



PERCEPTIONS



Mobile exhibition:
co-creating migration narratives
& partnership building



Collaborative partners

Swansea City of Sanctuary, Swansea Museum, Glyn Vivian Art Gallery, The National Waterfront Museum



Location

Swansea Museum, Glyn Vivian Art Gallery, The National Waterfront Museum



Purpose/Aim

The purpose of this activity is to raise awareness about migrant experiences and perceptions of Europe, drawing on the findings from the PERCEPTIONS interviews. The exhibition reflects on migrants' experiences of arrival to Wales and the ways in which places of hospitality are negotiated and re-created in the city of Swansea. In collaboration with the City of Sanctuary, an NGO that is a part of the UK-wide Sanctuary network promoting culture of hospitality and welcome, the exhibition uses art-based approaches and storytelling to reflect on migration and social change. In order to stimulate conversations between the refugees and local residents, it raises questions about reciprocity, the ethics of welcome and actual practical principles of hospitality. Due to its mobile character, it opens up different spaces of engagement with migrant' stories and enables different audiences in different parts of Swansea to learn about migration practices, particularly focusing on asylum-seekers and refugees.



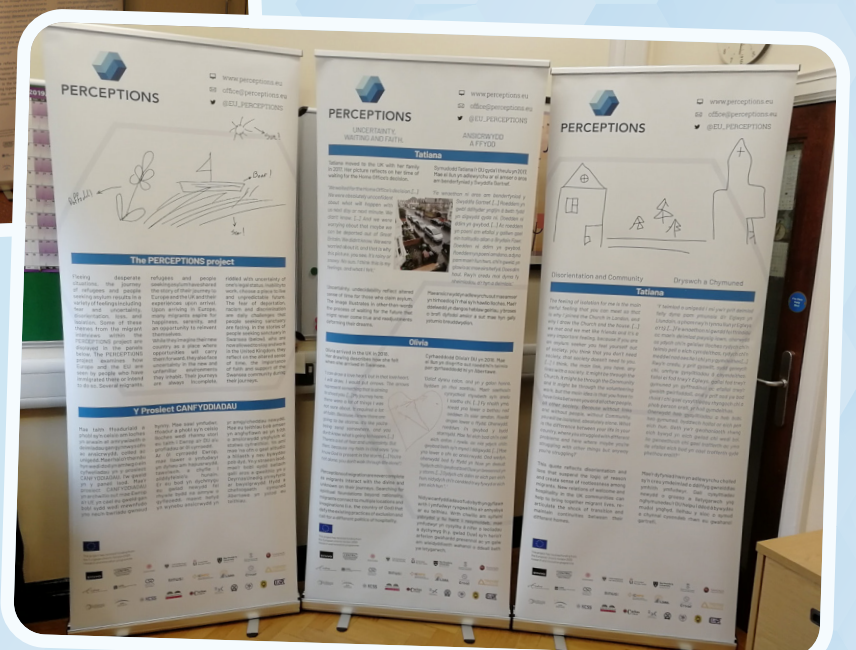
Audience

The audience involves the general public attending different arts venues across Swansea.



Description of the Activity

The activity involves creation of the exhibition panels and colourful posters telling stories of people seeking refuge in Wales. The posters include anonymised quotes from migrants and hand-drawn images they created to illustrate their stories. It forms part of the 10th anniversary of the Swansea City of Sanctuary, which celebrates the contributions and creativity refugees and asylum seekers, as well as showcases through the range of interactive activities the work of community partners and organisations that support migrants in Swansea.





Techniques

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Techniques/Format of Activity

Rather than freezing narratives of mobility, this activity presents migration as contemporary and shifting phenomena by physically moving exhibits and panels across different art venues across Swansea. It offers a dialogic engagement with migration narratives by inviting migrants and locals to “populate” the exhibition in each different venue with temporary donations of objects (travel documents, photographs, family heirlooms passed from one generation to another) and autobiographical statements. In so doing, the exhibition co-produces migration narratives and takes them away from the domain of the professionals (curators), broadening migration PERCEPTIONS both in temporal and material terms.

