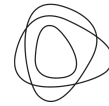


**FOMACS**  
FORUM ON MIGRATION  
& COMMUNICATIONS

*The*  
**ATLANTIC**  
*Philanthropies*



centre for  
**Transcultural Research**  
and  
**Media Practice**

# **Media, public storytelling and social justice**

An introduction to FOMACS,

Forum on Migration and Communications

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# Introducing FOMACS

## **Background**

Since 2000, some 750,000 migrants from 211 countries have come to Ireland. In spite of the strongly transformative nature of this influx and the hugely positive contribution migrants have played in the Irish economy and society over this period of time, there is little recognition in public debate of the permanent nature of immigration, nor acknowledgement of its value. The stance of the Irish media on migration can be viewed as largely negative, focusing, on the one hand, on issues of control and security and, on the other, generally portraying immigrants as either exploited workers or victims. The overall effect has been to perpetuate, in the representation of immigrants in Irish society, a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them', between Irish 'insiders' and foreign 'outsiders'.

In the political forum, the situation is hardly better. Seemingly positive immigration reform measures such as the *National Action Plan Against Racism in Ireland 2005-2008*, the forthcoming Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill and the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Integration, while significant, are perceived by many working in the migrant sector as not being sufficiently proactive or engaged in the realities of migrant experience.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the global economic crisis in 2008, negative public attitudes towards migrants in Ireland have visibly hardened, a situation likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

## **The role of FOMACS**

The Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) emerged as a collaborative public media programme designed to support the voices of migrants and to develop and strengthen the communications strategies of NGOs who work in the migrant sector. Launched in Ireland in 2007, FOMACS is based in the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice at the Dublin Institute of Technology and works in partnership with NGOs, migrants and associates to build their individual and collective capacity to use communication effectively when campaigning for migrant rights.

Central to FOMACS' role as a collaborative, capacity building initiative is its ability to produce and disseminate communications products which NGOs use to influence public opinion and immigration policy positively. To date, FOMACS has produced over 30 different products, as well as syndicating approximately 50 articles or whole supplements into print media across Ireland and other parts of the world, and hosted a range of events at which its output has been discussed.

FOMACS is a local project with international currency: an example of the collaborative approach social justice and human rights organisations can take as they confront the communications challenges of their everyday work.

## Building through partnership

FOMACS was conceived as a unique resource that would create opportunities for relationship building between NGOs operating in the migrant sector and support them as they advocated for change. In its practical work, FOMACS supports the collaboration of people of different ethnic backgrounds at the cutting edge of new media and communications concepts. Key words that have been used to describe its approach include collaborative, learning, integrative, flexible, inspirational and motivational.

Core FOMACS objectives include:

- Creating a space where NGOs can evaluate, design and implement campaign and communications agendas;
- Educating and informing policy makers;
- Documenting the rich and diverse contributions that immigrants make to Irish cultural, social, political and economic life;
- Exploring everyday challenges facing immigrant families and manifestations of racism through exploitation, prejudice and intolerance; and,
- Highlighting categorical differences between refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers.

Underlying FOMACS emergence was a recognition among NGOs that a more sophisticated approach to addressing media and communications concerns was needed in relation to:

- The representation in media coverage of migrants and asylum seekers as exploited workers or victims;
- Weak engagement of public and social services with the integration process of migrants; and,
- Lack of thought-out 'policy solutions' in media messages, which imply, unintentionally, a constant stream of oppositional discourse and perpetuate the 'them' and 'us' dichotomy.

The original intention was that immigrants would work with FOMACS partner organisations to shape content for campaigns focused on two distinct migrant policy issues – family reunification and irregular/undocumented migration. However, it soon became clear that the needs of NGOs in their advocacy activities required a more open, flexible and dynamic approach, involving NGO partners in individual projects as well as investing in capacity building through the FOMACS partnership.

Organisation building has been among the key outcome of the FOMACS partnership and can be witnessed in strengthened staff capacity for media engagement, IT development, media production experience, and exposure to international collaboration opportunities.

Among the benefits identified by FOMACS's partners are:

- Strengthening the presence of the organisations in the media and encouraging others in society to take a position on particular migration issues;
- Helping NGOs to communicate research findings effectively;
- Helping organisations plan multi-platform campaign strategies; and
- Widening the dissemination of media spokesperson capacity to an all-Ireland reach.

By building trust within the partnership and creating the spaces in which the NGOs join in discussion, reflection, thought and action, FOMACS has been able to support partners to discuss issues of common interest, and to work separately or together, as appropriate.

### **Partnership**

FOMACS has evolved into a space in which the NGOs can engage strategically with each other and the value of creating both formal and informal opportunities for the NGO partners to meet, learn from and engage with each other cannot be overstated.

In this context, FOMACS does not take the relationship between advocacy, communications and language for granted and, in all its activities, programmes and forums, a questioning, self-reflective approach is evident. Open questions include, for example: What is the migrant voice? How can it be rendered effectively? What are the implications for advocacy?

