Project outputs | Translocal Lives

Refugee settlement, place-making and digital technologies in the cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

*During the project, **11 films were co-produced with the participants of the Digital Place-makers program**: a filmmaking course that rely on Participatory Video as the main methodology to train participants in basic editing and story-telling. Throughout the films, participants explore the topic of place-making and belonging in the Dutch society (see figure 1).*

Figure 1: Posters of the 11 films and the documentary (bottom right) co-created with participants.

Films

Concretely, four themes were identified in the films:

(1) *Challenges and resilience:* in this theme the films show a stark reality of the refugee journey emphasizing the challenges of leaving home and stepping out into the unknown. The participants, however, also stress their resilience in overcoming the various obstacles they face. The films 'Sunny Days are Coming', 'Next Chapter', and 'Life is Changeable' are examples.

(2) *Motivation and opportunities:* in this theme, the narrative focuses on the opportunities that participants identify upon arrival in the Netherlands and the relevance of different actors, from family and friends to organizations and institutions for their place-making process. The main argument is the search for the skills that help them to recognize themselves as valuable individuals in the new society. The films 'You Can', 'Just Try', 'Bridge Over', and 'How to Grow a Healthier and Happy Garden' are some examples of this theme.

(3) *Memories and connection to home:* in this theme, participants explore questions about how to connect with their country of origin, their culture, and their family left behind. The film 'Homeland' questions if and how to replace a home left

behind, while the film 'Life' explores how a family recipe can reconnect you to childhood memories.

(4) *Belonging and relation to the city:* in this final theme, participants use metaphors to narrate the tensions in the relationship between their identity as refugees and their sense of belonging to the city. In tandem, the films account for some strategies that they develop to better connect with the host society and what questions this process brings about. 'My Friends' and 'Stranded Rendez-vous' are two examples in this theme.

The films were shared during a Screening Night event organized at KINO Rotterdam on February 26th (see figure 2). More than 50 assistants were present, between friends and family of the participants, researchers, and the local community. The films and documentary are also available to watch online through the website of the project: www.translocallives.com/films

Figure 2: Closing of the Screening Night event for the dissemination of the films.

Field-guide to conduct a Participatory Video project with hands-on activities

As an outcome of the *Digital Place-makers* program, we designed a **field guide on Participatory Video methodologies with practical activities** for anyone wishing to conduct similar projects in the context of digital technologies.

Specifically, this field guide contains: a) a general explanation of what was done during each of the 7 sessions of the program; b) step-by-step instructions on how to implement the most relevant activities related to Participatory Video that we used during the workshops; c) reflections on each of the sessions in relation to the participatory methodologies and ethical considerations emphasizing the challenges and opportunities

that we identified; d) A list of materials/tools needed to conduct the workshops and activities.

In this way, we hope that other researchers, stakeholders, and refugee communities who want to implement Participatory Video can find useful and accessible tools that will allow them to put this creative methodology into practice.

The field guide can be downloaded from our website
https://www.translocallives.com/resources

Methodological paper (under review) on Participatory Video in refugee-focused research derived from our experience in the Digital Place-makers program

In this paper we critically reflect on the implementation of Participatory Video to explore the perspectives of 14 refugee participants regarding their place-making strategies in the Netherlands. Participatory Video has been strongly criticized for its attendance to researchers' output requirements during the production process. We address this issue by focusing on our role as facilitators in acquiring editing skills and capacities that allowed participants to produce their films as autonomously as possible. In doing so, we found that engaging in editing techniques during Participatory Video had multiple benefits for the refugees. We observed that:

(a) Engaging in editing provided the opportunity to learn skills and competences that were valued by the participants beyond the duration of the project. This allowed us to respond to crucial issues of research fatigue.
(b) The program enabled a pathway for regaining the confidence that many newcomers have lost due to the traumas associated with the loss of place, identity, or culture. The majority of participants perceived the impact that learning digital skills and engaging in creative exercises had on their individual well-being.
(c) Developing autonomy over the narrative through the control of editing choices was crucial for many participants to feel owners of their films, a core tenet in the co-production of knowledge approach. In turn, this led them to adopt a sense of responsibility to shed light on matters of social injustice in their communities.

We conclude the article with a discussion on how knowledge co-production in refugee research must question labels of vulnerability that prevent participants from enjoying authorship of their productions.

Conceptual paper (under review) on Digital Aspirational Place-making derived from in-depth interviews with 15 participants

This article proposes the concept of *Aspirational Place-Making* to better understand the role of digital technologies in the migratory experiences of refugee participants interviewed in the Translocal Lives project. *Aspirational place-making* refers to refugees' agency in negotiations of possible futures and aspirational places in the face of structural opportunities and challenges of integration within the host community. In this article, we argue that refugees have turned to digital practices to conceive these aspirational places and create their own pathways to belong. Three themes related to digital aspirational place-making practices among refugees include:

- Digital learning and self-development

When refugee migrants are faced by social boundaries, like the implemented policies at their municipalities or the difficulties of getting access to formal learning, they tend to use social media for self-development. They know that procrastinating or delaying a goal until it can be achieved by accredited channels will take a lot of time and effort, and they will be affected by the cultural changes taking place in the host community. For instance, a graphic designer will be underestimated by their municipal policies which urge people to work in certain sectors, like logistics, medical care, catering industry and cleaning. This is very demotivating and frustrating for the migrants, in particular the highly educated who look forward to changing their social status and their economic situation. Hence, social media platforms help refugee migrants to avoid the direct contact with the governmental process that hinders their dreams and add more difficulties and hardships.

- Digital social aspirations and connectedness

Social aspiration is a two-way approach which refugees use to keep themselves motivated and encourage others to overcome the difficulties they faced one day during their refuge journey. Sharing their own experience with their peers will help them feel that they contribute to building their society and keep them connected to their community as humans who care and as refugees who have a common case on the other hand. When refugees feel worthless because they are not connected to the host community or unable to get access to the labor market, they build their online relationships based on their mother language, a shared migration background and their ability of offering social support. Thus, this can be done through social media platforms which are not limited to a place, a city or an organization.

- Digital social participation as form of a self-motivation (well-being)

Digital social participation refers to the practice that some refugees engage with the aim of building an active social presence online to speak with people, motivate others and encourage them when they feel weak and depressed, while in reality these "migrant digital influencers" need this social support. For instance, some participants reported that they build their own brand on social media, as a social influencer, fashion model, modernist individuals, while they do not have an official status that grants them rights in the new place. Digital social participation then emerges as a form of "self-motivation" in the face of their exclusion from the social landscape of the Netherlands.