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DICO Toolkit for Digital Career Stories

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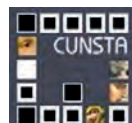
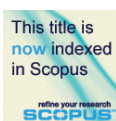
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DICO Toolkit for Digital Career Stories

edited by Mara Cerquetti, Concetta Ferrara



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Introduction

Digital Career Stories – Opening new career paths for arts and culture students, or *DICO* for short, has been a 2-year-long pedagogical development project. Its main objective was to develop innovative narrative and arts- and design-based methods that together form the Digital Career Story methodology introduced in this toolkit.

Through the methodology developed, the project aimed to encourage reflection and self-reflection skills in higher education students, along with their digital and creative skills, and to help them build professional identities and design career paths, as well as enhancing their resilience, self-efficacy and self-esteem. The specific target group of the project was students of arts and culture subjects, but the pedagogical methods can just as well be used with other higher education students.

The project was planned and launched just as the Covid-19 pandemic was dealing a drastic blow to Europe and its educational institutions. That is why one essential focus of the project was to develop methods that can be applied in online learning, using various digital platforms and tools, as well as in face-to-face learning in classroom settings.

The DICO project was the joint effort of a consortium of five European universities: Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS), Finland (as the applicant and coordinator of the project), University of Macerata (UniMC), Italy, Staffordshire University (SU), United Kingdom, Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design (MOME), Hungary, and the Technological University of Dublin (TU Dublin), Ireland. The project was funded by the Erasmus+ programme and lasted from March 2021 to February 2023.

The project activities involved both lecturers and students of the participating universities. During the project, lecturers on arts and culture courses gathered together in five teacher training workshops to share their expertise and

experiences of narrative and arts- and design-based methods, to learn from each other, and to develop new teaching and learning practices and methods together.

The participating lecturers got first-hand experience of using various digital tools, since many of the project's activities, from teacher training workshops to network meetings, were organised online or in hybrid form. This was partly out of choice and partly out of necessity, due to travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic and later because the Russian invasion of Ukraine caused an influx of refugees to neighbouring countries. The partners became accustomed to communicating and collaborating via Teams or Zoom, and using tools such as Google Jamboard, Padlet, Miro and WeVideo for various activities.

Arts and culture students at the partner universities participated in pilots in which new methods were applied and tested. Some of the pilots were short workshops, some were longer learning processes incorporated into study units on their courses. Most pilots were implemented locally – either online or on campus – for the students of the organising partner university, but some allowed students from all partner universities to participate and learn together.

During the project's pilots, students participated in various creative, expressive, narrative and reflective activities, making use of fine arts-based practices, theatre-based activities, design-based visualisation methods, and digital storytelling with digital media tools. Thus, storytelling took many forms in the project: teachers and students engaged in written storytelling, visual storytelling, audio-visual and multimodal storytelling, haptic storytelling and embodied storytelling. Through these creative activities, participants reflected on and constructed their career stories up to the present time, imagined their professional futures, and explored issues relevant to their personal and professional identities and to their professional field at large.

Feedback collected from participating students has played an important role in the development of the Digital Career Story methodology. Indeed, it has also given us good grounds to believe that our project has been on the right track: using creative narrative methods for reflecting on and building the students' identities and career stories is meaningful and serves the intended purposes.

The *DICO Toolkit* contains the project results in the form of a handbook intended for lecturers, counsellors and mentors in higher education institutions (HEIs), and for cultural and creative organisations and professionals. It aims to provide both theoretical frameworks and practical tools for developing art-based methodologies with HEI students in the arts and culture. The book is structured into three sections – *Theories and methodologies*, *Implementing creative methods*, and *Project evaluation and further resources* – and concludes with an *Appendix*.

As the first section, *Theories and methodologies* presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of the project.

