Digital Storytelling Crosswise - Silences, Places, Identities and Non-Humans

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Introduction

This paper is based on our activities and reflections from two series of digital storytelling workshops organized in south-east of Sweden within the frames of the inter-regional project Delta Garden. The aim of the paper is to bring together these two workshop series from a number of analytical/thematic perspectives in order to identify similarities and differences in the stories created during the workshops. We introduce the article by shortly describing the workshops and stories created and after that move on to discuss experiences made in relation to the described specifics of the contexts were the digital storytelling workshops took place. The varying local contexts and the differences in group settings and different circumstances for the activities which took place, help to define three important dynamics of storytelling; how memories are related to embodied experiences of places; how silence help to shape stories; and how non-human actors intervene in the process of story-making. The practical experiences from the “Local history group” and the “Integration-group” form the basis for a concluding discussion about the need of a more adaptive approach to the Seven Elements of Storytelling (Lambert, 2010) as a way of structuring stories. We also emphasise the importance of making room for diverse cultural worlds in story-making, hence challenging the hegemony of the grand narratives.

The paper is structured as follows. First we will present the two workshop series by locating and situating them, then we step forward by introducing the analytical perspectives we use in order to unfold the process of story-making and finally we move over to discussion and conclusions.

The Local History Group

It is an early spring evening; it is not yet dark but not quite dark either. The first thing, when we leave the cars, we see is an old building, which we even without any information would have known is a school. Together with our workshop participants, whom we have already met before, we stand outside on the worn out stairs. We have not key and hence no access to the house. Finally Lena comes and she as a trusted person has the key. We step inside the building with colors and materials that are not happy and bright, quite contrary the walls are grey and once again worn out. The atmosphere of the house feels cold and unfriendly. There is no return so we climb up the stairs to the second floor and realize that our workshops will be conducted in a computer room, which in our contemporary Western society would be called an IT-room. Rows of tables and computers stand and wait for us.

We, the authors of this paper, were initially invited to set up a series of workshops on digital storytelling in spring 2009 by a local association working with rural development in a small village in Blekinge in the south-east part of Sweden. Participants of the local
association were interested in learning the method of digital storytelling, and as they told us, in order to describe a closed, since 1950s, school building and their childhood memories in connection to the building. The goal was to produce stories which could be displayed when the school building was to be re-opened for locals and even for visiting tourists during the summertime. A number of stories were created, by the group of five persons, and above these two or three members of the local association participated as intermediaries between the locals and us. Coffee drinking helped when bridging the social and cultural gap between strangers.

Story number 1 - Villagers and postboxes
The only man who took part in the storytelling group chose at first to tell a humoristic story about an eccentric villager called Tingren. This was not a personal story; it was more of an anecdote about a man and his experiences of a new media, when the radio came to the town. His second story was about how post delivering was organised in the village in the beginning of the twentieth century. The storyteller was then a young boy, and went on by describing more personal memories of how the local postboxes played a part as gathering point both for grown-ups and children. In the 1950s the joined community postbox was closed down and replaced by individual postboxes. This story illuminates the change from collective information- and gossip exchange towards a modern society with its individualised information exchange.

Story number 2 - Lemons and scrubbing brushes
A woman in her seventies tells a story about her personal experiences of feeling sick during a bus trip to the local bathing house. The children were supposed to be properly cleaned regularly and this was organised by the school and took place in a public bathing house. The feeling of being forced was reinforced by the actual scrubbing by a hard brush and the taste of lemon which was given to her in order to prevent her from throwing up during the bus ride. The situation is sad; she still can recall the scent of the lemon and the grip of the hard hands of the woman scrubbing her body. But the story told here and now turns out to be a story we can laugh at, even under the laugh we can react on the harshness and hardness towards small children.

Story number 3 - The water mill and paying salaries
The woman in her 60s tells a story when she was a child. Her father was the owner the local mill and every time local farmers came to pay their depths they were offered a cup of coffee and schnapps. In one occasion a man said no to this regular drink. But the storyteller thought that there was something wrong and came with the bottle although she was just very young, shouting with her childish voice: “Wait, wait Uncle David, you forgot this”, waving the bottle of schnapps, which she barely managed to hold with her small hands, hence the grown-ups had a good laugh.

