



PERCEPTIONS



Re-imagining stories:
Animation Workshop



Location

Swansea Science Festival, The National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
(23 October 2021)



Audience

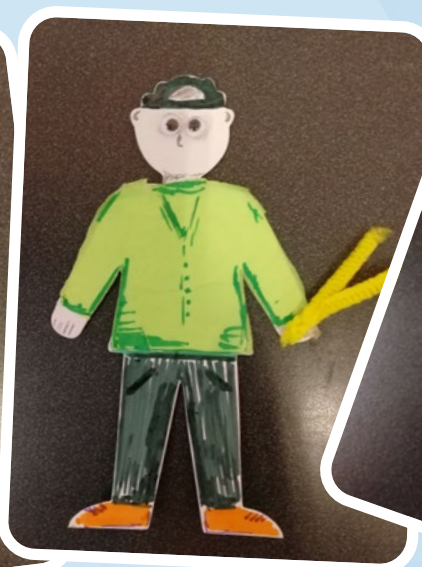
This activity involves several participants: recent migrants to Swansea, children (8+) and general public. Once the outputs of this activity are shared online, they will also be available to other users, including first line practitioners, CSOs and migrant organisations.





Purpose/Aim

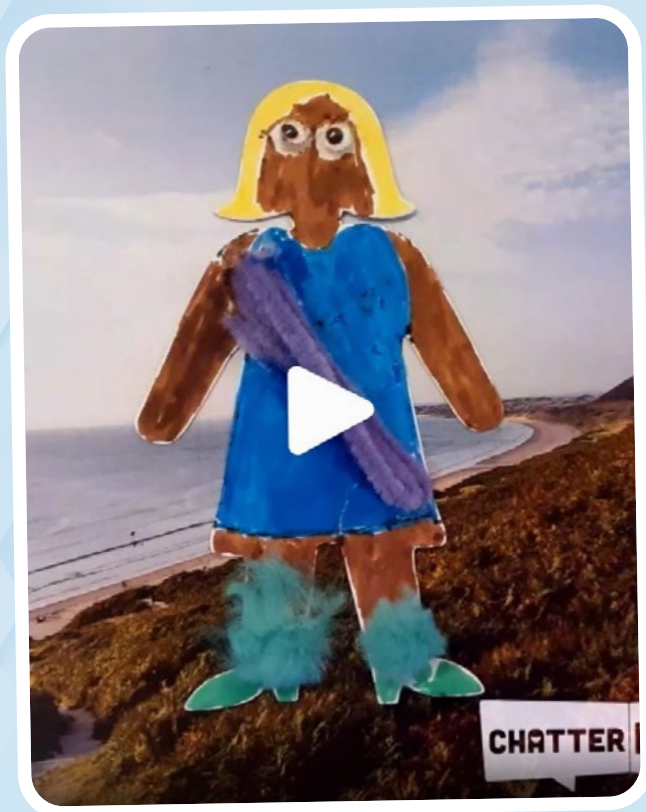
The aim is to re-imagine the narratives and perceptions of Europe created by migrants, bringing together shifting narrative voices, migrants' points of view, responses from broader audience and geographical frames of reference. It reshapes public opinions about migration. This interactive activity develops new ways of thinking about migrant journeys to avoid reductive interpretations used by policy-makers and front line practitioners that often oversimplify both fictional worlds of migration and lived experiences. It helps the public learn to be affected by the experiences of migrants in PERCEPTIONS project, develop collective articulations and prompts them to tell their own stories of invisibility, lostness and confusion.





Description of the Activity

The activity centres around digital storytelling and animation around the key themes emerging from the migrant interviews in the PERCEPTIONS project. It includes image making, creation of short stories, crafting of migrant avatars, creative writing and re-imagining of migration narratives, audio recording of narrated text and short video recordings in the Android app Chatterpix kids.



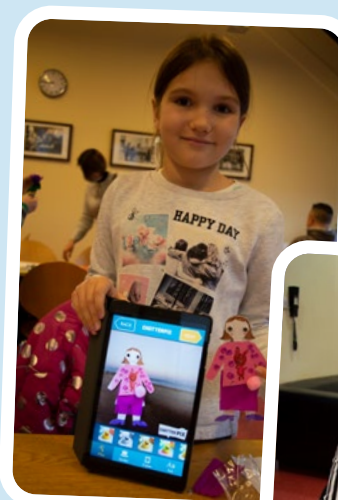


Techniques

The activity progresses in 4 stages

Stage 1: Collection of images for Swansea (geographical setting). During this stage, an online image competition was organised to encourage migrants share images of the specific geographical setting (Swansea as the place where migrants live) and prompt reflections on that setting. We asked migrants to share images that are important and meaningful for them in connection with the following findings, which emerged from earlier migrant interviews during the PERCEPTIONS project. These themes included: faith, (In)visibility, Disorientation, Loss, and Hope. The participants were asked to provide an image reflecting one of these themes, explain why it was chosen (its importance) and provide a postcode so that this image can be attached to a specific location.