In the first chapter (*Building skills for cultural and creative sectors in the digital era: current needs, trends and challenges*), Mara Cerquetti introduces the role of HEIs in training cultural and creative graduates and professionals and improving their skills. After analysing how culture and creativity can help innovation worldwide, the author examines the uniqueness of the cultural and creative sector (CCS), and its positive and negative aspects, such as high rates of precariousness, fluctuations in income, contract instability and difficulty accessing social protection, in addition to its sizeable contribution to the European economy. The chapter then focuses on the need to fill skills gaps through, for example, entrepreneurship and digital innovations, and how European policies and the scientific literature are addressing this issue. The paper also discusses the differences between CCSs and points out the need to reshape the debate focusing on students' awareness and critical thinking about their career path and supporting their resilience in uncertain times by improving co-creativity. In line with these achievements, the following chapters present the teaching theories and methodologies employed during the DICO project.

The second chapter (*Professional autobiographical process including identity work in creative writing practices*) focuses on the reflexive and reflective skills needed in the workplace today and in the future. Ilona Tanskanen argues that critical reflection and critical self-reflection are essential and, alongside rational, cognitive work, imagination, intuition and emotions, also have an important role to play. The author presents the transformative learning process adopted at the Arts Academy of the Turku University of Applied Sciences with master's students. The Professional Autobiographical Process is at the core of the process. Creative life writing, free writing, focused journaling, digital storytelling, and other art-based practices are applied and have proved to be fruitful in the professional autobiographical process.

The following chapter by Pirita Juppi (*Digital storytelling as a narrative approach to identity and career construction*) introduces Digital Storytelling (DST) as a participatory, narrative, and arts-based practice applied for various purposes and in various institutional contexts. The author explores how DST can be used in HEIs for career construction by developing reflexivity, increasing self-awareness and contributing to skills building. The method is discussed within the broader framework of narrative theory and practice, as well as career guidance and counselling. Creating and sharing multimodal career stories in a facilitated group-based process, using DST, can provide a useful tool for career counselling in HEIs, especially in the arts and culture.

In *Collective and individual identities in an era of cultural co-creation*, Carola Boehm continues the discussion on professional identity by considering the background and contexts of individual and collective identity formation as

part of a search for creating more powerful and holistic digital career stories that balance our individual nature with a more collective understanding of ourselves as human beings.

Next, the chapter by Dorottya Féja, Fanni Csernátony and Anna Pais (*Design thinking in career planning. Implementing tools and mindsets*) presents the main visual tools adopted in design thinking methodologies, exploring how they can support storytelling and career planning. Implementing a designer mindset allows students to look at their work with a critical eye, to be open to improvement, not to fear mistakes, and to learn from those mistakes. Identifying and using divergent and convergent mindsets and allocating the appropriate tools for designing a given career are the key components of a successful career plan.

The first part of the DICO Toolkit concludes with a chapter by Barbara Knežević and Michelle Malone. In *Equity, inclusion and feminist pedagogies*, the authors examine specific fine art research methods and technical and practical tools employed by TU Dublin as a unique way to open discussions around ethical teaching with regard to access, technology, gender, class, and ethnic and racial diversity. The chapter looks at some of the specific tools and methods common to fine art education and practice in the points-of-sharing sessions and asks how lecturing staff can deliver career learning in the creative arts that is considerate and sensitive to the unique challenges that are presented in terms of equity and inclusion in third level creative arts education and career story creation.

The second part of the DICO Toolkit (*Implementing creative methods*) focuses on how the creative methods experienced during the DICO project can be implemented in HEIs. Following the DICO Learning Teaching Training Activities (LTTA) pattern, this section provides planning and technical tools for organising workshops and other activities with students.

In her *Creative writing practices and autobiographical process enabling professional identity work*, Ilona Tanskanen provides the learning materials used in the professional autobiographical process through the example of professional autobiographical processes employed in the Contemporary Contexts of Arts Programme studies at TUAS. The chapter describes journaling practices, presenting the targets, pre-assignments, content and contact class activities and assignments for each of the ten phases identified.

In the next chapter (*Organising a Digital Storytelling workshop in an HEI setting*), Pirita Juppi provides instructions for planning a DST workshop with experienced facilitators, but without the need for specialised digital media labs or professional video-editing software. The author first guides lecturers in defining the purpose of the workshop and the topic of the digital stories that are to be created. After this, the workshop structure and schedule are defined, keeping in mind the learning facilities needed at various stages of the process.

