The *Arriving* Storybook: Bidirectional Storytelling through Creative Practice and Interactive Media Design

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Abstract: *Arriving* is an interdisciplinary research project that incorporated audiovisual and interactive technology to capture and disseminate multigenerational narratives surrounding movement, migration, and arriving at a new place. Employing co-creation and storytelling techniques, conversations and interactions between younger and older generations centered around personal objects related to arriving were documented in audio recordings and portrait photographs and shared in public gallery exhibitions along with an interactive, online e-book. This article reflects on the creative process in designing the *Arriving* project and, subsequently, the construction of a digital storybook, which has been distributed nationally and internationally as a tool to foster two-way integration in international communities.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Creative Practice, Interactive Media, Co-creation

Introduction

Storytelling employed as a creative methodology has the capability to build connections with audiences and trigger emotional responses. Barber and Siemens (2016, 3) references playwright David Mamet, who argues that "it is our nature to dramatize." Barber and Siemens (2016, 3) add:

> Drama is the nature of human perception, he says, and it is a human need to construct, or have constructed for us, narratives about our lives that "order the universe into a comprehensible form," a cause-and-effect conclusion. We construct such dramas in order to understand ourselves, to exercise our own will to create our own character.

Embedding storytelling into research can serve as an effective technique to help us understand the world around us and offer a vehicle to relay complex topics in a format that is understandable and easy to digest by audiences. Spaulding and Faste (2013, 2844) argue that "by rooting design concepts within a sensory story world, we believe designers can help their audience develop greater levels of engagement with both the concept and the story and connect more meaningfully to experiences in their past or present."

In 2019, the *Arriving at a New Place* project, or simply *Arriving*, was created as part of the Being Human Festival in partnership with the Arts & Humanities Council and the British Academy (StoryLab Research 2019). The aim of the project was to explore methods for

fostering two-way integration between members of diverse communities. In *Arriving*, this was achieved by bringing community members together to reflect on and relate their cross-generational experiences around migration and integration. This effectively helped provide a greater understanding of how younger and older populations from different backgrounds find meaning in arriving at a new place or environment. The new place could be a new school, workplace, town, or country, and the project brought individuals with and without migration experiences together to discover commonalities around their experiences of movement, migration, and arrival (Schneider et al. 2019, 2021). The resulting output of the *Arriving* project was an online digital storybook and hybrid physical-digital exhibition that utilized interactive storytelling to engage and inform audiences about the commonalities of movement and migration.

In this article, the creative practice of developing the online digital storybook is discussed, presenting insights on the use of creative design, co-creation, and user-driven storytelling to relay complex societal topics surrounding movement and migration to a broader audience. Furthermore, the article highlights how the inclusion of this design aided in promoting activities for two-way integration within varying international communities.

The Concept of *Arriving*

The interdisciplinary research team developed *Arriving* based on the idea of two-way integration, which has been emphasized over the past decade by a range of authors from the social sciences (Ager and Strang 2008, 2010; Alba and Foner 2015; Charsley and Spencer 2019). Advocates of two-way integration are critical of the assimilation approach, which views integration as a one-way process and places the onus on migrants to adapt to the country they have moved to. In contrast, the two-way approach advocates that integration involves all residents:

> An integration approach needs to move beyond one-way models of assimilation, and a focus on migrants and minorities, to recognise that all members of society engage in participation, interaction and change. In practice, the focus of discussion is often on the characteristics and behaviour of individuals (e.g., migrants) to the neglect of society and policy factors. Recent policy developments, however, demonstrate increasing interest in viewing integration as something in which all members of society are involved and for which there is shared responsibility. (Charsley and Spencer 2019, 1)

The research team sought to reflect a two-way approach to integration, which promotes and fosters social connections and communications between residents who might have fewer interactions in the community for a variety of reasons, such as social, cultural, economic, geographical, age, and discriminatory. A two-way integration method was used that brought residents together to converse and reflect on personal objects from their past that embody the idea of arriving at a new place. Using objects in participatory research can facilitate and enhance social interaction processes (Mondada 2019). As social interaction, specifically

communication and bonding processes between all residents, are at the center of a two-way integration approach, a focal object was incorporated to ease social interaction between participants who had not met before.

