THE CO-ARCHIVING TOOLBOX

The Co-archiving Toolbox concept is developed by the research project Co-archiving (livingarchives.mah.se/collaborative-co-archiving), which aims at exploring and prototyping collaborative (co-) archiving practices inviting underrepresented voices to contribute to our common archives. The target group for the Co-archiving Toolbox is not only the unheard, but also archivists and museum professionals who are interested in assuming a co-archiving facilitation approach by engaging the subjects (the documented) in the shaping of archives. The underlying assumption is that inviting more people to contribute to the public archives would result in a more diverse and representative record of human existence.

The project is part of Living Archives (livingarchives.mau.se), which is an interdisciplinary research project at School of Arts and Communication (K3), Malmö University (mau.se) funded by the Swedish Research Council.

The toolbox was developed in collaboration with the Refugee Documentation Project run by the Regional Museum in Kristianstad, Malmö Museums, Kulturen Museum and the Department of Cultural Sciences, Lund University, aimed at documenting the emergent refugee situation in Sweden.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLBOX

The Co-archiving Toolbox is designed for archivists and museum professionals to use when collecting material in the field. It is meant to be administered by a public institution (a museum or an archive), left in the field for a period of two weeks, and used by the people who are being documented, that is, the 'subjects' of the archive. By applying the archiving practices included in the toolbox, they are invited to document their life situations from their point of view with little interference from the institution.

The toolbox is at its core self-instructive, but instructions describing the archiving practices are also attached to the box. When the planned documentation period is over, the toolbox and all the materials generated will be picked up by the museum or archive and curated by an archivist who will then add it to their collection. How the material will be used, meta-tagged, and stored is up to the institution to decide. It can potentially be used directly in an exhibition or be stored in the archives for future use.
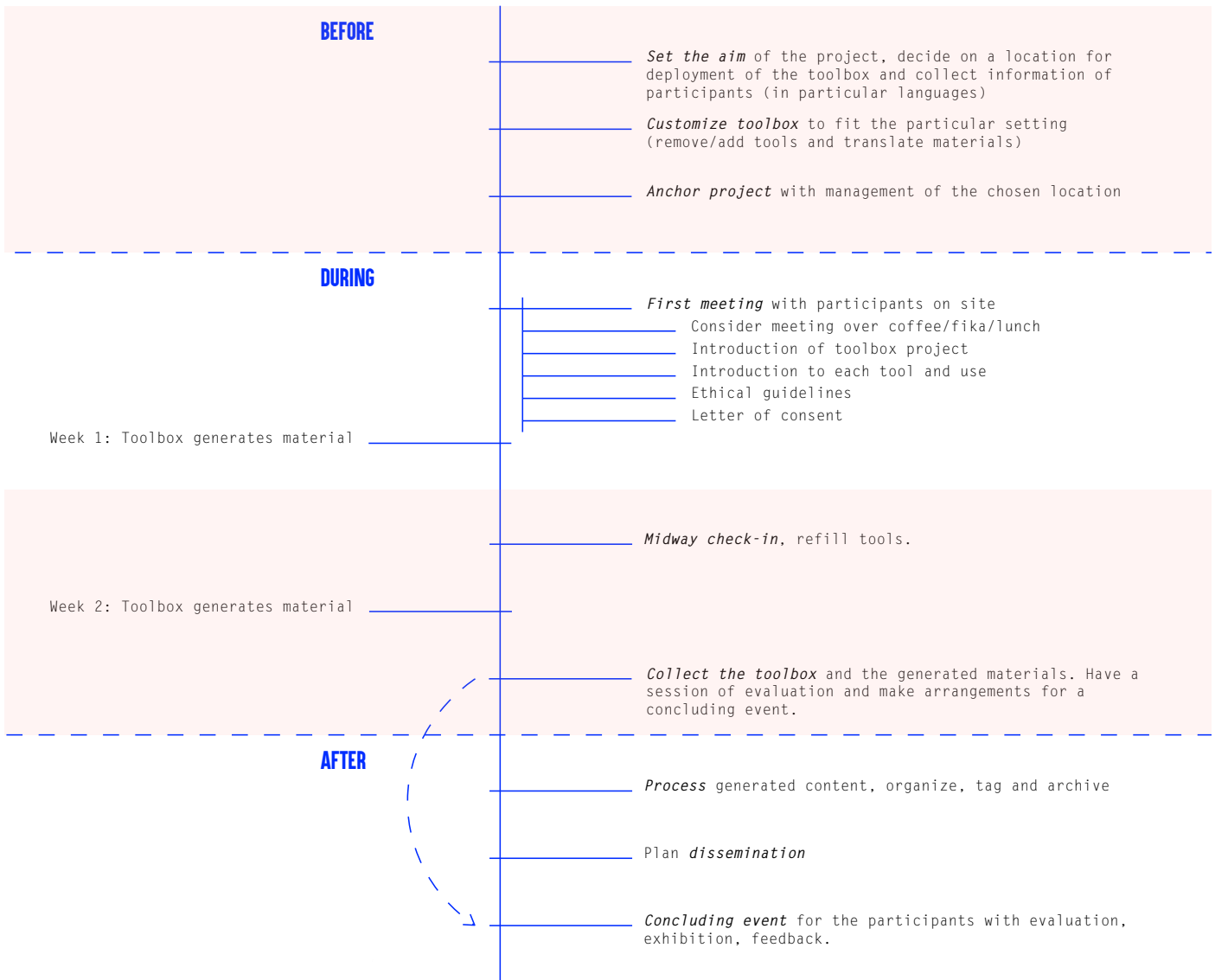
Co-archiving practices included in the toolbox Seven different co-archiving practices are made available for download, re-production and replication. All the material is designed to be applied by refugees, but the overall concept could of course be adjusted and applied to other contexts as well.

