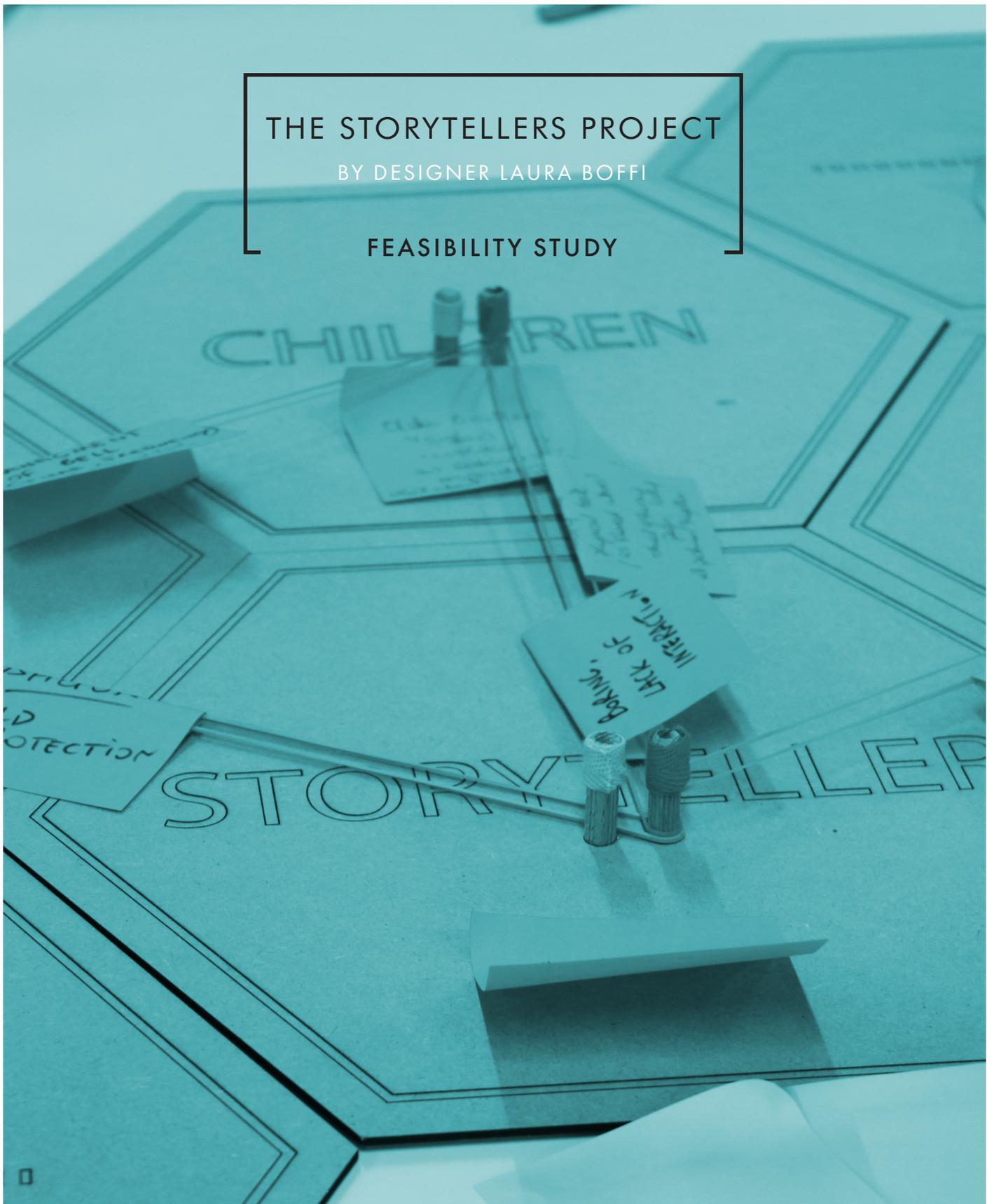


# THE STORYTELLERS PROJECT

BY DESIGNER LAURA BOFFI

## FEASIBILITY STUDY





## Table of content

Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	7
<b>I. CONCEPT &amp; OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>9</b>
The initiative and the expectations	11
Cost analysis and value creation	13
<b>II. EXPERIMENTAL SET UP &amp; TOOLS</b>	<b>15</b>
The structure of the study	17
Who I met, where and when	20
The tools	22
<b>III. STUDY IN THE NETHERLANDS</b>	<b>41</b>
International Child Development Initiatives	42
Bibliotheek BplusC	44
INTERVIEWS & CO-CREATION WITH LIBRARIANS	44
INTERVIEWS & CO-CREATION WITH SENIORS	46
<b>IV. STUDY IN ITALY</b>	<b>49</b>
Interview with Leyla Vahedi	50
Experience prototyping	52

