A MILLION STORIES

A REFUGEE INTEGRATION PROJECT CO FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN CULTURE PROGRAMME CREATIVE EUROPE
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A Million Stories - An Introduction

A Million Stories (AMS) is a two-year intercultural storytelling project initiated and led by Roskilde Libraries (Denmark), in collaboration with Future Library (Greece) and the public libraries of Malmö (Sweden) and Cologne (Germany). The project is co-funded by the European Union's Creative Europe agency.

The four partners, through “A Million Stories”, invited refugees and asylum seekers, who have had to flee from their homes, family and friends in the hope of living life in safety, to visit the libraries and share their life stories. Libraries are giving people a voice and support that their voice is heard.

Our main objective was to help refugees socialise and express themselves without necessarily speaking the host country language. In this way, our aim was to foster respect for intercultural diversity in the host populations by creating references we can all recognize from our own everyday lives, through storytelling. As a result, the project created a digital library of human experiences, containing more than 600 stories from refugees who have fled to EU in recent years.

The AMS platform enables refugees to share their experiences, culture and life stories in various formats including film, audio, visual and written forms. By doing so, we not only include a wide range of stories, allowing refugees to tell them regardless of language and storytelling capabilities, but we also communicate to a wider audience.

The combination of “A Million Stories” range of formats and geographical outreach creates a realistic picture of refugee/asylum seekers’ lives and what they have been through until the present day, enabling us to communicate not only on a social level but also on an educational or even political level.
Why?

Everyone has a story to share! Some stories just have a more prevalent voice within their local societies and media; while others’ stories seem to be drowning in preconceived perceptions.

We wanted to give the opportunity for these stories to be known and to enhance the connection between the host population and refugees. All of us need to be sensitized and to have a better knowledge of this particular situation by hearing them and learning more about them.

This became possible when our project was selected in 2016 and received European funding through the important opportunity of the Creative Europe programme\(^1\) on supporting projects working for the integration of refugees through culture, which aims to help build a better mutual understanding of what diversity means in Europe today.

We launched a project focusing on the integration of refugees through culture. We believe it is the part of the obligation of a library to spread information not only from the perspective of host countries populations to refugees but also, the other way around. 'A Million Stories' aimed to create a place where refugees can share the stories of their experiences and encounters over the journey of their migration - from telling about their life in their home country to their reasons for fleeing and what life has been like since they arrived in Europe.

We think it's very important for refugees, as well as for the host population in our countries, to hear directly the stories and the things that refugees find significant for their understanding of themselves and their inner situation. The project wants to engage actively both host populations and refugees, fostering information exchange and thereby greater understanding from the local host community while building tolerance and respect.

Thus, AMS functions as a digital human library with personal, unfiltered stories from over 600 people, who have fled to Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Greece. We have been talking to people in libraries, asylum centers and camps, in their private homes and in all the places where we have been invited to collect and convey the personal aspects of the historic refugee crisis, we have witnessed in recent years.

As the project manager Melanie Holst mentions: “The project has been very important for us, as a library, to dive into because the library tells stories, the library imparts culture, the library involves and includes, and the library focuses on relationships between people.”

Libraries are the first place to set an example and begin this transformation for our local communities and citizens. We want to give refugees a voice in their local society and an opportunity to have their culture discovered by European citizens. Moreover, storytelling functions as a mean of cultural preservation and through their integration, refugees bring their culture and contribute to the country they arrive in.
Reaching out to refugees

One of our first steps was to find ways to reach out to refugees and get in contact with the refugee community. It was, therefore, very important for us to work in local partnerships with ‘gatekeeper’ organisations who are already working with refugees and can assist in gaining outreach, explaining the storytelling possibilities and setting up the process of creating stories. The principal responsibility of the gatekeeper organisations was to assist in identifying storytellers from the refugee communities in each location. Their language capabilities, background knowledge and current acceptance among refugee communities played a significant role in facilitating identification and support for those who wanted to tell their stories.

Thus, we conducted introductory meetings for representatives of refugee communities and gatekeeper organizations and made formalized co-working agreements in order to gain better means of connections to refugees.

