

#Amplify  
#CulturalDealEU

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#TogetherEU  
#TheFutureIsYours

## Qisetna

### Contribution to Amplify: Make the Future of Europe Yours

(est. 2013) a non-for-profit organisation created with the aim to provide a digital platform for the Syrian community impacted by displacement to share, document and preserve their cultural and intangible heritage. *Qisetna* in Arabic means 'our story', and we have focused on engaging with local communities across the UK, Sweden, Turkey and beyond, in cultural events to encourage host communities to learn about the newcomers, their culture and identity.

A program of cultural activities which include exhibitions, storytelling workshops, film screenings, university and community presentations, in partnership with local and grassroots organisations, organised by our team of young and talented volunteers across borders.

A bilingual website which includes a growing archive of stories produced by Syrians as well as a digital magazine profiling artists, creative professionals and cultural agents from the Syrian diaspora is also available in two languages, English and Arabic.

### Goals

1. Engage displaced communities in the preservation of their cultural heritage
2. Educate and disseminate general audiences about the value of preserving intangible heritage of displaced communities for future generations.

## Milestones

### I. Unite for Heritage, UNESCO campaign

In 2015 Qisetna was featured by **UNESCO** in their campaign Unite for Heritage, as one of the initiatives from the civil society to document and preserve the intangible heritage of the Syrian diaspora in Europe.

### II. Community Group Archive

In 2017 we received an award for excellence from **Community Archives and Heritage Group** as “an extraordinary example of an archive both preserving the voices of displaced and fractured communities for the future and acting as an engine of community resilience in the present. This is an archive at its best: raw emotion, portraying real life and its impact on individuals and families, community leadership and involvement, a focus on tomorrow - the younger generation - and an excellent website for outreach and advocacy. This archive will become an outstanding research tool for the future. But it is also – evidently – succeeding in its principal short-term goal of community building. We also commend Qisetna's [website](#) and encourage everyone to take a look. The use of large apps gives a wonderful simplicity and clarity. From the first click, we all felt compelled to keep reading.”

### III. Make positive initiatives more visible

In 2018 we spent a week at Restad Gård, a former hospital near Gothenburg, in Sweden, converted into the largest asylum seekers camp in the country. During four days, we stayed in the premises and met members of Support Group Network, an association initiated by asylum seekers and refugees resident in this temporary accommodation. Based on a collaborative methodology of filmmaking, we interviewed some members of this diverse community, learning the day to day challenges of living together, despite the cultural and language barriers. Many young people were suffering from mental health issues after surviving the traumatic experiences they had been through, a situation accentuated by the fact that they had to wait, some over a year, to hear the decision from the Swedish government about their rights to stay. In the film [“Four Days in Restad Gård”](#) we interviewed young Afghani, Syrians, Somali, Kurdish and women from Gaza, Iran... all eager to express their feelings of gratitude to the support of the volunteers, themselves

refugees from many countries. This support group network (SGN) has been awarded by the European Union, and even welcomed the King and the Crown Princess by Adnan ALGhani, one of the founders of the support group, who explained about the work involved in supporting new arrivals and promoting integration. The support group is operated on an entirely voluntary basis, and has been formed by the asylum seekers themselves.

As part of our intervention in Sweden, we produced a series of short films featuring artists and musicians who identified as Syrians or Palestinian Syrians. These are two of the films produced by Qisetna in 2028:

- [Osama Derbas](#), musician and composer
- [Mohannad Sulaiman](#), sculptor

#### IV. Bilingual Digital Archive

In 2021, Qisetna continues growing its digital archive, an inclusive and safe place where Syrians can share their stories and memories. This open access archive is regularly updated by a team of young people, including Syrians. In 2022, we aim to expand the scope of our website to Turkey and make our content accessible to Turkish readers. We profoundly believe reading stories produced by Syrians in Turkish will contribute to minimise the social exclusion of many individuals and increase dialogue.

#### V. Stories from a Treasure || Storytelling Workshop

Thoughtful, powerful & deep. That's what was experienced at Qisetna's three-day [storytelling workshop](#) in Nottingham led by British storyteller Marion Kenny, which aims to showcase the importance & art of storytelling as a way to share and learn ideas, values and practices. Cultural and communication barriers ceased to exist in this workshop as the Syrian newcomers who settled in the UK and a mixture of active members of Nottingham found common ground, connected to their personal treasures.

But storytelling is much deeper than this.

Pain, sadness, happiness & surprise – These are just the handful of a whirlwind of emotions that the 13 participants experienced when relaying these stories in relation to their personal treasure. We find out how a simple object may seem insignificant to us, but to someone else it is a highly cherished, important artefact.

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As the stories reveal what each participant endured – both hardships and happy memories. An unprecedented amount of courage was displayed by the participants when it was their turn to share their story, giving them a first-time opportunity to face the pain.

The aims of the storytelling workshop were to help build confidence and a sense of identity, acknowledging the diversity as well as to use a story of everyday life to reflect on how storytelling can bring benefits to the people in the community. Storytelling paves a way to open up and tackle problems the Syrian refugees deal with -from social issues to processing trauma from war.

The Qisetna storytelling programme covered different exercises to help the participants feel comfortable, starting off with playing traditional Syrian music. Ice-breaking exercise is then carried out, getting a sense of the space; with eyes closed participants walk in a circle sensing other walking nearby. Then, one person would stand in the middle of the circle formed by the others, in which the middle person would close their eyes and fall, allowing the circle of participants to catch and push them to the next, as a trust building exercise. Afterwards, the participants would sit in a circle and pass their personal treasure along to the next person and explain to everyone why it is so important to them, which boosts their confidence and may provide them with an idea for their own story.

Then, the people were given basic techniques to propel their story forward, to create personal, fully formed characters and the musical, rhythmic language of storytelling. They told their stories in Arabic and English; a facilitator translated the story simultaneously. Some participants even brought their own musical instruments, including a violin, oud, flute, harp, guitar...which were tuned for a melody everyone knew. The group agreed that music would be incorporated in the stories, to truly feel the scene that they were to delineate.

Participants enjoyed an experience that led them to work together and perform music and stories for the first time. The performance was attended by 70 people and received great feedback. The performance was also bilingual which gave space to Nottingham newcomers Arabic speaking residents to come and connect to other people in their community.



December 2021