In the context of social connections, Ager and Strang (2008) differentiate between "social bridges" that relate to interactions "with other communities" and "social bonds" that refer to social connections with family and co-ethnic, co-national, co-religious, or other forms of group.[1] Social bridges (with other communities) are often defined by limited knowledge and understanding about "the other," which risks stereotyping and discrimination of residents, especially those who are labeled and stigmatized as "migrants," "outsiders," and/or "newcomers." By bringing residents with different backgrounds together, social bonds can be developed; commonalities can be identified, intercultural knowledge enhanced, and potential stereotyping and discriminatory practices between residents reduced (Schneider 2020; Schneider et al. 2021).

Designing the *Arriving* Project

The research team incorporated a speculative design approach to acquire and convey cross-generational stories on arriving from residents in Cambridge, UK, and embed them within a multisensory and interactive narrative. Speculative design operates on "bringing together multiple disciplines, skills, competences, cultures and interests" to "convey the results of the technical and technological investigations into narrative form and diegetic outputs which are able to engage all senses" (Iaconesi 2019). In the case of *Arriving*, expertise was drawn from academics across the fields of migration, intergenerational studies, storytelling, visual media, and creative technology. The varying range of academic backgrounds undertaking the project helped develop and apply an interdisciplinary methodology to collect these stories in a meaningful way and utilize an engaging narrative format to promote knowledge, awareness, and understanding of these stories. This resulted in the creation of the *Arriving* Storybook (StoryLab Research 2019), an online, interactive audiovisual ebook that presents reflections from eight pairs of sonically recorded intergenerational conversations on arriving.

Co-creation was used as a tool to construct social bonds and connections among the cross-generational project participants—a young person of secondary school age and an older person—mutually sharing their personal stories of arriving. Wu, Zhang, and Ren (2022, 2) mention the increasing popularity of co-creation applied in social design and that it is widely used to "investigate, generate and develop new ways to achieve collective social goals." They argue that co-creation "can thus be used to build bridges for research teams that facilitate participant integration and communication" (Wu, Zhang, and Ren 2022, 3). Moreover, co-creation "offers alternatives to a single-author vision, and involves a constellation of media production methods, frameworks, and feedback systems" (Cizek and Uricchio 2019, 5). In *Arriving*, this took a non-extractive approach (Yates as cited in Wissot 2017) prioritized by

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[1] Ager and Strang's (2008) references to social bridges, social bonds, and social links (interactions with the structures of the state) refer to Putnam (1993) and Woolcock (1998) who developed these forms of social connection.

adopting a co-creation method in storytelling, minimizing third-party mediation in the storytelling process, and consolidating the narratives of the contributors into a shared story. Applying co-creation methods in *Arriving* allowed stories to "emerge from a process, and evolve from within communities and with people, rather than for or about them" (Cizek and Uricchio 2019, 5). This provided an opportunity to empower the polyvocal (Aston and Odorico 2018) and multidimensional stories of our co-creators.

As a tool for sharing these stories, ebooks (electronic books) offer an effective medium for learning, education, and knowledge dissemination and have a stable popularity base (Laricchia 2022). The ubiquity of the internet grants the digital ebook format the possibility of reaching audiences further than their physical counterparts and thus removes some accessibility barriers (Farhan and Aasha 2020). Alshaya and Oyaid (2017, 41) state that ebooks contribute to the needs of teaching and learning by providing "advanced interactive content featured with richness, interactivity," and these properties serve to "increase interactions' levels of students with learning content delivered to them." In addition to added interactivity, there is also the benefit of being able to incorporate various multimedia elements within a digital ebook that cannot be readily implanted in physical books (such as audio, video, moving graphics, and animation). This can "attract the attention of students, and their sense of enjoying the thrill during learning" as well as "combining the use of several senses while reading to overcome traditional limitations facing readers as a result of their reliance on only visual reading" (Alshaya and Oyaid 2017, 44).

The creation of the storybook in *Arriving* differs from traditional ebooks as it is designed as a complete audiovisual artifact used to share authentic representations from community members within the project through embedded multimedia. While traditional ebooks are often text-based with some images and URL website links, the combination of embedded static and dynamic visuals, auditory elements, and user interactivity of the *Arriving* storybook offers audiences a broader, multisensory experience for storytelling.