In *Collective and individual identities in an era of co-creation: a workshop*, Carola Boehm describes how to develop a workshop that considers individual and collective identity formation for creating more powerful and holistic digital career stories that balance our individual nature with a more collective understanding of ourselves as human beings. As suggested by the author, artists have a long historic tradition of forming collectives and co-creative processes. However, in a world that has emphasised individual endeavours and individualism as the highest concept associated with freedom, they have not always received positive value judgements. Thus, the neoliberal tendency to elevate the individually identifiable creators has established a perceived meritocratic society of individual power and choice. But the current multiple crises of governance, society, the environment and the economy point to a dead-end on this trajectory. Perhaps, as a result, current discourse on more collective, cooperative and collaborative endeavours is on the rise in the arts sector as in others.

Following the structure of a workshop hosted and held by Staffordshire University Department of Media, Performance and Communication in October 2021, in their *Performative embodied identities: using acting and storytelling to explore identity and careers*, Nicola Herd, Robert Marsden, and Maria Buckley Whatton present how to use oral storytelling, narratology, acting and embodiment. These techniques are explored both as a process and as product vehicles in their own right. After introducing the critical framework, the authors present several key practices.

Planning the future with visual tools, by Dorottya Féja, Fanni Csernátóny, Anna Pais, provides learning materials for a nine-hour course for university students that helps them to make conscious plans about their careers using the visual methods of design thinking and strategic planning. In their contribution, the authors provide a canvas with printed templates as an easy-to-understand framework for the entire process. The left side of the canvas analyses the present situation, the right side the future goals and the centre acts as a bridge between the two, identifying possible barriers and resources, listing and evaluating possible ideas for achieving future goals and establishing a realistic timeline from these ideas.

Finally, in *Equity, inclusion and feminist pedagogies. Workshop outlines*, Barbara Knežević and Michelle Malone describe the workshops delivered by the Technological University team on the DICO project as part of the points-of-sharing intellectual output. The paper is designed to provide a step-by-step guide for two of the sessions delivered.

The final section of the DICO Toolkit (*Project evaluation and further resources*) opens with a chapter by Concetta Ferrara and Mara Cerquetti (*Evaluating the DICO project: results and future prospects*). The authors discuss the results of the evaluation activities carried out within the DICO project. After analysing the role of measurement in management and the specific contribution of assessment practices in higher education, the paper presents the

activities undertaken by the partner institutions during the project. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted to investigate lecturers' and students' expectations, prior experience, satisfaction, and the impact of the project. A specific qualitative focus was applied with students enrolled in a master's degree course in Cultural Heritage Management at the University of Macerata. The results provide valuable insights into teaching and learning methodologies and suggestions for HEIs in cultural and creative fields.

In *A "Flood of images". Notes on the fate of the "figure seen from behind" in the Digital Career Stories by the UniMC team*, Giuseppe Capriotti analyses how UniMC students used personal photos to prepare their digital career stories during a workshop held in Macerata in January 2022. The phrase "flood of images" expresses the freedom with which students used many of the photographs they had taken during their free time and travels. In this "flood of images", we notice the predominance of one that is particularly powerful and recurs in almost all the stories: the theme is that of a human being seen from behind, with his or her back to the observer. In some images, the protagonist (or the protagonists) is looking at an amazing landscape, whereas in others, he or she is admiring a framed picture, a work of art in a museum. The recurrence of this figure could be an effect of the huge popularity of some of Friedrich's paintings (including in the European handbook of general history, literature and art history). Within the framework of "visual studies" (and applying the categories established by Mitchell, Freedberg, Lester and Belting), the paper looks at a singular case of the "power of images".

Closing the DICO Toolkit, *Creative production in the Net: sharing vs protecting* by Pierluigi Feliciati presents legal issues related to the use, reuse, modification and publication of creative digital content on the Internet, specifically within the European context. He offers a number of tools, tips for instructors and students, and a list of the best-known platforms offering multimedia resources adopting open licences. The paper tries to fill a general gap found in the cultural heritage and arts community relating to the legal ramifications of reusing online communications and content.

The *Appendix* closes the book with links to the DICO Digital Collection with videos, images and further resources created during the project.

The DICO Team

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