Story number 4 - Remembering the paths of a school trip
Two sisters were in a big city with their school class in the beginning of the 1950s. They remember the narrow streets of a small town they passed through, the breakfast in the in the quilting factory, the fully grown yellow rape fields on the countryside, the old cathedral with its magical clock, the trams passing through the streets in the big city and finally the escalator in the huge department store. They also remember clearly what they were drinking an eating, fruit soup, sandwiches and milk.

The Integration Group

When we enter the building the light is flooding towards us. The ceiling, the floor and the walls - everything is white. The exhibition hall is enormously big and we cannot see where we should enter our workshop room. The kind lady in the reception is not informed about
us but she trusts us and opens the small and almost hidden door. The white moment disappears when the colorful women from Somalia, Vietnam, Thailand and China join us. The workshop room is normally used for textile screen print: we feel the smell of the paints and see the stains. Are there enough chairs for us? And no computers! Once again we need help and call the janitor who has the key and knows the location of the computers.

The second workshop-series was conducted with two groups of immigrant women. They came from different parts of the world, but they were artificially brought together and constructed as a group by the local municipality. Thus they became an entity which needed special integration-activities, and also constructed as the others or Immigrants. The women had to take part in various cultural activities in order to learn Swedish and thus become more integrated in the Swedish society. The workshops in digital storytelling were supposed to be conducted in relation to a sewing circle and the interest for computers among the women varied. However, they were all interested in telling their stories, even if the first group consisting of women from Somalia had none or little experience of writing neither in their own language nor in Swedish. We had to take an alternative approach and adapt the described method of conducting a “story-circle” into a “picture-circle”. However, they managed to write short stories. A common theme seemed to be to process the experienced knowledge of the difficulties of leaving a place physically, when the place still remains an integral part of your identity as a human being.

**Story number 1 - Changing bus numbers**
A common theme for the Somali women was the problem of getting around in the city. They were not lacking the Swedish language; they were also lacking the knowledge of reading and writing their natural language. They were illiterate, and the problem of reading and writing was a real constraint for them and a serious challenge for us.

“I have now been in Sweden for seven months. It was hard in the beginning. I remember once when I was going by bus 215 to my home in the suburb after school finished at 4 pm. We did not know that the bus changed its number. There was a bus with number 204. We waited and waited for bus number 215 but it did not come. I thought of Somalia, the camels and how to travel by bus in Somalia. Then we started to walk the long way back to home. When we came home they asked where we had been for such a long time. Later we found out that the buses from the suburb have number 215 and the buses to the suburb have number 204.”

**Story number 2 - Thoughts about the language**
“I want to talk about the language. Sometimes you do not need a language. Sometimes it is important when it is not possible to express what you want with signs or feelings. I need time to learn. It can take half a year for me to learn things. I was shopping with my husband in Maxi (supermarket). When we were done he left me by the bus stop. A bus came, I jumped on the bus, but how could I ask the driver if this was the bus I was supposed to take? My husband came running and he shouted that I was on the wrong bus. He said: Get off, get off the bus! If I had been able to ask the bus driver if it was the right bus I would not have entered wrong bus. Now I’ve learned which bus to take, what number it has and what time it leaves. Together with my friends in the textile group I have no need for a language. We understand each other without a language.”

One of the women from the other storytelling group described her experiences from living in different cultural worlds, separated by either old traditions or socio-economic boundaries.
Story number 3 - Living apart in two worlds

“My name is Kim Chi. I am 41 years old. I am from Vietnam. I like swimming and sunbathing. I go to church sometimes and pray for the sick and hungry and poor people. When I am standing by the tower I think that we can help each other in Sweden and in Vietnam. Long time ago there was a king in Vietnam who had 100 wives and a golden throne. This is his golden throne. When it is New Year’s Eve in Vietnam we go to the church at 10 in the evening. After that we have dinner with the family and by twelve o’clock we fire off some firework, and have some tea and cookies. At one o’clock in the night we fetch flowers so we can get a happy new year. My husband came to Vietnam from Sweden. My husband likes the Vietnamese food very much. At seven o’clock in the evening we have dinner. The food is very spicy and it is 38 degrees Celsius. I like to work at home, to clean and take care of the flowers and watering the plants. I like Sweden as much as I like home country Vietnam.”