Co-created Narratives: Storytelling through Conversation

The process of co-creation in *Arriving* developed through connecting diverse and multigenerational pairings (age, heritage, gender, etc.) via a storytelling workshop. "Arriving at a new place" was selected as the focus of the conversation because of the potential commonality of experiences with our participants (e.g., arriving at a new school, employment, neighborhood, and/or country). The aim of the topic was to identify and highlight common experiences, reflections, and emotions associated with the arrival at a new place and to enhance social connectivity and mutual understanding between residents who might not socially interact in everyday life.

The participant co-creators were invited to bring an object to the workshop that they felt embodied the concept of arriving at a new place. Focusing on a personal object of meaning was designed to help them relate their experiences and find common connections in their stories despite variances in culture and generations. Similarly, the relationship between a personal object and memory served as a tool to allow external audiences to find their own meaning in

the stories. It is argued that "this type of cognitive mapping of an existing story from a catalogue of experience-based stories onto a present experience can lead to a more personal resolution of narrative ambiguity and lead to feelings of greater ownership" (Spaulding and Faste 2013, 2849). Addressing the narrative power of co-creation, they expand, adding "there is an opportunity for narrative designers to consider crafting experiences in which the story and concept act as vehicles for performance that are directly accessible to both the storyteller and the audience, in an effort to create deeper attachments to the concept in the long term."

Capturing genuine stories from the co-creators required creating an environment of open, non-extractive, and unscripted dialogue, which, in this scenario, was best facilitated by unstructured interviews. While unstructured interviews are arguably not as effective at probing into greater detail of a phenomenon about which one already has a basic understanding, they are deemed "most useful when you want to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon within a particular cultural context" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009, 9). In the case of *Arriving*, this approach allowed more open conversations to occur between the participants without a mandate for predetermined questioning and helped discussions evolve based on the social and natural flow of interaction (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009). The unstructured interview format additionally provided greater opportunities to "understand the complex behavior of people without imposing any a priori categorization, which might limit the field of inquiry" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009, 1). As a result, richer and more organic data emerged from the discussions of the participants.

Sixteen participants engaged in conversations about their memorable objects. The sixteen formed eight interview pairs with one adult and one youth participant in each group pairing. Half of the group (four pairs) conducted interviews simultaneously in a large television studio at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. This provided a sizeable space where the group pairings could be suitably distanced to minimize excessive amounts of external sound overlapping into another conversation. Each pair was organized in a corner of the studio, and sound-absorbing boards were positioned around them to assist in isolating their separate conversations.

Figure 1: Arrangement of Group Conversation

Lapel microphones were placed on each participant to record the conversations, and two pairs of interviews were recorded on one four-channel multi-track recorder to keep the audio of a single pair synced to the same timeline. Each group of four pairs had half an hour to freely discuss the significance of their objects and how they related to their personal stories of arriving.

Meaning Expressed through Visuals

While the first group of four pairs conducted recorded interviews, the second group engaged in photography sessions with their objects. In between these conversations, each pair was photographed in another nearby studio with their personal objects. Each pair was photographed against a dark background, and a red ribbon loosely connecting them was used to illustrate their connection. These photographs were taken after our co-creators had their initial conversations. Even this short interaction resulted in the development of a relationship that can be seen in many of the photographs. The process was further developed through the informal approach to the photography that helped put the participants at ease and often resulted in a direct, self-empowering gaze into the lens. These images reflected the diversity of the pairings, forming part of the multimedia exhibition created for the AHRC Being Human Exhibition at the Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge, and the interactive ebook.

Figure 2: Participants with Personal Objects

Bridging the Media—The Interactive Storybook Concept

The audio and visual material formed the basis for a gallery exhibition at the Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (Schneider et al. 2019). The project was further developed to reach a wider stakeholder audience. Initially, a photobook was considered, but this would only showcase the visual components of the participants' interactions and not make effective use of the audio recordings. Thus, a platform needed to be created where the visuals of the participants could accompany their audio interviews. Therefore, the photobook concept was developed into an interactive storybook, where audiences can interact and listen to embedded recordings of the

participant interviews to give greater context to the imagery and help connect the audience directly to their first-person narratives.