The co-archiving practices are designed to be open-ended, which means that the individuals who are being documented have a large degree of freedom to decide how they want to use them thus enabling them to participate in defining how their own stories and everyday lives are captured, recorded and archived. Some of the practices are for independent use, while others need facilitation and encourage social engagement. Some are more structured, while others are very open-ended. The practices generate archival material of different media formats: text, video, still images and audio.

IN THE FIELD

- Using the toolbox is a highly situated practice, an emphasis thus ought to be put on the importance of adjusting and adopting the toolbox to the situation and the subjects of the archive.
- The physical placement of the toolbox and the instructions is of great importance.
- An incentive for people to engage ought to be created, something that catch their interest and create motivation to contribute.
- The concept of the archive in itself is a subject where participants could have different cultural understandings of who participates in them and what power structures lie therein. Time should thus be allocated to discussing the concept of museums, archives, and the importance of creating conditions for everyone to contribute.
- Before entering the field, make sure that you have a plan for how to handle ethics around the capturing, storing, and sharing of data and stories? Who actually owns the data? How long can they be held? Can individuals later ask for their material to be pulled out of the archive? Etc.

THE TOOLBOX IN USE

BEFORE

Set the aim of the project, decide on a location for deployment of the toolbox and collect information of participants (in particular languages)

Customize toolbox to fit the particular setting (remove/add tools and translate materials)

Anchor project with management of the chosen location

DURING

First meeting with participants on site
Consider meeting over coffee/fika/lunch
Introduction of toolbox project
Introduction to each tool and use
Ethical guidelines
Letter of consent

Week 1: Toolbox generates material

Midway check-in, refill tools.

Week 2: Toolbox generates material

Collect the toolbox and the generated materials. Have a session of evaluation and make arrangements for a concluding event.

AFTER

Process generated content, organize, tag and archive

Plan *dissemination*

Concluding event for the participants with evaluation, exhibition, feedback.

MORE INFORMATION