Story number four - the interpreter’s untold story

During the sessions with the Somali women we needed an interpreter in order to make ourselves understood. This was a man and he was very careful about keeping his role as a neutral person, keeping the distance to the activities which took place. Of course he was curious, listening and sometimes even commenting in order to explain cultural differences. During one of the coffee breaks he told us his personal experiences from arriving to a new country and the fatal mistake of using the wrong gesture in wrong occasions. For various reasons he was very reluctant to transform the telling into a digital story.

Analytical perspectives

In the analytical part of the article our standpoint is based the approach of being “modest witnesses” (Haraway, 1997) meaning that we celebrate the partial and situated experiences and by that we also want to emphasise that our reflections and thoughts come from practices we have participated in. Together with us in this story there are several other actors, sometimes though standing more invisibly behind the scene, such as the very facilitation of storytelling by the seven elements, the staging of the room or the scene where stories were created and participative methods. Even in their absence they are necessary entities in and for our own reflections.

Places and identities

The first perspective; is to understand story and storytelling as an activity of organizing situations and life events by creating a Memory or Memories. Through the Memory/Memories the storyteller also creates her/his own identity related to experienced and embodied places.

To locate in and contact digital stories to specific geographic places has been and still is one of the central and important themes and threads within the family of digital storytelling. We recognize for example the widely known project “Capture Wales” (Meadows and Kidd, 2009). To belong somewhere, to have a home is however not just a fact, such as a place of birth or a street address, but also a process of meaning making where the embodied experiences of places can offer a basis for reflection and construction of one’s own identity. Who I am my identity, is hence not a fixed and singular category but can be understood as an ongoing identity making process - becoming.

Stories which not solely and mainly tell about geographic places as such, as for example descriptions in tourist guides, but foremost about a storyteller’s location, position in and relation to places are often told through specific personal memories connected to these places. However memories, in a similar way as geographical places, are never just a fact, like an entry in an encyclopedia, but memories get also constructed and shaped in the
process of storytelling and stories. (See e.g. Hydén, 2007). Some aspects of people’s lives are selected, organized and presented as more meaningful, important and interesting than others. In this way the process of meaning making in and through some place-specific stories provides two angels to understand an identity construction. The storyteller with her/his experiences connected and related to the place told in the story becomes a person with an identity in connection to that specific place but as well, in a similar way, the place in the specific story also gets its own specific identity. Neither the identities of the humans acting in the storytelling or the geographic place/s acting in the stories are pre-given but shaped during the storytelling process reminding us that the identities are not stable but fluid depending on the choices of the story teller. (More about stability and fluidity see e.g. Law and Mol, 2000).

When talking and thinking about places we also talk about belonging somewhere, to have a home. In Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s, a feminist scholar, analytical weave the idea of home needs two other components, namely identity and community, if we want to use it as a frame or scene to discuss, analyse and understand our belongings and beings in places. (Mohanty, 2006, p. 103). By locating ourselves somewhere we understand and see ourselves as members included in neighborhoods or quite contrary seeing and feeling, both emotionally and physically, ourselves as strangers, visitors, not belonging to the place where we live in and stay at, either voluntarily by our own choice or when our staying there is caused by and based on other kinds of circumstances and prerequisites. The feeling being at home, having a home is, according Mohanty, about safe and familiar demarcations. In a contrary a feeling “not being at home” means not only a private and a personal emotion but also that some histories get excluded. She emphasises hence that even the experiences of places are individual and personal they are not historic but getting always contextualized in and linked to broader and wider geographic and political histories. (Mohanty, 2006, p. 108, 110).