A key driver for the storybook was interactivity and providing the reader with a choice in how they engage with each conversation. Hoguet (2014) mentions, "simplistically put, if you only have one story to tell, and most of all if you have only one way to tell it, you won't have much need for interactivity." With multiple strands of dialogue and stories arising from *Arriving*, user choice played an important role in how audiences engaged with desired narratives. Murray (2018, 14) mentions that a "more flexible and multivocal storytelling format could help us create new forms of shared representations that let us agree on common facts, and recognize that these facts can also be understood in multiple schemas of representation, each reflecting their own explicit values." While a traditional form of linear storytelling did not seem appropriate in relaying the diversity of narratives in *Arriving*, we see from Hoguet (2014) that "this is where interactivity can make a difference…by giving people the power of choice, interactive storytellers produce experiences that are more demanding but also more rewarding than a thousand articles." The interactive storybook offered an alternative format to share the interview discussions by housing them in their own unique chapter of the storybook. This enabled audiences to independently explore and experience desirable conversation topics at their own will.

Constructing the *Arriving* Storybook

Spaulding and Faste (2013, 2848) mention that "an optimum experience is one in which a design is nestled within a story that engages the senses and encourages users to dig into their past experiences to rectify the tension between the design and the story." One method of rectifying the user's experiences with the narrative in *Arriving* was making the digital storybook feel familiar and offer a similar experience to interacting with a physical storybook. This consisted of implementing real-time page-turning and a visual layout providing depth and size that gave the impression of interacting with a tactile object. While there are many design techniques for developing modern ebooks, preferred interfaces for ebooks are still nestled in the original design of physical books (Wilson, Landoni, and Gibb 2002; Vanderschantz, Timpany, and Huang 2018). In an experiment evaluating varying navigation methods in ebook design (such as utilizing page-turning actions like button presses, sliders, or "page-swiping" that mimics physical page-turning), page-swiping ranked high for nonacademic reading experiences as users enjoyed a similar feeling to using a physical book (Vanderschantz, Timpany, and Huang 2018).

To match the design of a physical book, a JavaScript library called turn.js was utilized (n.d.), and turn.js helped create a graphical interpretation of a physical book in native HTML5 and CSS programming codes. Similarly, the JavaScript methods provided by turn.js allowed the functionality of the virtual book to mimic that of a real book.
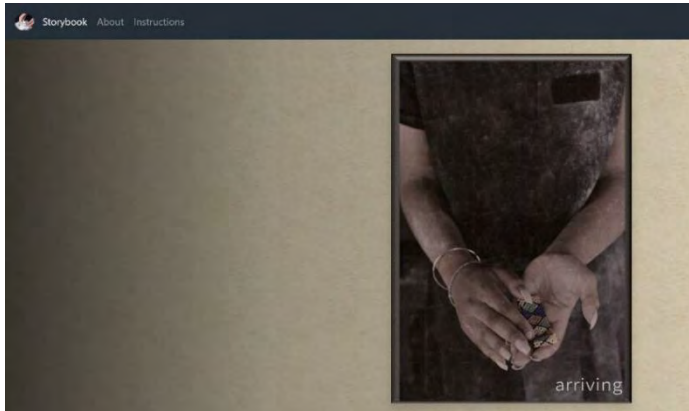
Figure 3: *Arriving* Storybook Cover Designed with turn.js

Within the storybook, each interview pair was provided their own unique chapter, and a single chapter spanned the visible left-hand and right-hand pages of an opened book. When initially accessing the storybook, the book appears closed on the screen, with the front cover shown to the reader. Users could then navigate the storybook by hovering their mouse over the right edge of the book and clicking and dragging the book's edge to open it and view the first internal page.
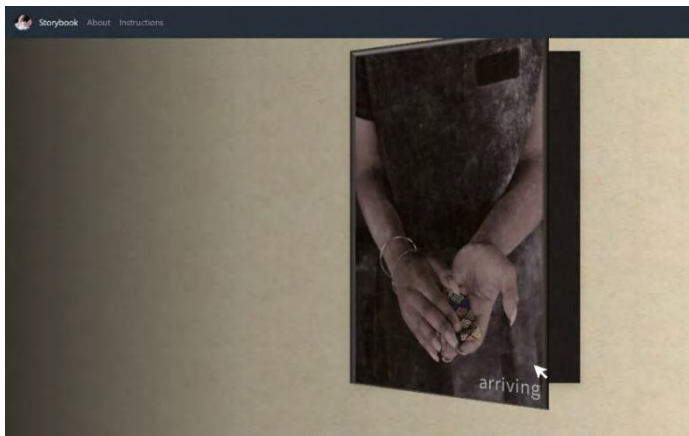