Public library of Empoli	58
INTERVIEWS & CO-CREATION WITH A LIBRARIAN	58
CO-CREATION WITH POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS	60
CO-CREATION WITH PARENTS .....	66
Public library of Siena	68
CO-CREATION WITH POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS	68
CO-CREATION WITH PARENTS .....	70
<b>V. LESSONS LEARNT &amp; RESULTS</b>	<b>73</b>
Insights	75
Opportunity areas	113
<b>VI. IMPACTS ON NEXT STAGE</b>	<b>119</b>
Envisioning Phase 2- Prototyping	121
The importance of Designscapes	122
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>123</b>

THE STORYTELLERS PROJECT  
Feasibility Study

By Laura Boffi  
Interaction & service designer

---

<https://www.the-storytellers-project.org>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This feasibility study has been funded by the EU project Designscares, under the Horizon 2020 project. The project which is studied in this report is The Storytellers Project, a self-initiated project I have been working on since 2017.

During the couple of years between the generation of the concept and the feasibility study (developed in the spring of 2019), the project received support and feedback from private persons and companies. I thank them because without their contribution I would have never reached a good enough level of development to be able to submit to the Phase 1 call of Designscares and win the grant. Those persons and companies are in no particular order: Mario Conci, Antonio Grillo, Mirco Piccin, Fablab Castelfranco Veneto, Makebot, Storytel, Marco Ferrario, Cristina Bartoli, Giulia Cortellesi, Tony Fontana, Roberta Franceschetti, Monica Milani, Aristide Ciufolini, Laura Marcolini, Letizia Di Maio, Elena Colombo, Filomena Scaccia, Antonia Casafina, Cristina Prospero.

I also thank all the participants who were interviewed and participated in the co-creation sessions and experience prototyping. Their genuine enthusiasm, criticism and feedback is the fuel of my work.

## INTRODUCTION

This Feasibility study is about The Storytellers Project, is a library service connecting a community of senior readers to children and their families for remote reading aloud sessions. Children uses the Storybell robot at home to connect with seniors willing to read, the Storybell robot transmits their reading live allowing them to speak as if on the phone. The main aim of the project is to generate intergenerational bonds among people belonging to different age groups and to foster physical encounters among them in the local community.

I organized this study in Italy and The Netherlands and engaged with potential users and stakeholders, such as seniors, parents, a child, librarians, child literature and development experts. I travelled to Leiden (NL), Empoli, Siena and Rome (IT) in order to run my research interventions. The project workshops were hosted by 3 public libraries throughout Italy and The Netherlands. Through semistructured interviews, co-creation sessions and experience prototyping, I tried to test and develop further the initial concept idea and its touchpoints. Several tools were designed and produced in order to facilitate my workshops with people.

Collaborations with partners have been set up and the gained experience of working together is fundamental for me in order to narrow down my selection of collaborators for the next stage

of the project (Phase 2- Prototyping).