Bringing together the stories created in the local history workshop and the integration group workshop and mirroring the stories created, the idea of place, home and belonging turns out to be a central theme. In the local history group the storytellers have their roots in the village and the school acting in the stories. The stories about and from the village are happy and harmonious childhood stories with a huge portion on humour and laugh. The sun seems to shine every day and there are no worries and problems. The community, sisters and parents are supportive and friendly. Only one story created during this workshop is a painful story from the story teller’s childhood where the grown ups’ acting is about power upon children. Following Mohanty’s proposal the local history group has their home and belonging in the village; the village gets an identity of a happy, friendly and harmonious place for children to grow up, at least for 50-70 years ago. The local history stories are stories of people of belonging and being at home.

Stories created by the second group, the integration group, are happy and harmonious when they are located in their home countries. Photos, the stories are based on, show colorful milieus, gatherings of friends and festivals, such as the New Year. The storytellers are at home, identified as a safe and friendly place. But when the storytellers and stories move on to a new place, to a south-Sweden small town, the stories changes their character. The embodied experiences tell now about unfriendliness and exclusion: the town is not a friendly home and the story tellers’ identities become identities of strangers in a place where the border is drawn between the knowledgeable members of the community and people not being able to read and understand the signs in the town. The stable identities are left behind and the new identities are painfully unstable.

The village and the town, both being part of the same municipality, get shaped as places which house both caring and loving inclusions but at the same time also everyday
exclusions causing alienation and insecurity. A willingness to return to a chronological time passed and left behind can be found among both groups: in the local history group the geographical distance is non-existing but the journey in time takes us back to the beginning and middle of 20th century. In the other group the stories travel long distances but the travels take place in the present age. What does it mean to have one’s roots somewhere, for those who stayed and for those who left, travelled and moved away? How do the storytellers create the identities of their own and of the places they tell about from these positions?

**Involvement of the facilitators**
Meanings in the stories are made also by listeners (Hydén, 2007). Some stories become meaningful when located and situated in some specific social contexts; we read, listen and see the stories through our own personal experiences but also through the discourses were we live and act in. (See e.g. Mörtberg, 1997). In this sense stories always are created in relations between the storyteller and her/his embodied experiences in a specific historical, political, social and economic places, the story in itself and the listener and her/his embodied experiences in specific historical, political, social and economic place,

Taking this standpoint invites us, the authors, to enter this story in a more explicit and accountable way. As facilitators we are not neutral persons just witnessing but in a high degree involved and interfered in the story making process.

The authors ‘backgrounds tell about flexible and multiple identities in relation to the settings and scenes of the workshops and stories created. The complexity of the threads related to the story tellers and stories grows when knowing that one of the authors has her origins in the same village where the local history groups also comes from, while the second author also can be classified as an immigrant woman. In what ways are the authors´ specific personal histories influencing the contents and stories chosen by the story tellers? Have been more sensitive to some perspectives than others? Have our own personal experiences and travelling pushed some angels of the stories? Have we been more interested to listen to some stories than others? These questions have no singular and clear answers, but by asking them we remind us (and hopefully also other facilitators) that we should be aware of our positions and situations when inviting people to expose their histories and live: the issue of responsibility and accountability is central. At the same time the facilitators also play a crucial role through their deep and genuine interest for people and willingness to share their stories. The stories become meaningful when they find their place and audience.

**Silences**
The second perspective; is asking the important question about who tells a story for whom and who is listening? The answers are not as obvious as one could expect. The ordering of the common activities of digital story-telling in several dimensions of private and public spheres reveal the complexity of the relation perspective between power enactment and creation of belonging. It is possible to distinguish several layers of silences which interfere and shape a story. There is the silence in-between what is actually told, the risk of being silenced by the expectations on you and by others, and also the active use of silence as a practical way of structuring a story. Pauses sometimes describe something crucial and are thus an active component when ordering a story.