Figure 4: *Arriving* Storybook Page-Turning

The table of contents on the first page is revealed when the storybook is opened, and it provides an index of the eight storybook chapters that the reader will encounter. The titles given to each chapter reflect the objects brought by the co-creators for discussion, and the titles were embedded with clickable URL links that instantly navigated the reader to the respective book chapter.
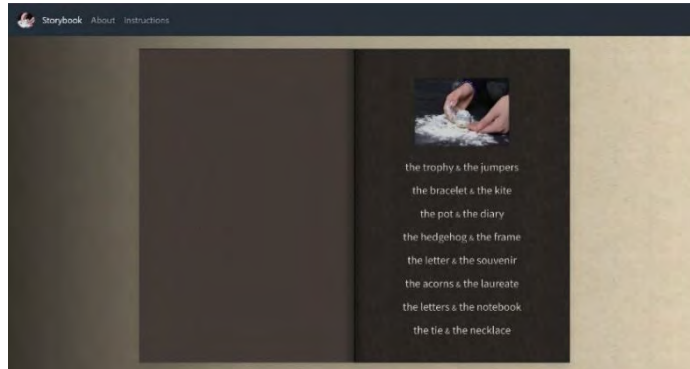
Figure 5: Table of Contents with Chapter Links

After the table of contents, the subsequent pages of the storybook hosted the individual chapters. Each chapter dedicated one visible page to a specific media type captured during the interview sessions. The visible left-hand page of the displayed chapter showcased the photographs of the participant pairs with their respective objects, and the right-hand page contained the interview audio that the reader can interact with and listen to.
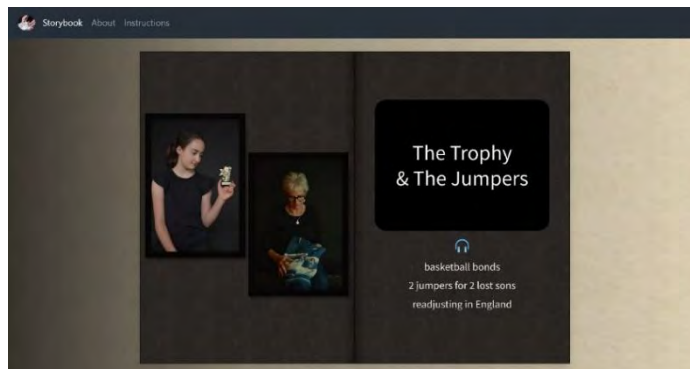

Figure 6: Chapter of Storybook

Storybook Design

After achieving the desired functionality of the storybook, the book was artistically designed to resemble an antique album to reflect the concept of shared memories among the participant co-creators. The pages were overlaid with darker colors and a grainy texture to give the appearance that they were aged and weathered over time. Participant photographs on the left-hand pages of the chapters were wrapped with a dark border to reflect traditional Polaroid-style photos and similarly superimposed with a grainy texture. The photos were then positioned central to the page and sized to cover the maximum width of the page.

On the right-hand page of the visible chapter, a chapter title was added to accompany the audio components and fill the remaining blank space at the top of the page. The text for the audio files was brightly colored to provide contrast to the dark background, and a lightly colored headphone icon was added above the titles of the audio segments to signify that they

were audio components. Clicking on one of the audio components changed the color of its text to signify active playback, while a second click to mute the audio would return the text back to its default color.

