



## D5.9 - Policy Paper 4

# Recommendations on policies to promote co-creation of migration heritage between cultural institutions and local communities

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### Summary

Based on the experiences and perceptions of selected stakeholders, this policy paper draws policy-relevant recommendations about the co-creational process of a shared migration heritage via digital storytelling tools. The interpersonal connections and networks emerging from co-creating narratives are a core motivator for cultural institutions and communities to engage in digital storytelling. Policies should be created to support the continuous co-creation of digital heritage of migration, and to provide long-term knowledge transfer on digital cultural heritage for social cohesion.

The project has connected cultural institutions, local citizens, and refugees and migrants to collaboratively reinterpret shared experiences of forced migration from the past and present. The process of co-creation, which defined all the phases in the SO-CLOSE project, was aided by the development of digital storytelling tools that easily allow cultural institutions and local communities to co-create digital stories and share them with the appropriate audiences. These re-negotiations of a shared identity and memory put migrants as dynamic agents in the centre of the production of a common cultural heritage, fostering understanding and recognition across the communities.

## 1. Introduction and background

The project SO-CLOSE is based on this hypothesis: Co-creating a shared heritage of migration between local communities and newly arrived forced migrants and refugees fosters mutual understanding, connection, and cohesion. Heritage, in this sense, refers to a social communicative action of remembering the past to make sense of the present and creating shared meanings and identities.

Digital solutions to drive communicative actions are not a new development per se. Over the past decades, a visible shift has taken place towards integrating digital platforms in cultural spheres, turning museums and other heritage institutions into places for active participation and agency. More and more visitors expect to contribute to the production of exhibitions as “prosumers”, rather than be consumers of a final product. This shift does not only serve the entertainment factor



for end-users, but also increases the focus on “history from below”, making the representation of cultures and experiences a joint effort with those who experienced migration as an integral part of the curation process.

While digital tools offer a solution to widely promote and share co-created narratives and inform distant audiences, the very act of creating the narratives is less contingent on the digital and more about creating connections and interpersonal exchange.

This policy paper discusses the effects of digital storytelling tools as means to co-create cultural heritage of forced migration and how the effects might translate into long-term sustainable use. It is based on the analysis of tool implementation in four cases (SO-CLOSE cultural institutions: VDA, GFR, MUME, MONTE) and the evaluation results in which both project contributors and end users were asked to reflect on the initial hypothesis.

The paper is divided into three parts: (I) an overview of the key findings and political implications; (II) a set of recommendations based on the findings; and (III) a concluding section.

## 2. Key findings and socio-political implications

The findings of this paper are based on the review of academic literature, the toolbox implementation analysis during the SO-CLOSE Open Day trials (D4.2) and the evaluation of the process of co-creation and the tools (D4.4). Some key topics include digitalization, co-creation, and cultural heritage of migration.

### 2.1. Digital storytelling as a tool for social cohesion

Throughout the process of co-creating heritage via digital storytelling tools (a storymap, a web documentary and a virtual exhibition), it has become apparent that one of the main motivations of cultural institutions to use the tools was the possibility of creating new connections with local communities and stakeholders. Similar findings concern the refugees and migrants who contributed to the co-creation process. They wanted to collaborate with the SO-CLOSE cultural institutions out of their desire to connect with local communities, learn about the local history and share their own stories. The digital narrative was a means to connect and create a common product, but not the main driver that brought the contributors together. In that sense, the opportunity to come together, exchange understandings, and find oneself reflected in the other’s experiences was of primary importance. The digital aspect was an enabler or a mediator for the interpersonal dialogue during the co-creation process.

Outside the content-making process, the digital story connects end users (i.e., visitors of the cultural institution, schoolchildren interacting with the tools in the classroom, etc.) with the stories shared by local communities together with the refugees and migrants. It offers information and perspectives to the end users and invites them to reflect on their own experiences. As educational tools, they teach about past and present migrations and connect these narratives as a shared experience. Evaluation results confirm that the digital stories foster the idea of shared experiences and commonalities between local citizens and refugees and migrants. End users report better understanding of refugee and

migrant experiences after using the tools, and even see connections with their own history and identity, as reported in deliverable D4.4, “Trial Evaluation Reports”.

The curators of the digital tools content are able to customize their design to aim at one of three alternatives: 1) to use the tools as stand-alone digital narratives, where end users interact with the content on their own; 2) to embed the digital elements into physical exhibition spaces as a complement to offline activities; and 3) to give primacy to the guided presentation of a curator, with the digital content being explained and problematized in direct connection with in-person guided tours.

These formats affect the nature of the interaction with the digital tools. In events in which audiences got to engage with the tools side by side with the creators and contributors, immediate conversations further fostered the understanding and continued the shared meaning-making. In cases where audiences engaged with the tools on their own, with no further guidance, commentary or opportunity for conversation with the creators, the focus was more on the aesthetic design and images, as well as on the contextual information provided in addition to the stories themselves.