Invitation to our partners

During the first months of the project, it was our intention to invite partners we wanted to collaborate with, for a first presentation of AMS and its goals. All four partners did not necessarily have a successful first step with this action. In the beginning, only few cultural associations, non-governmental organizations, artists, volunteers and colleagues responded to our invitation. We organised small events, hand out our flyers and offered them something to drink. This is a good first step in collaborating with local organizations. In this way, we had the opportunity to meet many participants and volunteers, as well as people willing to share their stories.
Cultural associations and Aid organizations

In order to identify new arrivals and spread the project over the next months, we needed to collaborate with various associations and aid organizations. The associations invited us to their various activities and workshops. The AMS team visited these organizations and met new arrivals. There, we presented the project on site and met many refugees, who wanted to participate and share their story in our project. The associations/organizations we worked with were from the same city. It's important to get in contact with local organizations and associations to identify refugees because they have a broad network.

Volunteers

It was important for us to be able to cooperate with volunteers. We had volunteers from our libraries, from our partner organisations and some of our volunteers were also refugees. The fact that they have experienced the same journey and speak the same language proved to be valuable for the project. To meet a person who you can identify with creates a basic sense of security in the interview situation. Afterwards, the volunteers were trained and learned the recording and interviewing techniques. They have also helped to translate the stories and identify new arrivals.

In the case of our partners in Malmo, they found many interested volunteers through their social media dissemination of the project, most of them refugees. In the end, they all received a certificate from the project that they can use in their future endeavours. Two of the partners, Roskilde and Cologne, had Arabic speaking interns who helped with getting in contact with refugees and conducting the interviews in Arabic. Later, they also helped with translating the stories in partners' language.
Challenges

There are many ‘gatekeepers’ and NGOs working on refugee issues and with refugees, but it is really difficult to truly talk to refugees. This is not only from the initial language aspect, but also from the perspective of trustability on both sides.

That was one of the main reasons that each of the partners had to follow a different approach method according to the situation in each country. For all partners, however, it seemed essential to communicate in person with the refugees rather than simply spread the word by flyers.

Future Library:

In our case in Greece, from the outset we had to deal with many challenges trying to find storytellers.

First and most important was the trust issue on the refugees’ side but also on our part. For refugees, it proved difficult to trust and to open up in a short space of time, even when we had help from the NGOs and community leaders to introduce us to the community of refugee centres. For that reason, we started to visit the refugee centre in Athens many times in the week. The more often the refugees saw us and discussed different things, the more they trusted us. In Veria, because the refugee centre is outside the city, the library decided to activate the mobile library in scheduled visits every month.

From our side, we had trust issues because many times we had scheduled to meet with refugees and they did not show up for the interview or at best they came on a different day. Also, regarding communication, sometimes the phone number they gave us became inactive after a while. Therefore, we started to communicate with them via messenger, Viber, or WhatsApp on which they had a more stable account/number.
Another issue was the time of day that communication was attempted. In the mornings, this was difficult: children were at school and adults often slept late. Thus, the visits/meetings in the refugee centre were arranged to start after 12 noon. Another good time was early in the afternoon when everyone was outside their caravan.

A further issue was that refugees were not interested to talk with us or visit the library because, as many of them mentioned, they would soon leave Greece. As time passed, they became used to seeing us frequently in the refugee centre and many of them changed their mind, deciding, in the end, to share their story with us - perhaps it was a trust issue again.

Moreover, during the first year of the project we had to deal with constant changes in the refugee community. People were coming and leaving continuously. That was a big issue in the case of Greece. Every three to four months, apart from the coming and going of refugees, there were changes to community leaders or to the staff of the NGOs in the refugee centres. So we had to deal again with the communication - trust issue. This was very time-consuming. We tried to find storytellers that were staying in a house/apartment in the city centre, but we didn’t have much success at the beginning. Thus, we started to visit and collaborate with community centres in the city centre that were associated with refugees.

In the refugee centre, they were used to see us around and after a period of time they trusted us and wanted to share their story, something that took more time with refugees who were living in the city.

After some time, as they started to see us more often and getting the chance to talk more with them, trust was established. They felt more comfortable talking about their life stories. After a while, we were welcomed in their working places, in gatherings with their families and friends and most importantly, we were welcomed into their houses and families.

**Roskilde:**

Reaching out to refugees in a Danish context has proven to be challenging. The initial goodwill and enthusiasm we met from potential partners and associations when starting with the idea of AMS in 2016, dampened by the end of the project. The change in the national political and media climate played a big role in this. It has therefore been necessary to be very proactive, both in the initial outreach, and in maintaining contact with potential partners.
Communication and investing some time in uncovering common points of interest in the project is also important in order to motivate partners to collaborate.

