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IO1.A2: Collection of Good Practices

Safe space as the backbone of digital storytelling

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SAFE SPACES FOR LEARNING

SAFE

Safe space as the backbone of digital storytelling

A short presentation of the project:

During a digital storytelling workshop, each participant discusses what they would like their story to be about and why, how much of their personal information – if any – they would like to divulge. Personal information can be particularly sensitive for certain participants. In some cases, participants sign up for the class without their closest family members knowing about it, e.g. telling them they signed up for a language class. Importantly, the space in which learners meet to discuss their stories and to create them is a safe one, boundaries are set at the beginning and understood.

An interesting example is that of a project on domestic violence, during which women were invited to share their traumatic experiences in the form of a video. During the entire process, a psychologist was present to support learners; it was also important that all participants and trainers were female.

While working on a story, long discussions took place over what the learner could say or present in their storytelling project without putting themselves in danger. It ended up being a negotiation process between what was important for the learner to share, and what could be done to avoid overexposure.

The entire process – from deciding on the topic of the story, to the selection of images and putting them together, including subtitles or a voiceover – usually takes around five days. It is important that the trajectory is finished off with a screening, but safety can also play a factor here: some learners might not want to have their personal story screened in front of other people.

Learners also agree early on to security measures on the video that will be uploaded: each of them can decide whether it will be accessed only by the learner, with a password, or open to everyone.

Training the trainers is key in making sure that they are not only knowledgeable about digital storytelling as a technique, but also as an interpersonal journey. Importantly, many of the trainers at MAKS are former learners and often come from the same neighbourhood as the learners, creating a feeling of understanding and solidarity.

A short presentation of the organization / association:

One of the main activities of MAKS is digital storytelling, starting from the idea that everyone has a story to tell and should be able to get it heard. Most of the work of MAKS is project-based, often targeting a particular community in Brussels, Belgium, e.g. refugees, job-seekers, people who suffered traumatic experiences. Creating a safe

space is all the more important in such cases. It helps that MAKS is primarily a community-based organisation, established for years in neighbourhoods whose populations often feel they are sidetracked in the economy or the political discourse.

Aspects that make this practice a good example of safe learning space:

Boundaries are clearly established, psychological support is available in cases where it is especially needed, for example when the aim of creating a video is to work over a trauma. Learners often come from homogenous groups and share similar experiences. Trainers are regularly trained to approach the process with the sensitivity that is required in the process.

It is important to point out that while a screening of the finished videos is often a moment of celebration, it does not always need to be the case. One person that EAEA spoke to about digital storytelling (from an organisation other than MAKS) admitted that some experiences discussed during the workshop prove to be so traumatic for the group that a collective decision is taken not to see the result.

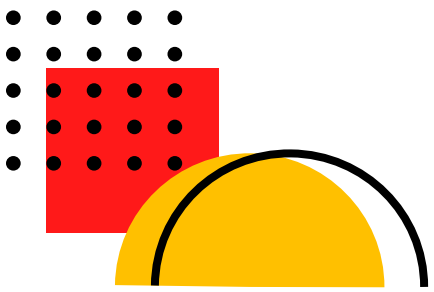
Exploring the cross-border transferability:

Digital storytelling is already used in many different countries and contexts, it has also been extensively discussed as a method to address trauma.

Contacts and links for further reading:

EAEA interview with a representative of MAKS:
https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/getting-your-story-heard-empowering- vulnerable-adults-through-digital-storytelling

Example of a video created by a participant of the project on domesticviolence:
https://vimeo.com/141408491

MAKS vimeo channel: https://vimeo.com/maksvzw

MAKS website: https://maksvzw.org/en/