Stage 2: Making of migrant figurines/avatars. We organised workshops involving about 30 school children as a part of Swansea Science festival, focusing on the participatory craft creation of migrant figurines. The children decorated (with craft materials) the cut-out people's figures to produce their vision of a migrant, drawing on the images of migrants from the [Migration Keepsakes exhibition](#) in the London's Migration museum. We discussed with participants, the challenges of visually representing complex and emotionally charged topics such as invisibility and hope, which we collected during stage 1. Once the children have completed the person/avatar of the migrant (no mouth), they placed their figurine on top of the photo background chosen (image of Swansea from Stage 1) and took a photo.



Description of the Activity

Stage 3: Storytelling, creative response. During this stage of the workshop, children were prompted to respond to the stories shared with us by the migrants as a part of the PERCEPTIONS project. We used the following prompts (linked to the PERCEPTIONS project themes) to co-produce stories with the children and re-imagine migration:

1. Have you ever felt invisible or being ignored?
2. Have you ever been lost and what happened to you?
3. Have you ever been in a place where people couldn't understand what you were saying, or you didn't understand them?
4. What are the things that make you feel at home?

Using storytelling and exploring meaning through images accompanying the spoken word, the workshop participants collaboratively produced narratives in response to migrant stories. The children wrote a short text which allowed for creative self-expression and dialogue around the important migration-related issues.

Stage 4: Combining text and images, video recording. During this stage, participants combined images, spoken word with creative writing, recorded voice with short video recordings. The children literally made their decorated migrant avatars/figurines speak by reading their script and recording it (in a short fragment, limited only to 30 seconds) on the free app Chatterpix kids. During this process, the participants negotiated the issues of migrant and self-representations, image making and storytelling, thus actively re-inventing the narratives of migration, Europe central to the PERCEPTIONS project and situating them in relation to their lived experiences.





Key Concepts

Disorientation – This finding was challenged during this activity. Through the stories told by migrants the children were able to empathise with the many **losses** and **uncertainties** facing migrants in Swansea. They were also able to identify aspects of everyday life which could be disorientating for migrants, such as a different language, different food and different weather. However, the photography and mapping exercise orientated and placed migrants within the city of Swansea. The photographs taken by migrants provided familiar sights for the children, locating migrants in Swansea and therefore making migration tangible and relatable.

(In)visibility – During the creative writing section of the workshop, the children were asked if they had ever felt invisible or being ignored? Through this simple question the children were able to identify everyday examples from their own experiences, enabling them to empathise with the stories shared by migrants. However, this activity also challenges the narrative of invisibility by making migrants and their stories highly visible, producing valuable teaching resources to be shared with the wider community.

Faith – Images of religious buildings were submitted by migrants as important sites of **Community** and **Hope** in Swansea. For them, these places provided familiarity and were key to orientating themselves in a new environment. These places were also essential for building social networks which are key for information sharing, emotional and financial support. These thoughts were also understood and echoed by the children through their stories and animations.



Outcomes

Outcomes of this activity included a collection of images produced by migrants to Swansea/Wales that reflect the key themes in the PERCEPTIONS project (faith, (In) visibility, Disorientation, Loss, and Hope). These images are attached to a specific geographic location so that migrant experiences are emplaced in specific infrastructural and institutional contexts. Beyond this, the activity produced a series of short videos that evoked alternative perceptions of migrants, migration and Europe, which can be shared in accessible formats (for example, in the virtual map of Swansea).

Impact



This activity delivered whole community impact through bringing together children and migrants from a broad range of economic, social and cultural backgrounds; people who may never have otherwise encountered each other. Together the children enjoyed the creativity of the activity; the exploration, experimentation and making-together of materials, which can be used as community educational resources, reshaping public opinions about migration.

This highly experimental, participatory approach positioned previously unheard voices at the centre of this activity. The migrants and children were able to take full ownership of their input to the project and steer the research to represent their experiences. This approach therefore challenges existing narratives by avoiding reductive interpretations used by policy makers. This approach makes the previously invisible highly visible and orientates the disorientated, highlighting the complex everyday lives of migrants in Swansea.

This activity provided a unique opportunity for children to creatively experiment with animation software, imparting new, creative skills. Furthermore, as the animation was set in the very familiar location of Swansea, the stories were highly relatable for the children. In the discussions and reflections on the themes of migration and community and the many challenges for migrants, the children expressed an understanding and open-mindedness towards migration.

As well as showing the perceptions of migration held by young people, the figurines, stories and films also serve as evidence of the knowledge and understanding of migration gained through the creative activity. The outcomes demonstrate a change in attitudes and values, exhibiting empathy and an increased capacity for tolerance towards migrants from all backgrounds. Therefore, this approach provides an interdisciplinary, interactive toolkit which reveals alternative perceptions which challenge dominant narratives and produces educational resources for further conversations on migration in the wider community.



PERCEPTIONS



This project has received funding from the European Union's H2020 Research & Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No 833870.