The dividends of this approach have been considerable:

- NGO partners no longer latch on to conventional media discourse;
- They have questioned the terminology used in their work; and,
- They have witnessed the invention of fresh, accessible language that is still able to deal with complexity

TABLE 1

Irish NGO's in the migrant sector:

- The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI)
- The Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland (MRCI)  
focused largely on economic issues faced by migrants
- Integration and Social Inclusion Centre of Ireland (ISICI)\*
- Irish Refugee Council (IRC)  
focused on asylum and protection

\*Merger of Refugee Information Service (RIS) and Integrating Ireland (II) in 2009

TABLE 2

FOMACS core partners:

- The Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice (CTMP), School of Media, Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- Immigrant Council of Ireland

- Refugee Information Service
- Irish Refugee Council
- Integrating Ireland
- *Metro Éireann*

TABLE 3

FOMACS collaborates with associates on specific projects, such as:

- Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America’s Voice, who conducts the media spokesperson and communications strategy training for FOMACS;
- The European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) which funds the ‘Migrants and the Media’ project;
- The British Council, which is partnering with FOMACS on the ‘Learning Lab’ project;
- The Goethe-Institut Dublin, Instituto Cervantes, Alliance Française and the Austrian Embassy. These organisations form part of EUNIC Dublin and partnered with FOMACS to launch two film series entitled ‘Moving Worlds: Cinemas of Migration’ as well as a symposium on ‘Cultural Diversity, Media and the Creative Arts’;
- The Irish Film Institute with which FOMACS is building a collaboration in the context of its primary schools project (animation and learning resource) in addition to its film education programme for junior and senior secondary school cycle; and
- The Young European Filmmakers Forum for Cultural Diversity (Yeff!), for which FOMACS is now the national coordinator in Ireland.
- FOMACS is currently in dialogue with Dublin City Council with the aim of establishing a partnership in relation to media outreach and social integration in the context of the DCC’s Office for Integration.

# The politics of storytelling: engaging the audience

*I felt empowered making the images for my story. Making the images gave me more power in expressing my feelings and telling my story than the words alone.*

Edwina, participant in Digital Storytelling Workshop, *Undocumented in Ireland: Our Stories*.

The establishment of FOMACS in 2007 presented NGOs working in the Irish migrant sector with an opportunity to access media and communications expertise and training with a direct value to building their knowledge base and organisational capacity. NGO partners have enhanced their media spokesperson skills, strengthened the communication components of their campaign strategies and improved their media literacy. Operating within an inclusive, transcultural paradigm, FOMACS's collaborative approach has also found expression through a variety of media formats such as print, film, photography, radio, digital storytelling. Through these, experiential stories of difference are rendered with immigrants participating actively in origination and production.

The FOMACS approach to media production aims to enable the subjects to represent themselves. In practice this means:

- A strongly collaborative approach to origination, production and curation, involving migrants and key NGO partners active in the migrant sector;
- An inclusive approach to communication;
- A research-based outlook on identity, social cohesion, gender and other factors that impact on perceptions of difference, migration and marginalisation; and
- A recognition of universal human experience as a force for changing attitudes to migration and marginalisation, and fostering understanding and action.

'Interculturalism' vs 'transculturalism': a working definition

*Transculturalism seeks to embrace the 'other', adopts a holistic and integrative approach, values difference and diversity, and embraces change. By contrast, interculturalism seeks to preserve the status quo and is less interested in exploring opportunities for integration and growth through diversity. ... FOMACS pursues a transcultural agenda in favour of social justice and transformation. Significantly, this is not confined to issues of migration, but enables the programme to reach into other spheres such as gender, marginalisation and racism.*

## **Building an audience**

One of the strengths of FOMACS' collaborative approach is its ability to put its partners in touch with new audiences and new users of their media products beyond their own constituencies, a process that can, in itself, revitalise communication activities with a new sense of purposefulness.

FOMACS collaborative approach to interactions, projects, productions, events, and operations has also created '**learning communities**', fluid groupings that form around specific FOMACS projects and activities. Learning communities provide the opportunity for mediated engagement in which people are able to discuss their impressions of a particular work (film, photography, animation), deepening

understanding beyond simple awareness and creating the possibility of mobilising people for social change.

In the course of its work, FOMACS has also galvanised different facets of what might traditionally be called the 'human rights' sector, attracting a diverse groups of stakeholders into its operational framework, including: journalists; immigrant and non-immigrant media makers; immigrant communities; social innovators; teachers; cultural institutes; curators; architects and urban planners; academics; actors; writers; youth groups; international researchers; and media makers; in addition to social justice organisations outside of Ireland.

### **Examples of learning communities**

FOMACS has conducted a number of roundtable seminars, symposia and exhibitions dealing with topics such as *Cultural Diversity, Education, Youth and Migration* and *Gender and Migration*. Each of these has created a learning community that serves to widen public understanding of complex migrant experiences in Ireland.