A final consideration for the book was placing a subtle graphic on the right-hand pages underneath the title of the chapters that served as a background for the page and complemented the heavy textual elements. A creative decision was made to utilize a moving graphic of a night sky with shooting stars that were animated when audio from the chapter was played (Loktar 2013). The animation aimed to be reminiscent of oral storytelling traditions that occurred under a night sky. When an audio segment was activated, the stars slowly moved horizontally across the backdrop of the image and provided another subtle cue of visual feedback to the user when an audio event was triggered.
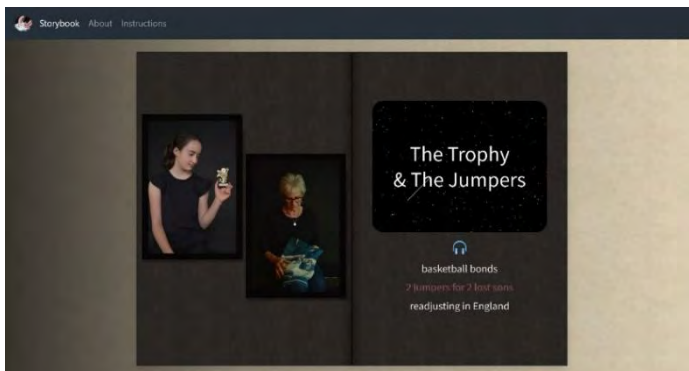

Figure 7: Audio Playback with Visual Cues

Integration of Audio Interviews

The key component of the storybook was the embedded audio interviews, as they aimed to provide the listeners with greater presence when experiencing the narratives. Ong (2013, 71) mentions that "sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer." In an interview with Siobhán McHugh, podcast producer, consultant, and Professor of Journalism in Arts, English, and the Media, she discusses how voice is "innately personal" and highlights the connection between the human voice and audiences by stating:

> When you hear the gulp of a voice, as a listener, you lean in, and you are physically connected to that person because there are no barriers. You're creating the bond in your own mind. You're creating an idea of who this person is, and what she's feeling, and you're being moved and affected in some way. (Boubia 2019)

Embedding the interviewees' voices directly into the storybook sought to achieve a deeper personal connection between audiences and the interview participants. Transcripts of the interviews helped identify conversational segments that shared the importance of the

interviewee's personal objects and their association with arriving. These selected sections of audio were then broken down into three or four audio segments of approximately three minutes in length or less. These smaller audio segments were aimed at making the listening experience easier to digest for casual audiences and passive engagement with the storybook. The theme of the topics addressed in these individual audio segments was used as the title for the audio piece, and the storybook user could click the text for each title to listen to the audio in each chapter.

Some of the themes extracted from the participant conversations showed an association with homesickness, friendship, and excitement of being in a new place. The extracts below reflect the discovery of commonalities and mutual understanding between their diverse backgrounds:

> Carlotta[2] (secondary school pupil who had moved recently with her family from Italy to the UK) and Mary (retired resident who had lived most of her life in Cambridge):

> Carlotta: So, I got my diary. My best friend gave it to me before I left. And she said, "write down every emotion, like, everything that I felt. And I really miss her."
> Mary: Yes, I can well imagine. It's lovely.
> Mary: The diary is all inside, is it?
> Carlotta: Yeah, it's inside. I didn't finish it yet.
> Mary: Oh, fabulous. That's really good. And you were able to write down your feelings about it.
> Carlotta: Yeah. So, it was very helpful because I was a bit scared of telling my feelings to my parents because I was scared about their reactions.

> Li (secondary school pupil from China who was on an exchange year in the UK) and Adam (retired resident who had lived most of his life in the UK):

> Li: It's nice. And when I come to England, I feel very excited actually, because it's a new place. It's really nice. It's, like, different places and they're very, very different, but then I feel a little bit, I miss my home because when we go traveling, you will feel very excited now for the new things, but when you come there and live a long time, you will maybe feel a little bit…you want to come back.
> Adam: Well, I like to go but for a short time. I don't like to go for a long time…. As I get older, quite honestly, just a week's enough, then I want to come home, you know.

The source audio files were stored in encrypted, cloud-based storage that enabled them to be streamed to the listener upon activation. The storybook user simply needed to click on the titled text of the respective sound file to listen to the desired audio segment. A secondary click would then pause the playback of the audio file. The use of embedded audio provided an additional dimension of engagement to be added to the storybook concept. Reading a traditional, physical storybook requires the reader to take an active role in understanding the text and consuming the

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[2] All names are anonymized.

story. Adding audio interviews to the digital storybook, however, provided an opportunity for the interviewees to share their intergenerational migration and movement stories with the storybook audiences as they intended, directly from their voice as the original storyteller.