A second challenge we met early on was that one of our partner NGOs backed out on previously held agreements to facilitate access to refugees. This was due to lack of resources, especially for translation and staffing, which is common for organizations working with refugees. Bearing in mind, that there are often many different language groups, it may be necessary to consider focusing on certain languages, if resources are scarce. An aggravating factor is also that these organizations are often in competition for the existing financial resources, and as such are “protective” of their own working areas. It is important to approach organizations working with refugees with honesty and transparency so they can make an informed decision.

It has proven very effective for us to collaborate with refugees themselves, engaging them in different forms of collaborations within the project, e.g. internships, consultant work etc. There have been several benefits to this, such as ease of contact within refugee communities, trust-building, and with training said refugees in certain skills, both digital and lingual, within the Danish job market.

A third important challenge was that refugees are atomized around the country in the municipalities allocated by the national government. While this is a desirable political and financial solution to countries welcoming refugees, it meant some national travelling in order to meet partners.

Finally, we come to the most important part, the refugees themselves. The language issue is paramount. Translators comfortable with the regional variations of the languages refugees speak are an absolute must in order to communicate with them effectively. In this context, one has to consider that most refugees are fleeing persecution in their native countries and are distrustful of authorities. They had no frame of reference to be certain that talking with us would not worsen their situation. In this regard, it is also helpful, as described above, to work with gatekeepers from the refugee community. The shared language and cultural knowledge often contributes to a level of trust and insight which is valuable towards building the level of trust it takes to engage in the form of intimate storytelling that sharing life stories and experiences represents. Mostly though, it has been extremely interesting and very rewarding, talking to refugee and helping them to tell their stories. Many refugees have appreciated our time and willingness to listen to them, and made their stories and viewpoints heard.
Malmo:

We noticed that we had more participating men and tried to make it as equal as possible. There were many women who refused to participate in Sweden. We talked with the project team and discussed how we could tackle this topic so that more women participated. We tried with our female colleagues talking to female participants and it helped. We also had workshops where many gathered and could tell their story together to make it feel easier. We managed to get female participants increased. It may be tradition and culture that women do not like to be at the centre or in front of the camera. But it’s good that we had different methods that refugees could choose from. It was very important that a library was working for this project, a trusted place for refugees and this built trust.

Cologne:

It was quite a challenge to find storytellers in the beginning. We all worked part-time in the project so that there were many different people representing the project, but not one trust-building face. Thus, we changed our method from looking for individual appointments to visiting refugee homes. We made contact with social workers or the person in charge in the refugee homes so that the refugees knew we could be trusted and they did not have to leave their homes and travel to an unknown institution.

Initially, there was no budget planned for translations. It turned out to be necessary to have translators so that the storytellers could tell their stories in their mother tongue, even though they were able to speak some German or English. With the help of a translator we got much longer and more intense stories because they could express themselves adequately.

It proved to be most successful when we involved an Arabic-German-speaking person in the project whose family had migrated to Germany. For several month she was present every day, becoming the trusted face of the project and also providing the necessary language skills we did not have.
Interviews

Method of questions (Methodology)

Marianne Horsdal, Professor from the University of Southern Denmark who has specialized in narrative analysis, participated in our opening meeting in Roskilde. Her participation in our opening meeting provided the project with a method to be able to give consistency and veracity to the interviews we would conduct throughout the life of the project. Her method builds upon the notion that receiving a personal story is a gift.

Every person has a story to tell and there is something to learn. Every person has taken a path through life that's different to our own. This is something that we need to use when we approach storytelling. It's good manners not to complain about the gift one receives.

Marianne Horsdal writes by hand, verbatim, in order to slow the narrator down. This gives the narrators time to think. She asks only one question: “Would you please tell me about your life, from the beginning until we’re here and now” and then let the narrators decide what to tell. They decide the selection, what is significant and not significant to share. They decide the sequence too.

Thus, when we started conducting our first interviews we had in mind the methodology of Marianne Horsdal but after a while, we understood that we had to adjust our method. Gaining more experience from the interviews and understanding our narrators, we decided to include four general questions so to help the refugees with some examples but not actually leading them to narrate specific things.

After our second partnership meeting, we all mentioned the need to have some neutral/open questions at the beginning of the interview, as many of the interviewers asked us to. The questions were general about their past, present and future, without asking specific details. We remained focused on Marianne Horsdal’s advice, to be neutral and not lead them. Neither to predefine the content for them.