In association with EUNIC Dublin, two film series have been held, entitled *Moving Worlds: Cinemas of Migration*. These have targeted diverse audiences, seeking to reach 'the unconverted' in an effort to change public perceptions of immigrants. Following film screenings, audiences were able to engage directors, producers, actors and scriptwriters in discussion, many of whom were migrants. Going forward, *Moving Worlds* will involve the Irish Film Institute as a third partner.

FOMACS is a partner in the European Programme on Integration and Migration (EPIM) Project: 'Migrants and the Media', and as its contribution to this initiative has launched a radio mentoring workshop entitled *Having Your Voice Heard* (see chapter four). In this learning community, participants learn combined skills in audio and documentary production.

FOMACS has also embarked on the 'Learning Lab: Identities and Social Justice' initiative in association with the British Council. The project identifies lab leaders who are specialists in their field in different parts of the world and will produce a face-to-face and online community of participants interested in ongoing and active dialogue.

FOMACS is reaching out to schools as learning communities through learning and teaching packs designed around the three-part animation series entitled *Abbi's Circle* (see chapter four) which examines immigration in Ireland with a particular focus on family reunification.

Cultural institutions such as the Goethe and Cervantes have commented on the value that FOMACS adds, not only through its expertise, creativity and extensive networks, but through its ability to introduce reflection into its interactions.



## Types of audiences

Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America's Voice, describes three types of audiences that can be reached with effective media communication on migration issues: supporters, sceptics and opponents. He argues that the goal of effective media communication is to 'change supporters into champions, to change sceptics into supporters and to demoralise opponents'.

FOMACS Director Áine O'Brien identifies collaboration with media professionals, practitioners, 'unexpected allies' and networks as being central to establishing sustainable platforms of media support and output: 'Let's move beyond a monolithic reading of the "mass media", which has in the past been narrowly understood as comprising the intersection of print journalism and broadcast media.'

"Regardless of how 'participatory' the media production was/is in its design and scope, the real and urgent task of opening up diverse public spaces for transcultural dialogue and 'political listening' to unfold is all too often easier to negotiate in theory than in practice."

- Grossman & O'Brien (2010)

However, public broadcasting and print remain key mechanisms through which FOMACS productions can reach large audiences. By 2008/9, prior to entering its curation phase, FOMACS had already reached a viewership of approximately two million through RTÉ television broadcasts of *The Richness of Change* and a readership of over 40,000 on seven different occasions through its publication of supplements in *Metro Éireann*. Its print syndication strategy expanded this reach to 17 other locations in Ireland through the syndication of material into other newspapers.

New outreach initiatives in 2010 include:

- Screening episodes of *Sanctuary* in commercial cinemas prior to the start of feature films;
- Exhibiting *A Sikh Face in Ireland* in the Chester Beatty Library, one of Dublin's premier exhibition venues (see chapter four);
- Expanding the reach of the *Abbi's Circle* animation series and teaching pack through the Irish Film Institute's 'Education and Access' nationwide programme; and,
- Exploring the option of exhibiting work in airports and other public venues for wider exposure.

FOMACS has actively sought unconventional alliances to identify and engage diverse, 'unconverted' audiences. To date over 6,000 people have been drawn into screenings, film festivals and photographic exhibitions. In addition, the FOMACS outreach strategy involves primary school students in discussions about the migration issues raised in the *Abbi's Circle* animation with the support of the learning packs distributed to date. This initiative is now actively targeting teacher training institutions in order to prepare teachers to use the material effectively in their classrooms.

"The Memory Box contains child friendly and teacher-friendly material on subjects which are of critical importance in Ireland today. . . It will be a welcome addition to every teacher's portfolio of materials for intercultural education in the primary school classroom"

- Barbara O'Toole, *InTouch* (2008)

### **The challenges of media access**

'The extraordinary continuing absence of non-white, non-Irish practitioners in virtually all Irish media', noted by researchers Browne & Onyejelem, is a significant feature of the current mass-media landscape. While entry to employment is partly dependent on professional training in media practice, 'the Irish media environment ... does often operate on the basis of close-knit and long-established social networks' that constrain the entry of skilled migrants into public and community media. Further constraints have been identified in the discourse, production and content of mainstream media messages about immigrants. Devereux and Breen argue that 'the problematising of immigrants [in terms of crime or welfare fraud, for example] within Irish media discourse conforms to the wider tendency of the mainstream media always to demonise the most marginalised in society.'

Compared with the other media, mainstream print media has proved to be fairly difficult to influence in respect of giving voice to the migrant experience. The challenge of getting in-depth features on migration published in newspapers suggests that the power of the print mass media may thus be limited in its ability to influence public perceptions of migrants.