This activity was implemented in 3 different stages:

- 1. Creation of mobile printed panels**, which include migrant stories and drawings of their perceptions of their journeys and places they traversed. Exhibition provided information about migrant-focused charities in Swansea and support that refugees and asylum-seekers can get.
- 2. Organisation of the joint exhibition and accompanying community events**, which bring life to the stories and invite different neighbourhoods to respond to migration narratives. Joint activities (such as lantern parade, migrant tour of the city) help to highlight commonalities between migrants and the locals and bring our migrant stories into public spaces.
- 3. Use of exhibition panels**, images and stories as discussion prompts for community events, in order to continue conversations about hospitality and welcome in Swansea. These events will involve “Sanctuary speakers”, who sought sanctuary themselves, and who can perform, negotiate and transform migration narratives and challenge the misconceptions about the migration practices.



Outcomes

This activity produced a collection of images and stories produced by migrants to Swansea/Wales that reflect the key themes in the PERCEPTIONS project (disorientation, loss, uncertainty, hope, faith and community). These images and stories have been used to create portable exhibition panels which will be used to share key findings of the PERCEPTIONS project and continue the conversation on migration, community and hospitality in a variety of spaces and events in the future.



Key Concepts

Disorientation, Loss and Uncertainty – The stories and images produced by refugees and asylum seekers on the panels clearly communicate feelings of **disorientation, loss and uncertainty** which are ever-present in their everyday lives in Swansea. The drawings and images exceed the limitations of language and reach beyond the rational to represent their complex circumstances. The uncertainty of migrants' legal status and incompleteness of their journey prevents them from establishing roots in the city. Asylum seekers are unable to work, choose a place to live and are highly vulnerable to discrimination and deportation.

Faith, Community and Hope – The activity also reveals and highlights alternative accounts, countering the dominant dehumanising narratives surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The stories and images highlight how **faith** helps refugees and asylum seekers in the UK endure their highly disorientating and uncertain circumstances. **Faith** provides a familiarity and enables migrants to orientate themselves in a strange, new environment. Faith also assists migrants in finding an accepting and supportive **community**. These communities are essential for information sharing, financial and emotional support. They provide **hope** and enable migrants to imagine a future in Europe. However, the focus on **faith** also serves to highlight that perceptions of migration are never complete as migrants interact with the divine and unknown on their journeys. Searching for spiritual foundations beyond rationality, migrants connect to multiple locations and imaginations (i.e. the country of God) that defy the existing practices of exclusion and call for a different politics of hospitality.



Impact

Exhibitions are a highly accessible format of research output as they combine objects, narratives, images reflecting different voices and perspectives. Therefore, this activity has the potential to appeal to different audiences and deliver whole community impact. As the curation of the exhibition invited migrants and locals to "populate" the spaces with temporary donations and statements, the act of collaboration **brought diverse communities together** through co-production and ownership of the events. The events brought together a range of voices, highlighting the varied and multiple experiences of migrations to the EU. However, the act of curating the exhibitions highlighted the many commonalities between migrants and locals, promoting wider community cohesion.

The panels themselves **make the narratives of migrants highly visible and accessible**. The panels produce and communicate a strong counter narrative, revealing the agency and human-ness of refugees and asylum seekers. The text and images have been re-scaled and placed centre-stage of the panels, drawing the attention of on-lookers directly onto the stories of the migrants. The stories and images produced by the migrant participants have been transformed to make a strong, accessible narrative essential to effectively communicate the findings of the PERCEPTIONS project.

The panels will also be moved between spaces and events, potentially interrupting, and disrupting ongoing, taken-for-granted migration narratives evident in existing urban and rural settings. In this context, the panels not only inform the viewer of the highly complex circumstances of migrants but also prompt the audience to question these seemingly reliable narratives. Therefore, through bringing migrant stories to the heart of different communities across South Wales, the panels and exhibitions **support social education and community cohesion**.

The exhibition and panels also serve as evidence of the wider positive effects of collective practices of welcome and hospitality. The drawings and stories displayed on the panels and the events at which they were displayed, grasp the intangible, complex emotions involved in migration, give meaning and clearly communicate them to diverse audiences.



PERCEPTIONS



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