Some examples of those questions are:

- “Would you please tell me about the beginning of your life in your home country?”
- “Would you please tell me about the time the conflict started?”
- “Would you please tell me about how is your life now?”
- “Would you please share some thoughts about your future?”

It's important always to mention that they are free to say whatever they want. They choose which part and how many details they want to share of their story/ life experience.
The need for BRIDGING

In order to conduct an interview, we perceived the need for ‘bridging’ between the narrator and the interviewer as a very important part. The use of methodologies that allow the narrator to say what they want and also to have the time to think and decide what they want to share was also very essential to our project. Moreover, bearing in mind that 60% of the refugees that chose to come to the EU do not necessarily speak English or the host country language. It is important that participants are able to convey textual or oral components of their stories in the languages they know. In addition, the staff who conduct the interviews have to portray calm, security, and give the sense of containment. No need to focus on the horror side of the story. After all, libraries are a good space to interview since they are seen as safe spaces.

In the end, you can finish the interview with small talk. After the transcription is completed, the interviewee should look at the product and give consent to the story, because the CONSENT is essential. Storytellers have to give their consent in order for the stories to be published, but they also have the right to withdraw the story at anytime of their choice.

However, if you don’t conduct the interviews in libraries, make sure to choose a place where it will be quiet and the narrators feel comfortable to speak. Apart from inviting them to the libraries and conducting the interviews face to face, we also tried different approaches, so that people felt as comfortable as possible. We also went to their places e.g. house, place of work, community centres.

Furthermore, we conducted writing - drawing workshops for adults and children, with the help of volunteers from our libraries or from refugee community centres. The workshops can have a topic. e.g. “Write/Draw about what the fear/ the freedom means to you”, “How do you feel about what you experience today (regarding your visit to the library)?”, “How do you feel about living in country X now?”

Allowing people to tell their own stories and not asking too many questions, but also gaining their trust, requires a variety of methods. Thus, we conducted a pilot phase to ensure the most efficient way of collecting stories.

Therefore, in order to achieve the ‘bridging’ and establish trust, apart from the period of time they needed to adjust seeing us around, we always considered the culture of the interviewees. Appreciate their stories and the trust they put on you. Respect their traditions, dress code and show it when you speak to them. In many cases, we had to adjust whether we were speaking with a man, a woman or a minor. Each individual has its own way.
How to conduct the interviews

The initial point of contact/trust-building

It was important for us that the interview was as comfortable as possible for anyone who chose to share their story, as trust-building through personal interaction proved to be the crucial point in the project. In the beginning, you have to explain who you are and what it is that you are trying to accomplish. After achieving the ‘bridging’, you have to identify what means will be appropriate for the individual storyteller, be it oral, filmed, or written, to share his/her story. Everyone had the opportunity to use their native language and choose the narrative method: to tell their stories in words, pictures or any creative expression. It's important for the participant to be able to pause during the interview and not to have to answer questions that feel too private.

Then, we started asking for some basic information. We recorded the first name, last name, age, sex, city/country of origin, destination country, organisation/people who helped us to identify the storyteller, type of story, language, date and place of interview, contact info and any notes needed. This information helped us later for the needed metadata on the website. However, we also had some cases of refugees who did not wish to share certain personal details.

Our ethical viewpoint

We see the individual and respect their choice to participate or not. Storytellers have also the right to withdraw their participation at any time, in order for their interest to be protected. We didn't ask personal questions that might affect their security and confidence. We only asked very general questions, so as to leave the decision of what to tell to the storyteller and to prevent any retraumatization of the storyteller. Besides, it's a great feeling when these people finally trust you and want to express themselves, and you as a library and as a person can help their stories - and their voice to be heard.
Consent forms and anonymity

As mentioned above, every participant had to sign a consent form in order for us to be able to publish their story. If they agree to include their story in the project, they should be aware that it is published on the World Wide Web, and could be reviewed and analyzed by the press, researchers and citizens alike. There is also the possibility of stories being shared on social media. It is therefore important that they carefully evaluate to what extent they wish to share their story in the project. Of course, they have the right to be anonymous if they want so. It's important to respect the choice they make and not to question why.

Different formats

The narrators can choose how they want to tell their story between video recording, sound recording, painting, pictures, poetry, animation and song, or in any other format they want to. It's important to let the narrator use their competence in their own way. At this point, libraries can highlight the means that are available to them e.g. maker space, media labs etc. Nevertheless, a bilingual person with a pencil and paper can work just as well as someone with a full studio.