Ruadhán Mac Cormaic, migration correspondent for *The Irish Times* notes

*As a story, migration doesn't adhere to the same patterns that apply to, say, health or education. It's amorphous, it cuts across established specialisms, it's a process more than an event, and there are few ready-made networks in place between the journalists and the immigrants they're writing about. It takes time to find contacts and gain their trust, to master asylum law or to get a handle on trends, for example, and in most newsrooms time is generally in short supply.*

*Migration Matters 30/7/09*

In comparison, film, radio and photography are not subject to corporate editorial protocol and producers, scriptwriters and photographers thus retain the freedom to use these mediums to explore human experience at will. New media is similarly not constrained by editorial convention, but offers significantly more flexibility for widening participation in the production process. Subject to the resources being available, new media create the conditions for people to tell their own stories in many different ways, often through collaboration.

### **The politics of listening**

For FOMACS the task is not only to enable immigrants to voice their lived experience authentically and powerfully, but also to engage with disinterested and disbelieving audiences. Creating the conditions through which audiences can really *listen* to what the productions are saying is complex.

For audiences, there may be risks in reaching for greater awareness and understanding about the social justice issues associated with migration. Real

understanding must hold within it the possibility for change – in this case, for example, a change of perspective on issues associated with family reunification and undocumented workers.

The implications for FOMACS are to draw on its collaborative and learning orientation and to further develop the concept of ‘learning communities’ through which ‘unconverted’ audiences can be assisted to engage with new ideas, new messages and new perspectives on social justice issues.

A further challenge is whether new understanding can translate into behaviour change in relation to migration. Audiences need to be encouraged to recognise the migrant experience as an integral part of the changing nature of Irish society and to see themselves as active players in making those changes for the benefit of all.

### **Social media outreach**

By focusing on the power of storytelling online, FOMACS is in a position to harness new technologies and online social movements to bring social justice topics more squarely into public view. Resources and tools could be provided online for communities to adopt topics about migration, social integration and social justice, and users could be encouraged to act as advocates for this content within their communities so that they become the distributors of the message and the work. These strategies enable users to participate in the projects posted online and to link up with associated media projects and resources.

Future development plans include the creation of an **Outreach Advisory Panel** which will identify target audiences and outlets, functioning as a live network linking into communities on the ground. The advisory panel will include representatives from city and county councils, union sectors, community-led initiatives, business and the private sector, education and life long learning, creative and cultural industry, media and journalism, and state/semi-state organisations.

Similarly, a **Social Media Digital Advisory Panel** will advise on the design and sustainability of the social media database, comprising experts in information architecture, graphic design, engineering, on-line/viral marketing and other key areas.

Such extensive collaboration around outreach will boost FOMACS’ positioning as a communications facilitator, a ‘think-and-do-tank’ in the social justice field, both in Ireland and outside. The outreach process will contribute to building a brand that is valued and trusted by diverse partners and associates, and this in itself will play a major role in extending the reach of such work to a wider range of ‘unconverted’, ‘disinterested’ and ‘disbelieving’ audiences. Over time this could help achieve a critical mass necessary to counter the concentration of negative publicity that continues to influence public perceptions of migrancy in Ireland.

# The politics of storytelling: the authentic story told

Social documentary is the foundation of FOMACS' work and opens up media channels and platforms for immigrant communities to express themselves and be heard, using participatory media methods. For FOMACS, audiovisual media goes way beyond recording and observing human experience. It can generate new knowledge, new understanding and new perspectives on the complicated and contradictory nature of the migrant experience, for example, long-distance motherhood.

FOMACS products – both fiction and non-fiction – have a strong documentary slant that sets out to challenge the image of the disempowered migrant. Contrary to many social documentaries that focus on despair, hopelessness, deprivation and victimhood, FOMACS asserts that the ways in which people surmount significant obstacles is equally compelling. 'Ethnography' – the study of human lives as they are lived – is an old fashioned methodology newly invigorated in FOMACS by the recognition of research subjects as co-collaborators and co-authors.

Ireland is an oral culture with a strong performative dimension. 'It's not about what you say; it's about how you say it.' This creates the impetus for exploring how language in the media is used to create reality vs. describing reality.

In many cases, the chosen medium for a FOMACS project emerges out of the specificity of a human story, its circumstances and particular concerns. For example, the use of digital storytelling to capture migrants' experience of living in incarceration, with the migrants themselves being the protagonists in their stories, whilst protecting their identities.

Another defining characteristic of FOMACS' output is that, while it has a point of view, it is non-polemical in its treatment. The focus is on telling human stories through social realism rather than portraying the immigrant experience in symbolic terms.

The FOMACS body of work extends from film through digital storytelling, animation (what FOMACS terms 'documation'), photography, radio, print and web-based products.

## **Search for authenticity**

How is the migrant experience featured in specific productions? How is the content of FOMACS productions viewed by migrants themselves? These are key issues of representation and authenticity at the heart of FOMACS's media output.

FOMACS Director Áine O'Brien identifies the challenge of resisting popular stereotypes without inadvertently falling into counter stereotypes, which produce a well-meaning but equally problematic discourse of 'otherness':

*We are by now well familiar with the negative stereotypes and homogeneous one-liners and repeated sentiments, such as:*

*The ‘criminalisation of the illegal’; ‘welfare fraudster/scrounger’; ‘foreigners taking our jobs/wage undercutters’; ‘this “nation state” or “island” is already too crowded’, etc.*

*And the counter stereotypes:*

*‘Victimised’; ‘deserving/ hard-working/pays taxes’; ‘has endured a gruelling, perilous journey en route’; ‘isolated from social network and family’; ‘vulnerable and without agency’, etc.*

*In-between both sides of the stereotypes there is a rich terrain of complex identities and realities that seldom get represented in the media; it is this complexity that we have to translate and communicate to a range of audiences.*

The reality of being undocumented must reflect not only individual experience, but should reflect the wider context with which undocumented people are interacting daily. It also involves drawing on the rich experience of organisations, legal practitioners, service providers, teachers and doctors who interact with and support undocumented workers, failed asylum seekers and their families.

Taking the view that the medium serves the material rather than the other way round, the FOMACS approach is that the story to be told comes first and then consideration is given to which medium fits the story best.

The involvement of migrants in shaping FOMACS productions is an important part of the programme mix in order to ensure that the content and representation is credible, authentic and relevant. In most cases, FOMACS has worked closely with its NGO partners to source migrant participants who contribute a diversity of perspectives to FOMACS productions. They represent the experience of both men and women, and reflect the experience of non-EU visa professionals as well as less-skilled non-EU work permit holders. Migrants to Ireland have also contributed to FOMACS productions as creators (participants in the digital storytelling project), directors, actors and advisors on issues of characterisation and representation.

*Metro Éireann* Editor, Chinedu Onyejelem, attributes the authenticity of the FOMACS productions to the organisation’s collaborative approach: ‘It’s not about “we know it all”. They bring people in, hear other perspectives. Collaboration is key.’

Many of the migrants who have become involved in FOMACS’ work see particular value in the way FOMACS productions make audiences more aware of the complexity of the migrant experience.

Noemi Barredo who is the subject of the documentary film, *Promise and Unrest* (2010), explains how she was interested in working with FOMACS because she wants everyone to know how migrants feel when planning to move to other countries:

*They will learn about how difficult it is to be alone, to support others, how a mother leaves the Philippines and how vulnerable migrants are.*

Fidel Taguinod, the subject of the film *Here to Stay* comments on the documentary:

*It will enable [migrants] to reflect and not to romanticise [the migration experience] ... it will help them make a decision for themselves rather than what they hear about the US, Ireland. It will empower them.*

Joyce, a participant in the digital storytelling project, encountered scepticism among her fellow hostel-dwellers about her involvement in the project: 'People in the hostel felt it was a waste of time – where would it go?' Nevertheless she believes that 'Ireland could use it,' as she explained in her address to the public launch of the digital stories at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin on 28 May 2009:

*These are our stories, written from the heart, with no guards on our emotions, our experiences, or our ideas as single women, fathers, mothers, Asian, African, non-English speaking, Christian and Muslim people living in direct provision centres across this country...*

*...Perhaps none of us nine storytellers will be the direct beneficiaries of the positive change that this project will bring in the future, yet we are confident that this will emerge as our small contribution to building a better Ireland.*

### **The living archive**

Key among FOMACS' aim is the design and maintenance of a 'living archive' of recent migration experiences into Ireland, making digitally accessible its cross-platform media projects to a diverse set of constituencies and interested publics. This is achieved through online dissemination, as well as exhibitions, DVD authorship, film series/festivals, educational toolkits and outreach materials.

FOMACS Director Áine O'Brien describes the purpose of the living archive as reaching and engaging unconverted audiences with material about sensitive issues. By enabling people to identify with stories of the migrant experience, FOMACS aims to support closer engagement with social justice issues related to migration and difference in order to impact on public opinion. As she puts it, FOMACS implements 'a strategy for the exhibition and circulation of the work, opening up opportunity for collective dialogue and reflection'.

### **Website**

The FOMACS website [www.fomacs.org](http://www.fomacs.org) targets diverse audiences, including local and international networks and gives users access to FOMACS' products, introduces them to work in progress, demonstrates the collaborative nature of the methodology, and links web users to other products of a similar nature.

*Migration Matters* is a controlled archive that scans local and international media for information and perspectives on migration issues. The scan selects content using a

media and communications lens, and the material bears the stamp and perspective of its compiler, FOMACS' Contributing Editor, Colin Murphy, who is a journalist specialising in migration issues. *Migration Matters* is an informed, user-friendly resource through which readers can quickly access a range of perspectives.

### **The digital storytelling project**

Digital storytelling is a collaborative and interactive process of creating stories in which participants can reflect on their experiences and engage in dialogue with others. Digital storytelling uses a classic testimonial approach. At its heart is a workshop format and a creative process that takes place through the form of a story circle. Co-facilitated and co-authored to help participants share their stories, it is a process that can uncover stories that would otherwise be left untold. From the migrant perspective, digital storytelling enables people to develop a new understanding and value in their life stories but also to relate sometimes painful and traumatic experiences, without them having to relate their testimony repeatedly for advocacy purposes.

FOMACS has produced two series of digital stories: *Undocumented in Ireland* (2009) and *Living in Direct Provision* (2009). The stories can be used as a means to communicate with family members across distances; analyse social issues; develop educational outreach; advocate for policy changes; build social networks and artistically express oneself in a way that underscores the vibrant and heterogeneous ways of living migration.

According to participants involved the digital storytelling project, the process built their confidence: 'Digital storytelling is more intense than ordinary writing and it gave us the sense that if we could do this, we could do something more,' said one of the participants, Joyce. Other participants spoke of a sense of relief that their experience was documented and could not be erased.

### **Film**

The unique potential of film to reach a wide range of audiences has encouraged FOMACS to think harder about the medium, not merely as a message transmitter, but as a means of facilitating closer engagement for audiences with the complexity of migrant experiences. Key outputs include:

- ***Here to Stay [2006, 72 min]*** provides an intimate portrait of Filipino nurse Fidel Taguinod and poses a fundamental question regarding the promotional prospects of migrant nurses, working in the Irish healthcare service. Tracking the mobilisation of the Overseas Nurses Section of the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) from its inception, with Fidel as President, *Here To Stay* captures the evolution of political process over time as well as depicting Fidel's managerial competence, his working relations with patients, consultants, and Irish and overseas nursing staff.
- ***Union Ink & Paper [2010]*** follows the advocacy of Anton McCabe, a trade union activist and Labour Party councillor, on behalf of three South African meat workers trafficked into Ireland by an industry preoccupied with the

short-term gains of cheap labour from outside the EU. Anton helps to regularise the status of these workers, stranded by their Irish employer and 'undocumented' through no fault of their own, offering them and their families dignity and security.

- ***Promise and Unrest [2010, 95 min]*** documents the experience of Noemi Barredo, separated from her daughter Gracelle at seven months. Filmed over a five-year period, *Promise and Unrest* is an intimate portrayal of a migrant woman performing care giving and long-distance motherhood, while assuming the responsibility of sole provider for her family back in the Philippines. The film documents their subsequent reunion in Ireland and the beginnings of a domestic life together in the same country for the first time.
- ***The Richness of Change (2007)*** is a series of one-minute films used to communicate the contributions that economic migrants are making through brief snapshots of everyday life. They were broadcast by RTÉ during intercultural week, 7-14 April, 2008.
- ***Sanctuary (2009)*** is a collection of 24 ultra-short monologues written by people who have sought asylum and received refuge in Ireland and performed by actors and writers living in Ireland. By having the messages spoken by Irish people, the aim is to forge a point of identification and create the possibility of catharsis among audiences: 'What if that were me?'

### **Animation**

FOMACS has produced a three-part series of short animated films, *Abbi's Circle (The Memory Box, 5 min, 2007; Team Spirit, 6 min, 2008 and New Beginnings, 7 min, 2009)*, which focuses on immigrant family reunification and foregrounds the voices of children. The overall aim of the animation project combined with learning resource packs is to communicate the diversity of experiences for families on the ground and the lived impact of policy decisions (or lack thereof) in relation to family reunification.

FOMACS has coined the term 'documation' to describe the creative and political interface between animation and documentary. The stories cut through the intricacies of the Irish immigration system (where to go, how long the process of family reunification takes) and are able to convey complex messages simply and with humour. Animation provides critical distance from sensitive issues, enabling the translation of real life stories and case studies without revealing the identities of the people behind the stories.

Much of the impact of these films derives from the emotion of a universal story that rarely gets told and cuts through the notion of the 'other'. In all three episodes children from different cultures cooperate to solve challenges they encounter at primary school, creating powerful examples of how unity through diversity can be a force for empowerment.



The FOMACS approach to the series is well captured in its description of the productions aimed at children:

*In order to reach an audience of 9-12 year olds we decided not to be hard hitting, since we didn't want to risk losing our audience. The series does, however, place narrative agency in the hands of young children and allows them to narrate the story of family reunification. The learning resource, on the other hand, works across the primary school curriculum and uses accessible language to communicate the issue of family reunification to teachers in the classroom, working with subject headings such as, 'cultural diversity', 'diversity in the classroom', 'family reunification', 'historical perspective' and 'movement in and out of Ireland', 'transport', 'cityscapes', 'communications', and 'family'.*

The issue of language is also addressed in *The Memory Box*, the first of the three films in the *Abbi's Circle* series. With primary school teachers noting that there is a dearth of resources incorporating the diversity of languages in any given classroom, the inclusion of Yoruba in the film enables Nigerian children to have a sense of belonging in Ireland, and was almost certainly the first time the children had heard the language used on screen in Ireland.

### **Photography**

The FOMACS photographic projects combine documentary work with life histories capturing migration memories, places, stories and communities in transition. To date, three exhibits have been mounted, all focused on the work of Dr Glenn Jordan, Reader in Cultural Studies & Creative Practice, University of Glamorgan in Wales and Director of Butetown History & Arts Centre in Cardiff:

- *Somali Elders: Portraits from Wales* exhibited at FOMACS in March 2007;
- *Mothers and Daughters* exhibited at the Civic Offices in Dublin and at FOMACS in November 2007; and,
- *A Sikh Face in Ireland* exhibited at the Chester Beatty Library between 7 May and 18 July 2010.

*A Sikh Face in Ireland*, which was first viewed as work in progress at a seminar hosted by FOMACS and Alliance Française in 2009, was particularly significant as it represented the first exhibition relating to contemporary cultural issues to be hosted by the Chester Beatty Library. The exhibition provided both a profile of the present and a social and cultural history of Sikh immigrants and their descendants. Sikhs first came to Belfast in the 1930s as cloth sellers and pedlars and have lived in the Republic of Ireland countryside since the 1950s, with hugely diverse experiences in that context. However, most of the Sikh immigrants arrived after 1995, during and after the economic boom.

On an ongoing basis, FOMACS seeks other public spaces such as airports and libraries as venues for the work to be exhibited on the island of Ireland.

Working with a team of collaborating photographers, FOMACS aims to produce a substantive archive reflecting historic and contemporary images of migration into Ireland and beyond, exploring issues related to 'family', 'youth cultures', 'journeys', 'neighbourhoods', and 'cultural identity'.

### Radio

Radio is widely consumed in Ireland and is unique in its ability to transmit diverse 'voices' and 'accents' to a wide range of audiences and to simultaneously transport the listener into different places, situations and stories. FOMACS's first foray into radio was the production of a radio programme by journalist, Colin Murphy, on Ireland's local elections in June 2009 in which 40 immigrants stood as candidates. The programme was distributed as a podcast for *Le Monde International*, was also broadcast on RTÉ's 'Curious Ear' in late 2009, and is available on the FOMACS website.

*Having your Voice Heard* is a radio mentoring programme with migrant women who have been involved in media before coming to Ireland and wish to continue working in the media industry. The initiative provides participants with the tools and training to create radio stories about themselves, their communities and their worlds.

*Having your Voice Heard* is a powerful example of supporting media users to become media producers so as to make media that better suit the needs and aspirations of multicultural societies.

### Print

FOMACS has utilised print media in three different ways:

- The publication of seven supplements in *Metro Éireann*;
- The syndication of some 50 articles and supplements into 17 newspapers in different parts of Ireland;
- The publication of educational guides to films, starting with the three-part animation series called *Abbi's Circle*, targeting schools to introduce issues of migrancy to Irish and immigrant

#### ***Having Your Voice Heard***

by Roisín Boyd (Coordinator)

**Dublin neighbours** in Pearse Street Flats helping a journalist from Cameroon find the ropes; mourning the loss of a beloved brother in the Biafra war; how it was growing up as the middle child of 28 in Benin city in Nigeria and negotiating your father's 5 wives; remembering a beloved brother-in-law who happens to be albino; struggling and overcoming depression after the birth of a first child ; and chartering a mother's journey to Ireland from Zambia in the 1980s and her return home with her precious plants ...

All these stories emerged after 12 weeks of workshops entitled 'Having Your Voice Heard'.

Challenging, fun, imparting important skills and knowledge on the media, valuing one's own voice, hard work, the importance of accurate research; how to breach what can at times seem like impenetrable barriers such as accent ... Doireann explored the story of accents in Irish broadcasting – the value of difference, but also the importance of being understood!

All six documentaries were eventually born. *Neighbours* has been broadcast and we expect the others to reach air too.

But the most important message comes from Neltah:

*Thanks again very much for all the hard work you put into it and making a person like me feel like I can climb Everest.*

- children; and,
- Discussion guides also accompany digital stories and films, such as *Union Ink & Paper* and *Promise and Unrest*, in addition to the radio mentoring project and the *Sanctuary* monologues. Each media product is re-versioned to fit the needs of outreach and community education/dialogue.

# Learning – the hallmark of cooperation

*‘A simple lesson learned is that FOMACS is not simply about “product”, but equally about “process”, facilitating communication between individuals and teams and the effective communication to wider audiences.’ FOMACS Director Áine O’Brien*

Since the establishment of FOMACS in 2007, NGO partners have built their media spokesperson skills, strengthened the communication components of their campaign strategies and improved their media literacy. Learning is a hallmark of the FOMACS partnership, occurring at all levels of the collaboration and manifested in many different ways.

## **Skills transfer and organisation building**

Skills transfer has been focused primarily on equipping NGOs working in the migration sector with the skills for more effective media engagement. The key participants have been the five NGOs and their staff, all of whom are located in Dublin. In some cases, it has also been possible to involve member organisations located in different parts of Ireland, thus spreading FOMACS’ skills transfer impact more widely.

