect to this journey or your country of origin? Describe it. What exactly does it mean to you and why? Finns det något föremål / artefakt/ eller något du tog med dig på vägen hit? Något som kopplar din resa med eller kopplat till ditt bakgrund, eller med ditt land?
- The journey (Walk us through it)- What was the most memorable positive interaction, the toughest challenge faced, moment and objects that anchored your perseverance? Role of identity (ethnic, gender, race- divides and intersectionalities during your journey) Hur kom det sig

- Arrival in (Europe) Sweden- How did you feel when deciding to settle here, first thing you noticed, how did you end up in Ronneby, how has the ronneby community welcomed you? Ankomst i (Europa, Sverige) hur kändes när du beslutade att bosätta dig här, vad var det första du märkte? Hur hamnade du här i Ronneby? Hur har Ronneby samhället välkommen dig?

- How has this journey defined you? How has your new life in Sweden changed you? Hur har resan definierat dig? Hur har ditt nya liv i Sverige förändrat dig?

- Why are you telling your story? Varför berättar du din berättelse?

- What does identity mean to you? (could be in cause for leaving or their identity as seen by their community) Vad betyder identitet för dig? (kan vara i orsak till att man lämnar eller identiteten i sin egenskap av folkgrupp/ samhället)

**Interview Questions on Process**

**To Participants:**

- How did it feel to tell us/ the other participants your story?

- Are you happy with the story that you produced? Is there something that you would like to change in the retrospective?

- What is your favorite memory from the workshop?

- Which exercises did you like (best)? /Not like?

- What inspired you for your story?

- Did you feel respected by and trustful to the facilitators and/or other participants throughout the process? When in the process did this feeling start?

- Do you think you will be in contact with other participants in the future? Why (not)?

- Was there something that we could have done differently? /Recommendations for us?

**To Communicators/other stakeholders:**

- Is the process/ outcome what you expected? Better? Worse?

- What do you think could have been done differently? /Could be improved for next time?

- Did you have the impression, that the project has helped the participants in any way?

- Will you be willing to conduct similar projects in the future?
5. Pictures

Workshop room with fika

- Storytelling
- Workshop
- Välkomnna!
Introduction phase

Introduction Day
- Presentations & Getting to know each other
- Video Samples
- Exercises
  - Word meaning
  - Wasp game
  - 2 truths & lies
  - Story creating
  - Tree of life
  - What have you brought to Sweden with you?
- Questions to have about until next workshop
- Consent form & Participant list

How was the journey?
How does your new life in Sweden changed you?
Why did you leave?
Was there a deciding moment?
How has the journey defined you?
Is there a moment that you refer to as a turning point?
Between sessions
The difference between adults and children drawing
Above: Tree of life, Below: Big story cicle round
After small story circle round with two Syrian participants and BIU translator
Below: Recording session in the BIU studio