These observations lead to the next point of continuous co-creation.

## 2.2 Continuous co-creation

Since the co-creation process was the most rewarding element, all cultural institutions participating in SO-CLOSE said they will continue using the tools in the future. In surveys aimed at each of the three storytelling alternatives, over two thirds replied that they will do so, in

particular for the virtual exhibition. Using the tools implies both retaining the content created during the years of the project and the generation of new narratives, based on new interactions between local communities and forcefully displaced people.

One of the powerful impacts of the content generation process and of the open-day events was the possibility to transfer the knowledge of one cultural institution to another. During the project, this was captured through the “lessons learned” process, in which each organizer of the open day presented the next institution with a list of things that worked well and things that were challenging in the organization of the events. After the project, these lessons were included in the “How-To Manual”, a handbook for future creators of content for the tools developed in SO-CLOSE. This transfer learning is crucial and gives rise to continuous refinements and improvements.

## 2.3 Narratives beyond forced migration

SO-CLOSE has focused on forced migration as the shared experience between local communities and recent refugees and migrants. Our toolkit offers an accessible way to design digital interactivity that was tested with relevant stakeholders. One advantage of our tools is that they can act as “shells” for a variety of content, not restricted to forced migration. The sustainability of our project is connected to the flexible potential use of our toolkit.

In fact, the tools, accompanied by the technical and how-to manuals, can be used by curators of exhibitions, events and tours that have the aim to achieve social cohesion. Since social cohesion is about building bridges to marginalized

communities, our tools can be a useful intermediary for bringing together ethnic and religious minorities, or rural and urban communities. We facilitate this by providing instructions on the actual process of co-creation and curation, not only on how to design the digital content itself.

### 3. Voices from the field: policy recommendations

#### 3.1 Foster direct interactions between local society and migrant and refugee communities

While digital platforms offer many benefits iterated in previous publications, they are not a solution but a tool to foster social cohesion.

- Create opportunities for direct exchange in the form of events (workshops, seminars, presentations, summer schools, etc.) between local communities including refugees and migrants.
- Utilize digital platforms as aids but not as substitutes for direct interaction.
- Foster environments for contributors as dynamic agents: safe spaces for local communities including refugees and migrants to share, re-negotiate, and develop common identities.
- Provide training, education, and mentorship programs to equip civil society actors with the skills and knowledge necessary to reap the full potential of network activities and integrating digital platforms into their existing workflows.

#### 3.2 Develop sustainable strategies for continuous co-creation of a heritage of migration

To successfully use digital platforms as tools to foster social cohesion, cultural institutions need to have the means to implement the tools in a sustainable manner.

- Support the long-term integration of contributors such as refugees and migrants who created the stories by allowing them to participate into the institution's work force.
- Promote and support the development of long-term audience engagement strategies including direct exchange between contributors and audiences.
- Encourage network activities and personal interactions through the provision of funding, resources, and infrastructure to enable civil society actors to use digital tools in conjunction with traditional methods of communication and exchange.
- Invest in research and development programs to explore the potential of such long-term activities and facilitate the development of innovative and sustainable solutions to foster exchange and collaboration between civil society actors.

#### 3.3 Provide opportunities for long-term knowledge transfer in the domain of digital cultural heritage for social cohesion

The Horizon Framework Programmes have generated an impressive array of digital tools, including the ones from SO-CLOSE. To make sure that this knowledge is transferred to the societies that will most benefit from it, we suggest that the European Union

- Creates a freely accessible database of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe digital tools for cultural heritage that would encourage the transfer of knowledge from one project to another and would increase

the reach and sustainability of EU-funded research in this domain. New projects would be able to access this database already in the pre-award phase.

- Open calls for research and innovation programs (or others such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values) to specifically monitor and categorize the re-use of the results of the H2020 and Horizon Europe projects (e.g. an Observatory of digital tools for cultural heritage).
- Provide incentives to organizations that are committed to co-creating digital cultural heritage for social cohesion. This could include grants, or other forms of financial support, as well as forms of symbolic recognition.

## 4. Conclusion

To sum up, the experience of SO-CLOSE suggests that the combination of direct interaction between stakeholders, and the support given by digital tools, is a great way forward for promoting social cohesion. The emphasis on digitalization should be complemented by network activities and personal interactions.

SO-CLOSE also suggests that the European Union decision-makers should consider that long-term effects are more important than immediately

measurable outcomes. The promotion of the social inclusion of migrants through the development of a common cultural heritage with the receiving communities in Europe must focus on the long-term strategies for social inclusion and prioritize initiatives that will have a lasting, meaningful impact on both migrants and the receiving communities. These initiatives can be facilitated by creating infrastructures and additional research programs to support long-term social cohesion.

Authors:

Lili Nottrott and Anamaria Dutceac Segesten

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Partners:

