Living Library / Human Library

Is a concept for trustful dialogue and empathy on sensitive topics to dismantle prejudices by lending a conversation with a person instead of a book.

Information
Ideation
Consultation
Co-Decision

<25 people
25-50 people
50-100 people
> 100 people
> 1000 people

Preparation:
1-2 months for promotion and recruitment.
Implementation:
A couple of hours – 0,5 day
Follow-up:
Documentation of the event

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At least one persons for organizing and sometimes a translator

The Method: What is it, when to use it and what outcome to expect

The method uses the principle of a real library: readers borrow an interesting book, "read" and then return it. In the case of the Living Library, the "books" are people who make themselves available for a conversation with the "readers". "Books" are generally members of stereotyped or marginalized groups who agree to share their personal experience with the "readers". The main aim of the process is to create constructive, personal and trustful dialogue between people who might have no opportunities to speak to each other in everyday life and thus help dismantling prejudices and stereotypes. The method is particularly well suited to discuss the principle „Leave-No-one-Behind" and learn about day-to-day experiences of structural barriers and discrimination of marginalized groups.

The organizers of the events are the "librarians" and are responsible of the smooth functioning of the event. As "librarian" you create a safe environment in which the rules of conversation are respected, and the participants – especially the "books" – feel comfortable and open for personal interaction.

The Process: How to conduct it in an in-person setting or online using a PC/laptop with video option

1. **Lending**: Reach out to people that would be willing to take the role of books. You need explain them clearly the method and why their testimony might be impactful. Get in touch with institutions, with which you might want to cooperate (library, schools, festival) in order to have "readers". Set a time and place, where you will organize your event and promote it.
2. **Lending:** Online in advance and/or at the reception, the participants inform themselves about the book titles (usually illustration and description of a personality facet, e.g. "housewife", "refugee", "transsexual"). The "librarians" explain the method, the rules of conversation, support the selection and reserve an interview.
3. **Conversation:** . In the reading room, the "reader" sit down at a table with the "living book" for a 30-minute conversation. Personal and critical questions are permitted, guided by the rules of conversation. The "living book" can ask counter-questions and, if necessary, leave questions unanswered. If the book agrees, several "readers" can participate in the conversation.
4. **Return:** The "living books" are returned after the loan period.
5. **Discussion:** If applicable, the conversations can be followed up, reflected on and discussed during further events.. Each reader can also summarize to other readers what they learned from the book.

Blended participation

You can use the (online) living library in the beginning of a broader process in order to raise awareness about stereotypes, marginalized groups etc. The "books" can be collectively reflected for instance by different "readers" and/or further participants during another meeting.

Digital communication

Communication platform for the event: Teams, Zoom, Webex. Make sure that protection of personal rights is respected, e.g. that the conversations between "books" and "readers" are not recorded.

Good to know

- Target group:
- Citizens who need to be made aware of prejudices and marginalisation towards certain groups of people
- People who are confronted with prejudice and social exclusion in their everyday life.

Limitations:

The strong/intimate interactions between the "books" and the "readers" that is expected to be created out of this method might be weakened by the online process. As a consequence, organising living library online might result in creating less empathy and understanding than expected among the readers. By organising a living library online, it can be more difficult to find "books", because they might be more excluded from digital processes.