

Storytelling & Newcomers

A European Progress Report
Federation for European Storytelling



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



Storytelling and newcomers: a European progress report 2018

In a recent FEST survey, an overwhelming amount of storytellers, trainers and organisers voiced their support for storytelling projects involving migrants and refugees. Respondents from a wide range of European states seem to agree about the positive effects of storytelling on newcomers and recognize a bright future for applied storytelling catering towards this group. In the past, storytellers have already taken on the challenges that come along with an audience of migrants. Some even chose to not only bring the art to newcomers but also to guide participants to become storytellers. Echoes of these past experiences are found throughout the European world of storytelling, yet little documentation can be found online in this digital age. Although storytellers, often independent pioneers, have been working with newcomers for decades, few have formalised their work into documented projects. Because of this, new performers and organizers interested in working with migrants face difficulties and problems long overcome by others.

Compared to the past decade, it seems that local governments and institutions such as public libraries have found their way into the world of storytelling. The point of discovery has long been passed with durable bonds already formed between storytellers and social organizations. An example of this established cooperation is 'Ons Verhaal', a Belgian project by storytellers Rien van Meensel and Annelies van Camp. Together with Vormingplus Limburg, a provincial non-profit concerned with adult education and integration, storytellers Rien and Annelies have offered their workshops for refugees and migrants in many a town. The format of their workshop is a well-developed product which can easily be applied in different places. Thanks to the project's achievements of strengthening mutual trust and encouraging critical reflection, organizations such as Vormingplus continue to welcome storytelling as a means of emotional support and expanding skills. It is important for aspiring project initiators to understand applied storytelling's possibilities. In general, three types of development and support can be identified. Past projects have proven that storytellers can tackle all three or focus on just one type.

The first set of goals focusses on the newcomer as an individual with an often troubled past, having experienced wars, political oppression or socio-economic hardship in their home country. These goals also deal with questions about identity migrants might have as they find themselves stuck between their birthplaces and new hosts. LISTEN is one of the projects which focus on this emotional, psychological aid and development storytelling can offer. By telling their stories, participants can reconcile with their past and gain peace of mind.

A second set of goals deals with skills newcomers can gain and improve, ranging from their grasp of a second language to improving their overall communication. 'Babel en Vertel' shows the importance of small, active groups for language improvement. Storytelling drags participants away from the blackboard and into a practical, safe environment to try out their new skills.

A third set of goals centres around social cohesion. Projects such as the 'Story Sharing Café' can break barriers between locals and newcomers. Storytelling can dissolve the unseen lines that divide society because of mutual distrust and fear of the unknown.

Digital platforms are rapidly changing the scale and reach of storytelling projects. There are several advantages connected to digital projects such as 'Migrant Child Storytelling'. In a world with ever greater connectivity and availability of internet even amongst the poorer layers of society, website-based storytelling projects can transcend borders for a near global coverage. Digital material also proves cheaper per participant, further increasing the reach of these programs. Audiences from all over the world can visit the 'Migrant Child Storytelling' website and hear, read and see the stories of children from all across the world. Nevertheless, there are also challenges which are better handled by classic formats such as workshops. Training often proves to be a problem, lacking completely in 'Migrant Child Storytelling' although 'LISTEN' does provide support for their participants. There are also more ways for offline storytellers to reach newcomers, while websites can be difficult to encounter for someone who has never been introduced to storytelling before. In the future, cooperation and a mixture of formats and platforms will prove to be the best solution for today's challenges. For example, workshops with intense training possibilities can spread their stories on digital platforms.

A last highlight goes to storytelling and academia, following a Canadian example. The Creative Expression Workshops for Immigrant and Refugee Children project in Montreal tries to support children who are learning French as a second language. While plenty of European projects implement storytelling in a similar fashion, the Montreal project distinguishes itself by academia's involvement and subsequent study of the case. By establishing bonds with universities, both researchers and storytellers can profit. While the former gain case-studies for their theories and educational or psychological concepts, the latter receive a detailed analysis of their work and remarks for improvements.

The future of storytelling for newcomers in Europe looks bright, with more projects sprouting each year thanks to dedicated storytellers and increasingly involved public institutions and organizations. Documentation remains a problem to be solved. Independent storytellers and small organizations should recognize the worth of their work and the wealth of experience they gain in the field. This experience could serve the initiators of new projects with invaluable lessons to be learned.

Experiences do not always have to be good, sometimes one can learn more from a failure than a

success. Furthermore, EU-commission backed projects such as ‘Sheherazade’ have proven their lasting impact on the storytelling community in Europe. By training storytellers, these projects have prepared the field for new initiatives.

GOOD PRACTICES

1. SHARED HISTORY PROJECT

The Shared History Project is an initiative started by the South Belfast Roundtable against Racism. To take on the challenges of a multi-ethnicity and multicultural society, the SBRR provided an opportunity for citizens with a migrant background to tell their stories and reasons for moving to Northern-Ireland. The Shared History Project shows how storytelling can be used to strengthen communities against racism.