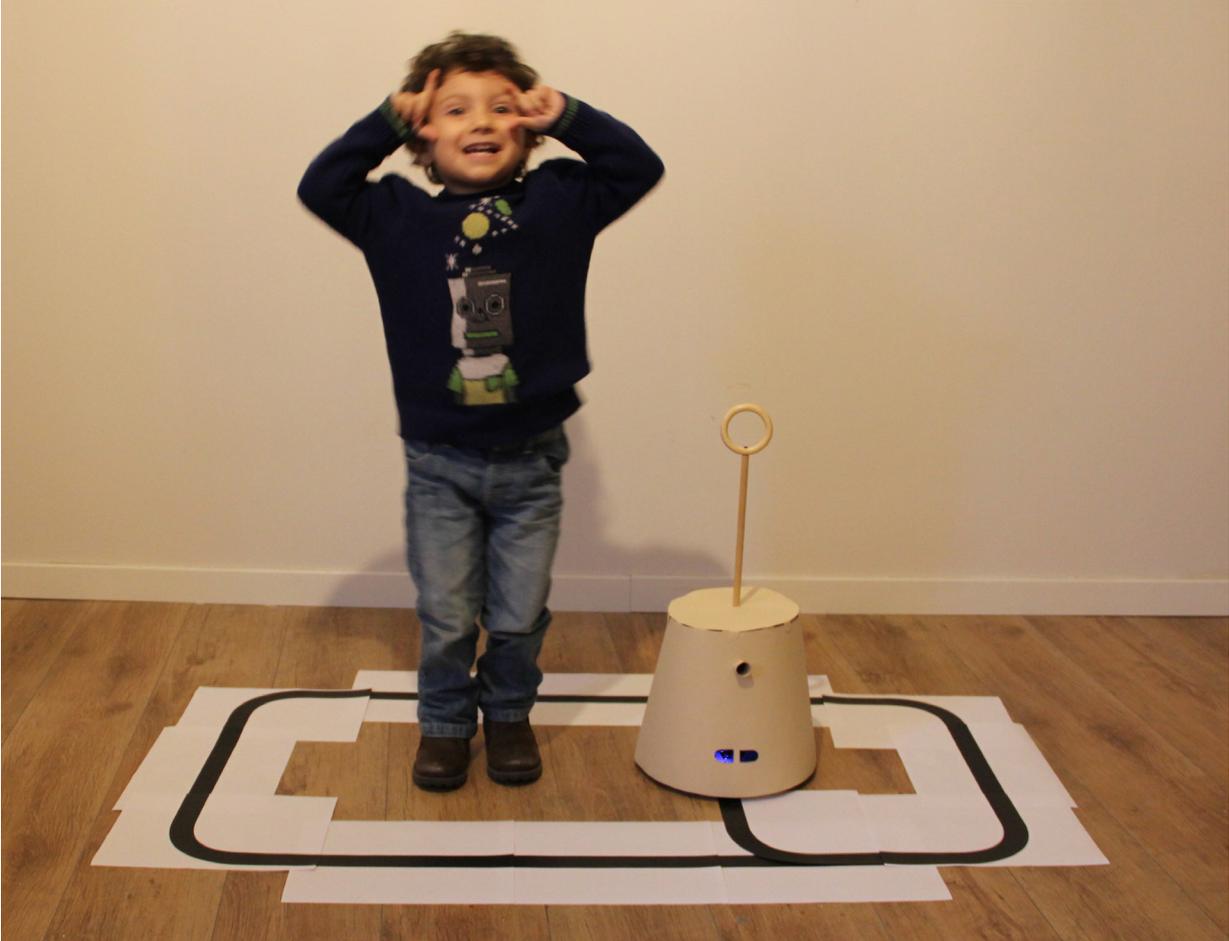
Thanks to the Feasibility study I learnt about the motivations of the different potential users to join the project and managed to highlight new actors in the service. As a result of this Phase 1, I synthesized 18 insights and 5 new opportunity areas, which constitute the main result of this work.

New opportunity areas are the departing point for the next iteration of the concept, which will be done at a higher resolution in the next phase of the project.

The user journey needs to take into consideration the needs of seniors in volunteering in the community, and thus being visible and recognized by other persons as Storytellers. On the other hand, parents are willing to engage in physical encounters if their child is interested in knowing a beloved Storyteller. Voice plays a main role in reading aloud remotely, thus a new kind of *physical book* may need to be designed to enable different kind of reading interactions that do not simply mimic co-presence reading, but enrich the remote reading session in a mutual and meaningful way.

The design workshops in Italy had a local resonance and I was invited to a tv interview to talk about the project and the design driven process to which the local libraries took part.

I.  
CONCEPT & OBJECTIVES



## THE INITIATIVE AND THE EXPECTATIONS

This Feasibility study is a fieldwork and co-creation initiative for The Storytellers project.

The Storytellers Project is a concept for a new library service connecting a community of senior readers to children and their families for remote reading aloud sessions. Children uses the Storybell robot at home to connect with seniors willing to read, the Storybell robot transmits their reading live allowing them to speak as if on the phone. At the moment the feasibility study has started, some explorative fieldwork and co-creation with parents, a writer and an illustrator has already been undertaken, but more was needed in order to gain in sights for potential users and stakeholders to develop the concept further.

The initiative was structured into 3 main activities:

- Learn
- Co- create
- Experience prototyping

These activities addressed librarians, adults readers, parents of children between 2 to 7 years old and a child of 5 years old, and were conducted among Italy and The Netherlands.

A 3 years old child with the very first paper prototype of the Storybell.

The Learn part consisted in semi-structured interviews with participants and focused on their daily life/practice,

motivations and values as retired adults, parents, librarians and experts of childhood development and intergenerational learning.

The Co-create part consisted of hands-on exercises to probe the interactions within the actors of the service suggested by The Storytellers Project.

The Experience prototyping part was a first low fidelity service rehearsal between a 5 y.o. child and a volunteer senior reader.

To facilitate the co-creation activities and the experience prototyping, several tools were designed and produced precisely for the scope by myself. The tools will be described along the report.

The expectations driving the three fold Feasibility study initiative were:

- to inform the project with contextual and real people insights on their actual life and practice (Learn)
- to probe the envisioned interactions of the concept with potential users and stakeholders feedback (Co-create)
- to develop the concept further by suggesting new directions and envisioning new interactions/touchpoints (Co-create)
- to test the envisioned remote reading experience and first contact between the child and the adult reader (Experience prototyping).

## COST ANALYSIS AND VALUE CREATION

This Feasibility study has been awarded a 5.000 euros grant to be conducted. I decided to allocate the money in the following way:

- payment for collaborating experts/associations/libraries
- research travel
- printing and tools productions
- payment for myself

The value I aimed to create through the Feasibility study was primarily for collaborators as potential partners of a future consortium. By paying for their expert contribution, I wanted to deliver them my commitment towards the project and the importance I attribute to their work as collaborators in the project. I wanted to demonstrate to them my ability to fund raising as well as wanting to test their professionalism as potential partners to deliver me good work.

This means that the value I wanted to harvest in this first phase is intangible and it would set the basis for any future bigger collaboration of the project. In particular, the value created is:

- of the project and of the principal ideator from the perspectives of potential partners
- of the potential project consortium from the perspectives of future investors/funding institutions

	NAME	PAYMENT (EUROS)	TOTAL (EUROS)
COLLABORATORS	Leyla Vahedi, Cartastraccia	150	2050
	ICDI	400	
	Bibliotheek BplusC	500	
	Promocultura + Biblioteca Comunale di Empoli	500	
	Promocultura + Biblioteca Comunale di Siena	500	
TRAVEL	Research travel	1000	1000
PRODUCTION	Printing & tools	450	450
AUTHOR (MYSELF)	Design work and management	1500	1500
		<b>TOT</b>	5000

II.  
EXPERIMENTAL SET UP & TOOLS



## THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study was structured into 3 main activities:

- Learn
- Co- create
- Experience prototyping

This allowed me to iterate and expand my fieldwork into different contexts and to develop the concept forward through co-creation workshops and initial experience prototype.

The participants I involved are divided into:

- potential users, such as adult readers, parents and a child
- super users, such as *professional* senior volunteers
- stakeholders, such as librarians
- child development and literature experts

The contexts in which the study was conducted are 4 different cities in 2 different European countries, Italy and The Netherlands. In Italy the study took place in Rome, Siena and Empoli while in The Netherlands in the city of Leiden. Then public libraries of Siena, Empoli and Leiden hosted co-creation workshops, while the European library in Rome hosted an interview with an expert. The cities were chosen according to their size, the relevance of their libraries in the context and the interest of the libraries in hosting the project.

On the top: the outside life of Public Library degli Intronati in Siena; below: the inside historic collection of the library.

	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>LEARN</b>
<b>POTENTIAL USERS</b>	Adult readers	IT   NL
	Parents	IT   NL
	Child	
<b>SUPER USERS</b>	Professional senior volunteers	IT   NL
<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b>	Librarians	IT   NL
<b>EXPERTS</b>	Child literature expert	IT
	Child development experts	NL

Participants were asked their consent about the use of their data and pictures/video taken during the research session. The responsible person for the handling and use of their data is myself as the author of the study.