For example, in Malmo, Reza from Afghanistan chose to share his story via a video recording, in which he sings about freedom:
http://refugeelives.eu/2018/04/03/i-fled-to-be-free/

In Cologne, George Haddad from Syria chose to share his escape story via a poem:
http://refugeelives.eu/2018/06/26/2793/

In Athens, Alaaeddin from Syria chose to narrate his story by sharing part of his diary that he was writing during his journey from Syria to Greece:
http://refugeelives.eu/2018/03/31/i-left-damascus-the-story-of-alaaeddin-koushak/
Useful notes

Inspiration

All partners were invited and participated to a number of events organised by various organizations. For instance, some of us attended theatrical performances and visited exhibitions related to refugee topics which gave us inspiration for our work. Some others participated in storytelling workshop with a drama teacher and learned about different narrative methods that make up a story's building blocks and form the basis for storytelling. Others participated in conferences and workshops, in which they learned about the integration of refugees in the communities and how important it is to really listen to a story and understand the narrator.

Attending these various events helped our project a lot. We met with many refugees and organizations. We learned more about them and we were able to adjust our way of communication and methods of approach. We got inspired to organise workshops with different themes and invite refugees to participate in them.

Useful information bases on the project experiences

- Trust takes time! Even if we had the help of NGOs and community leaders to introduce us to refugees and their community, it was difficult for storytellers to trust and to open up in a short time.
- We had to adjust our approach methods depending on the situation we had to deal with in any country, depending on who we communicated with e.g. man-woman-minor.
- From the beginning we had to be very clear that we are not in a position to help them with their documentation, migratory status or the like.
- There were local differences and challenges. For example in Athens, the Refugee Centre is some way far from the city centre and the libraries. Thus, we started to communicate more with NGOs and community/culture centres that have activities for refugees and are located near the city centre. In the case of Veria, we activated the mobile library to visit the refugee centre. In Roskilde, we used the network of some of our volunteers/translators and carried out house visits. This allowed our interviewees a sense of greater control over proceedings.

Other tips:

- Find key people who are familiar to them and have already gained their trust.
- Be flexible and prepared to book an interview immediately the following day.
- Participate in their gatherings. They feel more comfortable and familiar then, and you can also meet more people to talk about the project, who may be interested in sharing their story.
- Refugees who want to keep contact, they always find a way to do it.
- The best stories are shared when the recorder is off. Sometimes, refugees share more information about their story during a personal conversation with the interviewer.
- It’s a mutual exchange of values, cultures, and understanding of diversity in unity.

**Cologne:** When we were calling them from the library’s phone they didn’t answer our calls because the library’s number looks like an official number of the local authorities. Thus, we bought a new and neutral mobile number to call them for the interviews.

**Future Library:** Regarding the translation, at first we contacted some translation companies but soon we realised that often they couldn’t understand the right meaning of what the storyteller was telling (e.g. for communities and matters inside the refugee centre etc.) and they are very expensive. So, we decided to get the translation during the storytelling. We were conducting the interviews with the help of volunteer refugees from the refugee centres and communities. The volunteers know how to speak English or Greek and most important, can better understand the meaning of what the narrators are saying.

**Malmo:** Remember to book an appointment by phone instead of email. More often, new arrivals have many commitments to keep in mind. It may be good to call them the same day and remind them of the interview. We tried to book several interviews for two weeks, but many did not show up.
Evaluation

The approach to evaluation adopted by “A Million Stories” consists of two main aspects:

- **Process Evaluation** determines whether program activities have been implemented as intended and resulted in certain outputs. It aims to aid understanding of the functioning of an intervention, by examining: implementation structures, resources and processes of delivery; how intervention activities, and participants’ interactions with them, trigger change; context: external factors influencing the delivery and functioning of interventions; and research processes (randomization, spill-over, etc.)

- **Impact Assessment** has been defined as ‘a means of measuring the effectiveness of organisational activities and judging the significance of changes brought about by those activities. It is neither Art nor Science, but both’.

Various methodologies are employed to measure and assess such changes. Typically, they often involve testing of a proposition ‘before and after’ a specific intervention. One major challenge in impact assessment is to eliminate or minimise the risk that other factors (‘external variables’) may have caused the change rather than the intervention itself. One method often employed is to establish a ‘control group’ who do not experience the intervention and to compare the results with the group who do participate.

A further issue is the question of sampling. Greater validity is often ascribed to **random sampling** ‘selection of a group of subjects (a sample) for study from a larger group (a population). Each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample’. In practice, it is often necessary to opt for one or other form of **convenience sampling** (also known as availability sampling): ‘a specific type of non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in a study’.