<http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue4-perspectives7>

2. HET SPROOKJESPROJECT

‘Het Sprookjesproject’ or ‘Sprookjes van Heinde en Verre’ is a Dutch project started by Vluchtelingenwerk Midden-Nederland. The project hosts multiple storytelling groups with a focus on fairy tales. Migrant or refugee women with children are given an opportunity to meet each other and exchange stories from their cultural backgrounds. A report on a partner of ‘Het Sprookjesproject’ states that the initiative prevents social isolation and enables women to enhance their grasp of the Dutch language.

Report: <http://fontys.surfsharekit.nl:8080/get/smpid:27153/DS1/>

3. REFUGEE TALES

Refugee Tales is a project that wants to give refugees a chance to tell their stories. The project distinguishes itself by offering walks for solidarity. In their attempt to spread awareness about indefinite detention in the United Kingdom, Refugee Tales hosts several performances during the walks. Soon the organization will publish a book with many stories told by refugees.

<http://refugeetales.org/>

4. THE CARAVAN

The Caravan project provides Syrian refugees with storytelling workshops in camps throughout Lebanon. Not only can participants share their stories with the world, they can also contribute to a street performance consisting of recorded media.

<http://www.theatremoin.com/the-caravan-syrian-refugee-project-in-lebanon/>

5. NORTH YORK COMMUNITY HOUSE DIGITAL PROJECT

This Canadian storytelling project, hosted by the North York Community House, aims to help newcomers share their stories online. The community centre, which also initiated the project, provides workshops for immigrants and refugees so they can first learn to tell their story. Afterwards the project provides a digital platform for the recorded stories on You Tube. The North York Community House also hosts group meetings for newcomers, mainly targeting women.

https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/danielle-astrug/digital-storytellingimmigrant_b_2233944.html?guccounter=1
<https://www.youtube.com/user/nychonline>



6. CREATIVE EXPRESSION WORKSHOPS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN

This Canadian initiative for young immigrants and refugees in Montreal tries to support children who are learning French as a second language. The project in Quebec is marked by its connections to academia, most importantly the role of psychologists who have published works about this case of applied storytelling in language education.

7. SALON SOUVENIR

Salon Souvenir is a 2015 Belgian storytelling project which involved elderly inhabitants of an industrial , diverse town called Genk. Professional storyteller Rien van Meensel helped two groups tell their stories to bind cultures and take a look at mutual distrust and misunderstandings in the past. Although both groups consisted of pensioners and elderly citizens, one was comprised of inhabitants with a rich local ancestry. The other was made up of first generation immigrants of foreign heritage. The surprising and engaging stories were featured in an exhibition for a greater audience.

8. MULTIPLE PROJECTS BY STORYTELLING CENTRE AMSTERDAM

The Dutch Storytelling Centre Amsterdam has featured and continues to feature multiple projects which involve newcomers. Examples such as Osdorp the Storytelling Neighbourhood and Together in the Molenwijk prove the organisation's dedication to bringing storytelling to audiences of refugees and migrants. The Centre has also shared methods and theory about these projects in online readers for others hoping to set up a similar project. The material can be found on a dedicated website in Dutch and English, with an Arabic version in the making.

<http://sharetocconnect.nl/>

www.storytelling-centre.nl

9. SANGS AN' CLATTER

The Scottish storytelling project Sangs an' Clatter was set up by the experienced Village Storytelling Centre, which reached out to four different organizations each engaged with difficult to reach groups in society. One of these, the Possilpoint Community Centre, was running a Refugee and Asylum Project which fitted the storytelling project. Aided by music, storytellers brought their art to small audiences of newcomers. The project's outreach to multiple organizations shows its possibilities for future cooperation with other partners. It is important to note that Sangs an' Clatter tries to focus on the accessibility of storytelling, rather than giving newcomers extensive training and a platform.

<http://www.villagestorytelling.org.uk/>

10. HELDEN VAN VANDAAG

Professional storyteller Pauline Seebregts had already accumulated a wealth of experience working with newcomers before she kickstarted the joint Flemish and Dutch project Helden van Vandaag with her associates. By training refugees to tell their stories and engaging other storytellers to tell the story of a refugee, a small group of refugees were encouraged to grow into trained storytellers. These tellers toured the Dutch speaking parts of the low countries to spread their tales amongst the general population in a bid to improve awareness and open a dialogue.

<https://www.alden-biesen.be/sites/default/.../HeldenvanVandaag.pdf>

11. MIGRANT CHILD STORYTELLING

This digital, running project offers children from all around the world a chance to send in their stories. The format remains diverse to stimulate participants of many cultures. The texts, pictures, video's and various other stories are collected and displayed on the project's website. Although the project offers no training to the participants, it does try to break language barriers by offering translation services to English. Migrant Child Storytelling sets itself apart from similar projects by providing a connection to other storytelling projects. Small, training-centered projects can gain a large platform for their artwork thanks to this service.