Finken and Stuedahl (2008) have written about ethnography and the importance of acknowledging silence as an analytic category. This is also a basis for our approach in this paper. They point out that silence normally is related to physical hindrances i.e. deafness and dumbness. If you are silent normally something is wrong. There are also more abstract categories, such as: emptiness, nothingness or absence in space. Silence is seen as
replacement for something else, claiming a territory which originally is understood as belonging to language or speech. However, silence is both communication and an active choice of escape from being verbal, indicating that talking is the normal state. Silence could also be seen as something which hides something which either should not be brought to the surface, or as Finken and Stuedahl puts it:

“Silences can be used in power relations as part of how actions are performed, as they can manipulate and be strategic in different ways than articulated strategies. Silence can create power and can be the issue of powerlessness.”

When examining the stories told by the participants’ in the story telling groups all these layers of silences are apparent. In the first story, told by the only man in the local history group, the question about who tells what for whom is highly relevant. The man repeated during the first session that he wanted to tell precisely this story in order to preserve the memory of the eccentric man, rather than become too personal. Why did he then choose to not tell stories about personal matters? In this case the seven elements seem to play a restricting role. The man was very aware of the fact that a good story needs a dramatic turn and he also tied up his story around objects rather than relations, i.e. the bicycle, the post boxes. There was also the radio and the weather report announcing: “scattered showers of rain in solitary places”, which tied the story to a special person, a recluse. Although this eccentric man played a major role in the story, there was also another apparent theme of describing how modernity places longing in people´s lives - for bad and for worse. There is also an underlying power play in this story in the not described tensions between belonging and not belonging, if this is made by own choice or by being excluded. In the second story about the postboxes ‘importance for information-exchange in the local community the man finally lowered his guard and placed himself in the scene as a child among many and still not as the main character in the story. This was also an active way of choosing silence. By telling his story through other characters, he was also able to stage his own life by choosing to keep his personal voice down, and let his story tell itself through silence.

In the Integration-group the Interpreter made an active choice to not tell his story officially, but he was willing to share it during less formal circumstances. Possible reasons could be; first of all he was a man and digital storytelling in this particular version was an activity engaging primarily women. He was also further in his integration with the Swedish society compared to the women in the group. He played the role of the intermediary person in this context. Thereby he was also gaining a special position allowing him to watch without really taking part, and share without really sharing. His untold story is also part of the local construction of meaning in this group activity, and part of the participants´ reorientation in the unknown world they now are about to explore and memorize into a Memory.

The Somali women´s heartfelt experiences of the problem of travelling in the new society reveal more layers of silences. There is for example the black boxes of communication in our society which is clearly exposed in these stories. To possess the knowledge that the buses change numbers tells the complexity of belonging, that belonging also is made up by silence, that there is a lot of untold rules also in a signal system intended for communication, rules or orderings which are not always openly communicated and very difficult to know by heart when the language comes in the way.

Kim chi’s story also contains an ear-splitting silence. During the first session she presented another story which was far more personal and heartbreaking. She told us about difficulties in adapting to new customs and a living a life far away from the family, she focused on the negative sides of choosing to live a life as a wife to a foreign man without
being close to her original family. During the next session she presented another story and after a while she also told us that her husband disliked the first story so much that he had forced her to write a new one. For us who know about the first version the story the final story tells so much more through the parts that were removed. The description of the man with 100 wives sitting on his golden throne becomes a picture of inequality between a man and a woman, as well as the descriptions of how she is ordering her plants in the balcony, creating a silent space for her longings for the family.

*Mapping Identity*

“We make our world in the process of moving through and knowing it. 

[...] telling a story and following a path are cognate activities, telling a story is ordering events and actions in space and time – it is a form of knowledge making’. (Turnbull, 2007, p. 142-143)

The third perspective is about the need of tracking your own movements in order to locate your travel both in time, and the physical place and in your mind. Knowledge making is processed by following and interpreting the tracks of your life-path, this is ongoing work while charting the flow of life and cartographic mappings of a personal destiny. This also contributes to the making of a contemporary timeline over ongoing changes in Sweden allowing several map-constructors. The stories told in these diverse local contexts could also be seen in relation to what is worth to know in relation to grand narratives. The immigrant women taking part in the workshops all expressed this in their storytelling activities. The memories they created out of their former life was anchored in places; the beach, the desert in Somalia, the religious worship place, the fields of flower and the roads they have to travel. All these places become integral parts of their identity and assist them in the phase of reorientation and stabilization. The metaphor of travelling and finding a path of their own are powerful pictures representing their experiences as leaving their home and shaping a new meaningful life in unexplored terrain.