The use of surveys, interviews, focus groups and observation are all common methods of collecting impact assessment data, depending on the balance sought between **quantitative** and **qualitative** results. ‘Qualitative data approximates or characterizes but does not measure the attributes, characteristics, properties, etc., of a thing or phenomenon. Qualitative data describes whereas quantitative data defines’.
Survey questions may offer Likert Scales as the response mechanism. Data from Likert and similar rating scales (e.g. 1-5) are quantitative. Their advantages include avoiding challenges associated with analysing more qualitative ‘open’ answers.

In choosing email as a method of distributing surveys, laws governing privacy, data protection and database use need to be taken into account.

**Process evaluation in A Million Stories**

Focus groups were chosen as the main method of process evaluation. A briefing note on conducting Focus Groups was prepared centrally for partners. The Focus Groups were of 1-2 hours duration, and had 5-7 participants, consisting of library project staff as a ‘core’ plus, variously volunteers, refugees and NGO partners.

It was suggested to partners that Focus Groups address the following list of questions:

1. These are the goals of the "A Million Stories" project - do you think they are correct and achievable? How can they be modified?
2. Who are the main actors interested in gathering stories of refugees? What is the role of each of them? What is the role of the Library? What else could the Library do that makes sense? Who else do you think could make an important contribution?
3. What problems have arisen in recruiting storytellers from the refugee community? What factors may have hindered the success of this measure? How have you dealt with these questions so far and how could this be improved?
4. How have you conducted interviews and recorded stories so far? How many did you collect and what media did you use? How well did this work and what problems did it cause? How, if at all, are you thinking about changing your approach and why?
5. What problems have arisen in connection with languages and translations? How did you deal with them? What further steps are you planning?
6. How did you save the stories that arose? How did you describe it and what metadata did you use? What problems have arisen in this respect?
7. How can the AMS website be used most effectively to promote project results?
8. What other topics would you like to discuss about A Million Stories?

After completing their Groups, the partners provided the Evaluation consultant with records of their discussions as follows:

- Cologne: a written transcript in German was provided by the partner, which was then translated into 14 pages of text in English by the consultant using Deepl.com Translator,
- Greece: a three-page summary of the discussions was prepared in English by the partner.
- Malmo: a page of notes was prepared in English by the partner.
Roskilde: a sound recording of the discussion, held in English, was provided by the partner which was then transcribed into 13 pages of text using the YouTube as a transcription facility.

The consultant then ‘coded’ the texts with annotations of apparently significant issues, extracted and organised this information to develop a synthesis. Not all partner responses were organised exactly according to the list of questions above, but the tables are structured according to them, as far as possible.

The synthesis report of the Process Evaluation is available online on project’s website: http://refugeelives.eu/toolkit-for-libraries/

Impact assessment in A Million Stories

In choosing a suitable methodology, we took into account the requirements that it should:

1. Be possible to implement within the time and resource framework of the project
2. Be methodologically sound
3. Give meaningful and interesting results
4. Meet our obligations in this area, as expressed in the grant agreement with the EU
5. Allow any shortcomings in a terms of ‘good practice’ to be understood and accepted as plausible and unavoidable limitations.

With limited resources available, we decided to concentrate on the impact of “A Million Stories” on two groups of people:

- Participating refugees
- The host country population

The possibility of assessing the impact on politicians and officials responsible for policy and implementation of migration in each country was also considered, but was thought very complex to achieve in practice, within the time and resources available.
Refugees

We decided to interview a sample of refugees immediately before and after the storytelling event itself. It was considered problematic to maintain consistent contact with the same refugees at a significant time after the event.

It was agreed to limit the sample in each region to between 4 and 8 (10-20%) from each group of 40 storytellers (10%).

Brief questions were then prepared centrally for short-term pre-and post-testing, based around the storytelling event.

Host population

The sample size was determined to be in the range of 25-100 individuals in each region. An online survey was prepared centrally for translation and use in each locality. This consisted of pre- and post-test questions, mainly in the form of ‘Likert Scales’. Some of the pre-and post-test questions differed. Questions needed to be translated by the partner into the host country language(s).