<https://migrantchildstorytelling.org/>

12. LISTEN



LISTEN: learning from intercultural storytelling is a project backed by the EU Commission's Erasmus+ program involving multiple partners across Europe. Similar to the Migrant Child Storytelling project, LISTEN gathers the stories of newcomers on a digital platform. The latter distinguishes itself by targeting an adult audience and keeping to a radio format, specifically attempting to improve the participant's peace of mind and their communicative

skills. LISTEN also provides learning courses for trainers who in turn can help refugees or migrants grow into storytellers. By offering this training opportunity, the project will most likely have a lasting impact will encourage trainers to set up new projects in the future.

<http://listen.bupnet.eu/>

13. SILENT BOOKS

This project by IBBY has been creating wordless books for migrant children on Lampedusa, an isle located in the Mediterranean and known as a hotspot for migrants on the move to the European mainland. The project tries to achieve its passive approach to storytelling through books in two phases. In a first phase, a library for locals and migrants alike was set up on the isle. In the second phase, a yearly repertoire of wordless books was created. Although the project retains a passive approach, it can still serve as an example for storytellers because of its reach and possibilities to expand beyond Lampedusa due to its use of pictorial language.

<http://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/activities/silent-books/?L=0>

14. EEN MAAL & VERHAAL

Raymond den Boestert, a veteran professional storyteller and founder of the Dutch Vertelacademie helped power the maal & verhaal project in the Netherlands. By hosting intercultural meetings on a local scale, locals in the Utrecht neighbourhood of Lombok got to know each other through storytelling. Maal & verhaal can serve as an example of storytelling to bring together and strengthen a community.

15. ONS VERHAAL

Belgian storytellers Rien van Meensel and Annelies van Camp work together with the provincial non-profit Vormingplus Limburg to host storytelling workshops for refugees and migrants. Ons Verhaal tries to strengthen mutual trust and encourages critical reflection. Travelling from town to town, the workshop gives the participants a chance to tell their story and receive guidance during six half a day sessions. Afterwards the digital stories are presented online.

<https://www.onsverhaal.be/>

16. RØDHÆTTE OG LEILA

Red Riding Hood and Leila is a private project run by Danish storyteller Pia Sigmund. The project, which started in 2003, focusses on a group of storytellers with different ethnic backgrounds ranging from Somalia to Turkey, Iraq and beyond. After the lead storyteller had told them a story, pairs would repeat the story in their mother tongues for various audiences. By combining Danish with languages such as Somali and Arab, locals got a taste of foreign culture whilst enjoying the comfort of their own language.

17. LIVING LIBRARY

Living Library is a project which originates from Denmark but has nowadays gained the support of the Council of Europe. With a focus on conversation, the concept is based on borrowing books from a library. Instead of books, audiences pick a person and engage in a conversation. The strength of Living Library is the reach of its participants and the easy to implement concept in over 60 countries across the globe.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/living-library?desktop=true>

18. MOEDER-TAAL

Moeder-Taal is a Belgian social project started by the Centrum voor Basiseducatie Kempen, an institution concerned with education. It applies storytelling in a loose way to help migrant women improve their grasp of Dutch and break free from social isolation. This in turn helps their children by improving their preschool environment.



www.isom.be/documents/Draaiboek-Moeder-Taal-Geel.pdf

19. BABEL EN VERTEL

Storytelling method Babel en Vertel is part of the greater Babel en... project, which aims to improve newcomer's grasp of the Dutch language in various ways. The project is run by Atlas, an integration service based in Antwerp, Belgium. The concept's aim is to encourage participants to tell their story with their limited skills, thus improving their confidence to use Dutch in everyday life. Formats such as Babel en Vertel are readily available on the project's website with plenty of information and training material for potential workshop organizers. The website can also be a trove of knowledge for foreign storytellers who wish to set up a similar project for their country's native language.

<http://www.nederlandsoefenen.be/antwerpen/babel-en-categorie/babel-en-verteleen-verhaal>

20. MOIRA CASSIDY'S WORKSHOP

This private, unnamed storytelling workshop created by storyteller Moira Cassidy is designed for the personal and group development of migrant adults. In four activities, Moira introduces the art of storytelling to the participants by using voices, smells, visuals and writing.

21. STORY SHARING UNIVERSUM

This Finnish project revolves around a story sharing café which functions as a monthly social get-together. By involving storytellers, musicians and visitors who participate in an open-mic storytelling time, locals and newcomers alike can enjoy themselves and get to know each other in a

comfortable, welcoming environment. Another part of the project provides storytelling workshops for asylum seekers in reception centres. Story Sharing Universum's success earned it the support of Helsinki city and a national prize in 2017. As the founder of Nordic Network, the project intends to publish material and exercises from their workshops in the future.

<http://universum.fi/universum/story-sharing-universum/>





Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



'This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein'

FEST
KASTEELSTRAAT 6
3740 BILZEN
BELGIUM

[HTTP://WWW.FEST-NETWORK.EU](http://www.fest-network.eu)
FESTEUROPE@GMAIL.COM