The participants in the local historic group also tied their memories and meaning-making to places, but in a more narrow sense. They stayed close to the place they were born, also in their storytelling. Having the privilege of living in a peaceful country contributes to the fact that their identities are mapped by the intertwining of trust and well-known paths. However, the need for exploration was expressed in the two sisters’ travel to the big city, where the memories were tied to the road travelled by the big taxi and their movements in the city. The escalator in the store also helped them- also in a metaphorical way- to actually move between levels in their mind.

At the same time the maps they create is also part of the grand narrative about how maps like these would look like in order to be recognized as stories about immigration and homesteading.

*Non-humans*

The fourth perspective is about the agency of non-humans taking part in the storytelling process. The contemporary theories of sociomateriality (see e.g. Haraway, 1997, Barad, 2007, Orlikowski, 2008) emphasise the need to expand our thinking and understanding of our worlds and realities to take a step beyond pure and clean social relations, those created and maintained by, between and among humans. Instead, the theories suggest, that we should learn also to embrace more openly and consciously various actors around us that are not human beings and which we have learned to call objects in contrary to humans, whom we usually call subjects. As an abstract philosophical, ontological and epistemological statement this probably sounds difficult and raises a huge number of questions and a big portion of resistance, but when moving to a concrete everyday context it becomes hopefully easier to access this proposal.
Think about the digital storytelling workshop setting. There are the rooms, the technology (computers, software, scanners, printers, microphones etc.), the photos, all acting in storytelling. But are these non-humans smooth and friendly alliances willing to co-operate with the humans and/or they disturbing companions making resistance?

The sociomaterial theories point that non-humans are not just passive attributes, things, artifacts and objects but they in a high degree participate and act in all our activities, so also in the digital storytelling circles and workshops. It is always in relations with each other; both the humans and non-humans constitute and create their agencies. (See e.g. Law, 2004, Orlikowski, 2007).

Taking these ideas to the workshops discussed in this paper we especially want to highlight the role of the digital (artifacts) and photos taking part in the workshops. The digital enters as computers and computer related artifacts and in the meeting with the humans also participating in the workshop the relations created between the artifacts and the humans present in the same room, can make the humans skillful actors managing the computers and software, but the opposite is also an option available. During these two workshops the human actors initially all proclaimed how inexperienced they were when talking about computers and internet. The technology actor demanded skills and experiences these novices did not had access to, so the phase of translating the written stories to digital ones suddenly transformed the storytellers owning their experiences, being experts on them, to unsure beginners. The digital demanded a lot of attention both of the story tellers but also of the facilitators. Instead focusing our seeing and listening to the story tellers and their stories, we were kidnapped by technologies and they made us to PC-support persons and technicians who also meant that the technologies did not only steel our attention and presence but also our time.

The digital stories are, besides the oral story, based on pictures. The pictures might be the story tellers’ own, paper or digital ones; they might as well be drawings and even photos borrowed from internet. When studying the Digital Storytelling Cookbook (Lambert, 2010) it becomes obvious that the visual part of digital stories is of vital importance, even if the visual does not have its own explicit element among the seven elements of creating a digital storytelling in the cookbook: “[…] we also want to look at how the use of visuals and sound bring things to life for the audience” (Lambert, 2010, p. 15). The visual part of the digital story is hence not a question of adding illustrations but being an essential ingredient of the story itself.