The pre-test survey questions for host populations were:

1. How far do you feel you understand the experiences of migrants who have arrived in this country in the last two or three years?
2. How interested are you to know more about the life and experiences of migrants who have come to this country?
3. How far do you feel that you have satisfactory access to the stories of migrants and information about their experiences?
4. How would you rate your opinion about migrants who have arrived in this country?
5. What are your main sources for information about migrants’ experiences?
6. How far do you feel that migrants are able to join in public discussion about their experiences?
7. How many times have you looked at the A Million Stories website?
8. What is the longest time you have spent looking at the A Million Stories website?
9. How far do you feel your understanding of the situation of migrants in this country has increased as a result of looking at the A Million Stories website?
10. Please say below how the A Million Stories website could be improved.
Data collected in the four participating localities for both process evaluation and impact assessment was sent to the Evaluation consultant for analysis. In some cases partners generated Google Forms questionnaires.

**Variations in each region:**

**Malmo**

**Focus group:** We invited colleagues and project participants to come up with ideas and useful information about the website and our interviews. We asked questions to the focus group. We received very important input that we could continue to work on. The discussion could be sound recorded or notes taken in order to evaluate and collect the answers from the focus group. The focus group could consist of staff members from different projects, refugees and library visitors.

**Impact study:** Pre and post inquiry for participating refugees and library visitors. The inquiry included 5-10 questions about their experiences about the project and refugees in general. The impact study was evaluated by the staff members of the project.

**Roskilde**

In the case of refugee evaluation, we used a set of refugees that was approached in the last phase of the interviews who we felt represented a diverse group. In regards to nationality and language, most of those interviewed were from the Syrian and Kurdish refugee communities in Denmark.

**Focus group, host population:** Due to difficulties in attracting interest in attending an impact assessment seminar in Roskilde, we approached local citizens with previous connections to the library to give their honest assessment about refugeelives.eu and the “A Million Stories” project. Their inputs were shared online after a deliberation period at home and were compiled in Roskilde before they were sent to our evaluation specialist.
**Future Library**

**Focus group:** We discussed and organized Focus Groups with the staff of each library that we were collaborating with (Municipal Library of Ilioupoli and Keratsini - Drapetsona in Athens and Public Library of Veria). These group discussions consisted of librarians, IT and communication staff, volunteers, refugees and NGO partners. Each group had five to seven people.

**Impact Study:** We gathered the sample of the host population impact study through a google form, in which we had translated the questions in Greek. As we were collaborating with three libraries in Greece, we tried to find a suitable way for all. Regarding the questions in the impact study for refugees, with some storytellers, we asked the questions directly. In some other cases, where we didn’t know the people very well from the beginning, we asked the questions during the conversation before and after the interview.

**Cologne**

**Focus group:** We discussed a Focus Group with staff members, our Arabic speaking intern representing also our gatekeepers.

**Impact Study:** We had two workshops with library visitors and staff members who were not involved in the project.

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The results of Impact assessment are available online on project’s website: [http://refugeelives.eu/toolkit-for-libraries/](http://refugeelives.eu/toolkit-for-libraries/)
Dissemination

Through this project, we increased our capacities and know-how in the field of collecting and disseminating stories from refugees as a means to a broader understanding of conditions, of culture and of connections to host country citizens. As many countries are dealing with the refugee crisis, we would like to share the idea of our project with many more people and the stories to be known in many more countries.

Website & Films

The stories are available on the digital platform: www.refugeelives.eu in order to disseminate to a wider public. We created a website with a domain name that reflected what the project was all about. All partners were taught how to upload and edit the stories on WordPress. It may be good to have close contact with the communication department at the respective libraries for technical assistance, if needed. The main language of the website is English, but we also have added a tool (Google translate) that translates into the world's languages. The stories are available in English and each partner has also added their native language to their stories. The stories also have the needed metadata to be easily available to other platforms, for instance, Europeana.eu, in order to disseminate the stories to a wider public.

The digital platform should be easily accessible for everyone. In order to promote more the website, we have put the project's website and information on our library website landing pages.

Additionally, we have created a short film from the stories and images that are uploaded on the digital platform http://refugeelives.eu/about/, and our partners in Malmo have created a short film which includes some of the stories they have collected https://vimeo.com/302412413. This was created for a film festival in Sweden.

Media / Social media / Network

In regard to dissemination, we have sent various press releases in different languages to our networks (libraries’ groups, local community networks, partner organizations). We collaborated with various actors (museums, festivals, book fairs, community and cultural centres). Also, we were interviewed for a research study that Public Libraries 2020 where
conducting related to good examples of successful innovation and outstanding advocacy efforts in public libraries in Europe. Moreover, we used our library’s social media or created a Facebook group to market the project on a regular basis. By this means, we gained many followers, who could get informed and take advantage of all our activities.