Results of the Storybook

The participants involved in the co-creation process of *Arriving* reflected positively about on their experiences, ideas, and emotions with other residents. Fostering new social connections and mutual understanding, a key dimension of two-way integration, was highlighted in participants' evaluation interviews:

> Really nice idea to link us together. We would have never met if not for this project…Everybody has a story. (Anna)

> I was worried, that talking to a person I didn't know wouldn't work but it worked very well. If you to talk to anybody, you will always find a connection. (Louise)

> I really enjoyed hearing about Li's experience. Everyone has their own experience, and it is good sharing this with others. (Mark)

Furthermore, the digital storybook format provides a suitable mechanism for the personal stories embedded in *Arriving* to be disseminated and distributed online using mobile, desktop, and laptop computing devices. Arguably, this digital format increased accessibility, facilitating global distribution of the project to generate a strong international impact (see Schneider 2021). In Germany, for example, the Centre for Diversity, Democracy and Integration in Education at the University of Hildesheim incorporated *Arriving* in their teacher network, reaching 488 teachers.

In Romania, the youth organization IPTA (Asociaţia Idei şi Proiecte pentru Tineri Activi [Association Ideas and Project for Active Youth]) used *Arriving* for a pilot curriculum for refugees living at the Emergency Transit Center in Romania (UNHCR) and in Erasmus+ mobilities activities. The idea of bringing and creating traditional objects to reflect refugees' diverse heritage backgrounds, and to describe the story behind them, was adapted in the pilot curriculum. As a follow-up, refugees would explore the commonalities and differences of their experiences and stories. The storybook also served as an illustration tool for the Erasmus+ activities conducted by IPTA and was applied to more than ten youth mobilities, addressing human rights education, migration, and preventive education on violence, stressing concepts such as stereotypes and prejudices. The aim of the mobilities was to bring together youth from the national majority and minority groups and increase mutual understanding of youth with different heritages and reduce stereotyping between them. Young people representing more than thirty nationalities took part, including young people from Estonia and Latvia (including Latvian, Estonian, and Russian speakers), Romania (youth with Romanian, Hungarian, and Roma heritage), Turkey (youth with Turkish and Kurdish heritage), and Spain (including youth with Catalan and Spanish heritage). In feedback from the project, a representative from IPTA

stated that "the e-book was an inspirational tool for practical workshops," "was (and it is) really easy to understand and to adapt the concept to various groups" and, in addition, that *Arriving* was "used to stimulate the dynamic and cohesion for young people originating from the same country but from different ethnic groups."

Last, *Arriving* was included in a large-scale five-year project on diversity teacher training in Slovenia (2016–2021; part of the larger project "Strengthening Educational Staff's Social and Civic Competences") funded by the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and the European Social Fund (European Commission, n.d.). The Slovenian Migration Institute (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) developed a sixteen-hour program on different issues relating to diversity (e.g., living diversity; intercultural relations and integration; respectful communication; zero tolerance for violence) and incorporated *Arriving* into their integration training. Expert teams traveled across Slovenia to conduct the seminars, which were organized for groups at the local, regional, and national levels. Overall, ten thousand teachers were trained in diversity as part of the project, and the project had wide-ranging social and political impacts.

Conclusion

Arriving offers an insight into how creative practice and interactive storytelling methodologies can enable a deeper engagement with research on modern social issues, particularly relating to movement, migration, and two-way integration. Barber and Siemens (2016, 2) argue that:

> if we grant that humanities scholarship and pedagogy may be grounded in stories of human cultural and creative endeavours, then the use of digital media to help create and share such stories may help engage academic research with creative practice to promote critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, and civic engagement.

Using co-created interviews with younger and older generations of different heritage backgrounds, *Arriving* offers genuine insights into these communities, opening opportunities to observe and comprehend the commonalities of their experiences. Embedded audiovisual multimedia facilitated authentic representations of their stories and experiences to be shared. The development of a digital, interactive storybook provided a platform for these narratives to be accessible to a broader audience, granting greater opportunities for discourse and understanding surrounding the topic themes. The impact of the project on local and foreign communities highlights the potential applicability of the *Arriving* project and its promotion of two-way integration projects in different contexts of diversity internationally.

Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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