## **Media spokesperson training**

During the period 2007 to 2009, 18 workshops were run by Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America’s Voice. Sharry brings extensive experience of lobbying in the US for immigration policy reform, and was able to share a style of media engagement that is quite different from that operating in Ireland. Frank describes his approach to effective media communication as ‘less is more’ with a strong, focused emphasis on narrative. ‘Let out the emotion,’ he says, ‘get command of your anger and communicate your experience of what you see.’ Sharry reflects on the ‘genuine openness’ in the workshops, with participants eager to try out new approaches. He plans to take the lessons from this process into a new programme that is being developed in the US for leftwing activist organisations that need help in widening their communication to new audiences.

## **Impact**

A key indicator of the value of the media training was the recognition by outside observers that the performance and impact of the NGO spokespeople on television improved significantly over the period 2008/09. As many spokespeople are migrants themselves, their involvement in the training has amplified the migrant voice in the public domain.

A 2006 analysis of the NGO migrant sector cited eleven ways in which NGOs could strengthen their policy influence in Ireland. FOMACS can credibly claim to impact on six of these areas:

- Strengthening the input from migrants and/or individuals to enhance the credibility of NGO communication with policy

“By working with FOMACS, ICI has acquired a greater understanding of visual literacy and how the different media formats (such as monologues, digital storytelling or photographic exhibitions) can be used to communicate difficult issues.”

- Denise Charlton, CEO of the Immigrant Council of Ireland

- makers;
- Sharpening media communication techniques and refining campaign communication strategies;
  - Taking up opportunities to exert influence through organisations which are working in other sectors and can help influence the achievement of the objectives of the NGOs in the migrant sector;
  - Producing material for parliamentarians and other stakeholders that is concise, accessible and addresses the issues in a way that is practically useful for the intended audiences; and,
  - Training and developing staff, and drawing to a greater extent on external expertise for capacity building.

FOMACS activity is underpinned by an approach to learning that contains within it a strong '**action-reflection**' rhythm. The formulation of media strategies and actual production processes are closely accompanied by reflection on decisions made and the value of outputs produced, with the aim of learning through practice about what works and how.

The FOMACS Programme Forum has created a space to facilitate insight and information sharing. Partners give feedback and educative input into the productions, and production staff feel their work is witnessed.

**Action-reflection** is further supported by FOMAC's '**action-research**' dynamic. FOMAC's situation both within and yet external to an academic environment is critical here. FOMAC's lead partner, CTMP provides the opportunity to relate community-based action to academic discourse and theory. In this context, CTMP co-director Dr Alan Grossman notes that the value of FOMACS' audiovisual media and social documentary practice is its potential to go far beyond simply documenting and recording the migrant experience. 'It offers in and of itself a critical discourse and provides a means through which one can critically, constructively and polemically engage with the complexities and multidimensionality inherent in migration.'

# Lessons on a journey

Seven critical aspects to the structure of FOMACS can be seen as having contributed to its success both in terms of strategic goals and programme design and these will continue to shape the value and the impact of the initiative.

## **1 Flexibility**

FOMACS' ability to work with different organisations, individuals and networks; to respond to emerging opportunities ; and to adapt its programme emphases in response to external changes (such as a rapid economic downturn) so as to remain focused on the overall programme goals and objectives.

## **2 Trust**

Fostered through genuine collaboration in which reflection is a springboard for future action.

## **3 Professional expertise**

Adding value by signalling new directions for innovation, and deploying creative and technical expertise to generate products that give an authentic voice to the migrant experience.

## **4 Thoughtful, collaborative academic insight and rigour**

Valuing community-based practice as a basis for engaging theory.

## **5 A learning orientation**

Producing insight and knowledge as part of media planning, origination, production and curation, and fostering authenticity and inclusiveness in all these processes.

## **6 A collaborative approach**

Valuing the inputs from a diverse range of sources, many of whom have direct experience of migration or other social justice issues.

## **7 Reciprocal benefit**

Accruing to participants, the partners and the FOMACS associates. Reciprocity is a rhythm that permeates all the FOMACS activities, and is key to sustaining the ongoing investment that partners and associates bring to the FOMACS enterprise.

## **Future direction**

FOMACS will continue to deploy and evolve cross-media communication in the service of its partners. Underscoring all its activities is the goal of negotiating a politics of difference (race, gender, religion, ethnicity and race), alongside a politics of equality (class, labour, health, education, civil rights).

Over time, FOMACS' learning communities are likely to draw in more partners, contributing to an even richer and more diverse set of interests and specialist skills, creating the opportunity for FOMACS to extend its activities into a wider range of sectors that are complementary to the migrant sector.

Fundamentally rooted in the community partnership model, FOMACS' propensity to work collaboratively with organisations located in and outside Ireland holds the potential for FOMACS to significantly spread its influence and amplify the impact of its work.

In his foreword to *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice*, Hamid Naficy comments:

*We are living in an interrelated world ...The lives and times of diverse displaced persons, migrants, refugees, nomads, stateless persons, émigrés and exiles ... are a complex issue of our time. ... the communication media reconnect us to earlier places and times, connect us to new places and times, and help us re-imagine new possibilities.*