In the case of Malmo, many Swedish and foreign media newspapers, radio, magazines and TV wrote about the project. They collaborated with Malmö Museums, Malmö City Theater, Library Bus, Somali Culture Festival, Vilja and Nypon Book Publishing. Cologne bought an ad in the local city magazine. They gave away pens and writing pads with the AMS logo to their storytellers. Moreover, they put a huge touchscreen in the entrance area of the central library featuring the website. Roskilde Libraries, also, produced writing pads and pens to give away to local citizens and promoted the projects activities in social media.

**Marketing**

To promote the project we attended various events in libraries (language lessons), in city festivals, in music lessons and concerts. Additionally, we participated in different events of organizations and cultural centres, to talk about the project. We also handed out flyers to visitors about “A Million Stories” and organized several events, workshops and exhibitions. Apart from these, we participated in and presented the project at conferences and different events related to our field and beyond. By doing so, we shared contact information, met potential collaborators and found people who were interested to share their story.

In Malmo, we went out and participated in various events such as film festivals and an Arab book fair to reach as many people we could. We contacted SFI (Learn Swedish) schools and conducted a number of workshops in their local buildings. We also presented the project at various language cafes in libraries.
Benefits and spin off effects of the project

While conducting this project, our target groups were both refugees and the public in the host countries, and researchers as well. Apart from helping refugees socialise and express themselves without necessarily speaking the host country language, we wanted through their stories to foster respect for intercultural diversity in the host populations and reduce the stereotypes that most people have for refugees. Later on, the collected stories can also be part of educational material or a research study.

Refugees & Stereotypes

“A Million Stories” project aims to reduce stereotypes about refugees and give a more accurate image than the one that has been shown in media. The project gives these people a chance to speak and a platform from which their many different stories will become an enlightening counterpoint to the often stereotyped illustrations portrayed in most media. Stories are unfiltered and without editing. We record/write down the story exactly as the storyteller tells it. Thus, we can learn about them from them. Moreover, we have noticed that refugees tend to feel better and relieved after they tell us their story.

Local citizens

Through this project, the host populations will have a more accurate view of the refugees and their stories. The local citizens will learn more about what the refugees have experienced, not only their difficulties but also about their childhood, education, life in Europe and their desires and hopes for the future. Host populations will be able to get to know the life of their new neighbours. In Malmo, also, the stories will be collected in a respected city archive that the citizens may use.
Library staff & volunteers

Library staff and volunteers learned a lot about working with refugees and storytelling and also the use of technical equipment. Through this project, we met people from different countries and backgrounds. We learned to encounter media in a more professional way and to collaborate with organizations from various fields. Networking and creation of new contacts have been beneficial to the project.

Moreover, the staff and volunteers, apart from learning the difficulties that refugees faced and most of them still deal with, discovered many things about their different culture, their everyday life in our countries, their hobbies and their interests.

Researchers

Apart from refugees and host populations, researchers are also one of the target groups. AMS and its outcomes (stories and metadata) have the potential to become a valuable resource for social and cultural history research. In the near future, there is also the possibility for the AMS stories to become part of Europeana, and specifically the Europeana Migration initiative.

Material

The project also has the intention to provide educational or research material for teachers and students at various levels such as elementary and high schools, college and university. As we have a variety of languages and countries among the partners, we will examine what will fit best for all or for each country.
All four partners believe strongly in the benefits of European and international cooperation. Culture, communication and information have to serve as catalysts for understanding and tolerance, and are vital elements in human relations. We believe that in order to bring cultures together, facilitating intercultural – and interreligious understanding and tolerance, libraries need to be at the forefront of gathering and providing information, distributing stories and sharing cultural experiences to a wide public.

So even if the beginning was difficult - with some reluctance among people in refugee communities to participate in storytelling due to cultural factors, indifference, security factors or other fears and concerns- in the end, we see people who are willing to share their story and integrate into our society, and that libraries can play a significant role in this.

As Mamon said in his story “A book can change your way of thinking and as you change yourself, you can change the world accordingly. This will help many of us in the future. It will even help the Europeans living here. We did not come here to sit upright. We are capable of anything, we just need an opportunity to use and improve our skills.” [Mamon, Syria] http://refugeelives.eu/2018/03/30/a-volunteer-for-a-small-library/
Further reading


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