In the local history workshop the participants, already at the first information meeting, brought with them amounts of visual materials: black and white photos and also articles from local newspapers pasted in thick photo albums. The variety and also amount of materials was also a sign of belonging; their past had not disappeared when elderly people had disappeared but they still had access to existing stories and persons being and having been part of the village life. The photos together with the story tellers shaped the framework for stories and also showed that they really had a long term belonging to the local community. The photos were signs of being competent inhabitants for generations but they also made some stories more accessible and possible to tell than others.

The other storytelling group had also access to photos. But only some of them and the photos were not historical but only some years old. Remarkable was that the photos were from the countries where they had moved from, but no photos were taken from their current place of living. The photos showed that there are places where they also are competent and where they have their homes and belongings but these places are geographically far away. Having no photos from the present time here and now, what does it tell us? That the everyday life of today is not interesting enough to take photos on and
that by not having recent photos they cannot show that their belong and have a home of their own in the town where they live their lives for the moment?

There was also another group of women in the integration group - the women with no photos at all, neither from their home countries nor from their current place of living. But they had rich oral histories from their homes, economically poor which also meant that in their past environment, home, the possibility to have a camera was not an option. However they did not have photos from their new place of living either; perhaps of same reason than the other group of women and/or perhaps still of economic and cultural reasons. In this group the pictures connected to the stories were captured from internet - being hence non-personal and sometimes acting just as illustrations. But what also happened was that when navigating on internet and searching for pictures they occasionally found pictures from their home countries and used them as visual metaphors in their stories. The non-existing pictures and photos could have created a group of strangers and novices and but by using their imagination they could actually build a bridge between their homes and belongings and the new places of living.

Concluding Discussion

In this conclusion we bring together all the layers we have distinguished through our analysis of what happened during a couple of storytelling circles in a small place in the world. However, this place is also an important crossroads for life travels and the meetings become important moments for creating meaning out of the travels which brought us together. We share stories and construct our lives through exchanging Memories, like exchanging treasures. We see the similarities and differences, the nuances and the scatterings becomes a part of our understanding of how to travel through a lifetime.

One of the basic questions we want to raise by this paper is about when and how do you know that the story really is our own? Is not all story-telling an integral part of a "grand narrative"? And how can we distinguish the ongoing changes of this grand narrative?

We see several examples of how it becomes easier to tell what you think is expected from you instead of being too personal, thus keeping the divide between public and private, to adopt what is anticipated as “the example story” rather than presenting a version of one’s own. Concrete examples are the women who were instructed by their husbands what to say and what pictures to show.

Another important aspect to examine is why we tell stories. The traditional function of storytelling is that it is a well-known method for participation through an oral tradition. It is also a pedagogical tool, for documentation, capturing history in time and place.

A crucial dimension of participation is real, authentic engagement in different processes, not just “taking-part” as expected or requested. Digital storytelling can contribute to creative thinking and in creating a foundation for engaged participation instead of dutiful or instructed participation, but it could also assist in preserving the “tyranny of the grand narratives” if seen as restricting instructions on how to travel properly in a lifetime.

Digital storytelling shows new ways for individual empowerment as well as collective community building. The storytelling movement is in many senses an important part of a democratic bottom-up movement. Digital storytelling is about having a voice. However, we must also acknowledge that silence also could be an essential part of talk and participation, and that silence and the unspoken contains a lot of power in its reluctance to adjust to formalised ways of storytelling. Why am I supposed to tell my personal story and for whom? Why should I give away my story if it also means that I will lose control over
my life? The reluctance of telling a story could depend on bad experiences of either keeping quite or speaking too much.

We learned through our experiences of working with these groups that the structure of the seven elements of Storytelling was not only the best way to help the storytellers to mold their story. The seven elements also created mechanisms for generalising stories and to keep them in line with the accepted grand narratives of how to tell nostalgic stories about one’s hometown, the roots of our belongings and the anticipated loss of self-confidence and basic trust when moving away from what we think is safe and well-known. It is an apparent risk that we as facilitators stick to the easy way of packaging the story and thus become prisoners of conventional storylines rather than acting as midwives to the unborn stories which are so essential for meaningful memory-making in our personal and common lives.

References