CO-CREATE	EXPERIENCE PROTOTYPING
IT	IT
IT   NL	IT
	IT
IT	
IT   NL	
NL	

The scheme of the structure of the study

## WHO I MET, WHERE AND WHEN

	PARTICIPANTS	ROME (IT)	LEIDEN
		12-04-2019	16-04-2019
<b>POTENTIAL USERS</b> 22	Adult readers		
	Parents		
	Child		
<b>SUPER USERS</b> 04	<i>Professional senior volunteers</i>		
<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b> 05	Librarians		
<b>EXPERTS</b> 03	Child literature expert	1	
	Child development experts		2

During this study I engaged with a total of 30 persons within The Netherlands and Italy. They consisted of potential users (4 of which can be considered super users), librarians, experts of the field.

N (NL)	REMOTE LOCATIONS (IT)	EMPOLI (IT)	SIENA (IT)
17-04-2019	03-05-2019	08-05-2019	09-05-2019
2*	1	9	2*
2	1	2	2
	1		
2*			2*
3		1	1

A remote locations category has been added in the scheme in order to count the participants of the experience prototyping activity. The participants were in their respective cities Rieti and Cesena in Italy.

## THE TOOLS

	PARTICIPANTS	STORYBELL	HEXAGONS	S
<b>POTENTIAL USERS</b> 22	Adult readers	IT   NL		
	Parents	IT   NL		
	Child	IT		
<b>SUPER USERS</b> 04	<i>Professional senior volunteers</i>	IT   NL		
<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b> 05	Librarians	IT   NL		
<b>EXPERTS</b> 03	Child literature expert			
	Child development experts	NL	NL	

Nine research tools were designed and produced in order to be used during the co-creation and experience prototyping sessions. They run from low fidelity sketches of wireframes, such as the Storytellers profile, to design games, such as the Hexagons tool. Co-creation tools and early prototypes enabled myself to sketch interactions, gain contextual insights from real people and to develop the concepts further with “just enough” technological effort and resources. In particular, co-

STORYTELLERS PROFILE	IDEAL STORYTELLERS JOURNEY	READING MAP	CHILD PROFILE	PICTURES SCENARIO	ROLLED STORY SCENARIO	EXPERIENCE PROTOTYPING VIDEO
	IT	IT		NL		IT
IT   NL			IT		NL	IT
	IT	IT				IT
IT				NL	NL	IT
					IT	
				NL	NL	

creation tools helped to go beyond “hearing” people towards incorporating them in the design team for the session. Such tools empower participants to step into the design process and show me how to proceed. I used them in a flexible way according to the single research session and the different participants joining in. Each single tool focuses on a particular research question I would like to investigate.

In the next pages, a showcase of each single tool will follow.

## TOOL 1

### STORYBELL



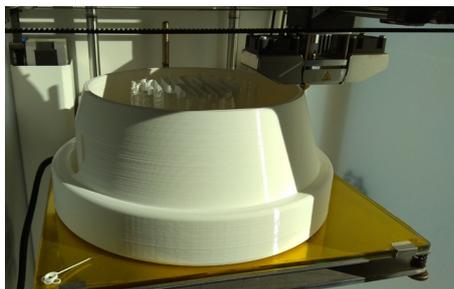
A low fidelity prototype of the Storybell enabling shaking, voice transmission and voice receiving. It was built in order to make a first experience prototyping of the remote reading between a child and a remote reader.

#### WHAT TO PROBE

The engagement of the child and of the senior reading remotely, using a Storybell, without or with a picture book; the shape and weight of the Storybell; the affordances and the playability in shaking it from the child point of view.

#### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

Shape; sound; voice transmission and voice receiving; handle; weight.



## 3D PRINTING

The bell shape was 3d printed thanks to the collaboration with FabLab Castelfranco Veneto.



## SOUNDS & VOICE

The bell sound was produced by embedding a real bell inside the shape. Voice transmission and voice receiving was enabled by a bluetooth speaker hidden inside the bell.



## THE CALL

The call needs to be simulated by pairing a phone with the bluetooth speaker. The call is done manually from the phone when the child shakes the bell.



## CHILDREN & THE BELL

The shape and the scale of the prototype fits children imagination because they compare it with a *real* church bell.

## TOOL 2

# HEXAGONS



A co-creation tool to visualize relationships between the service users and stakeholders and to discover new actors in the service. Participants sketch relationships through rubber bands and qualify them through post-its. Relationships can be positive or critical, and so rubber bands can bond green or pink poles.

### WHAT TO PROBE

Beneficial relationships and tensions between all the actors in the service; identify new actors.

### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

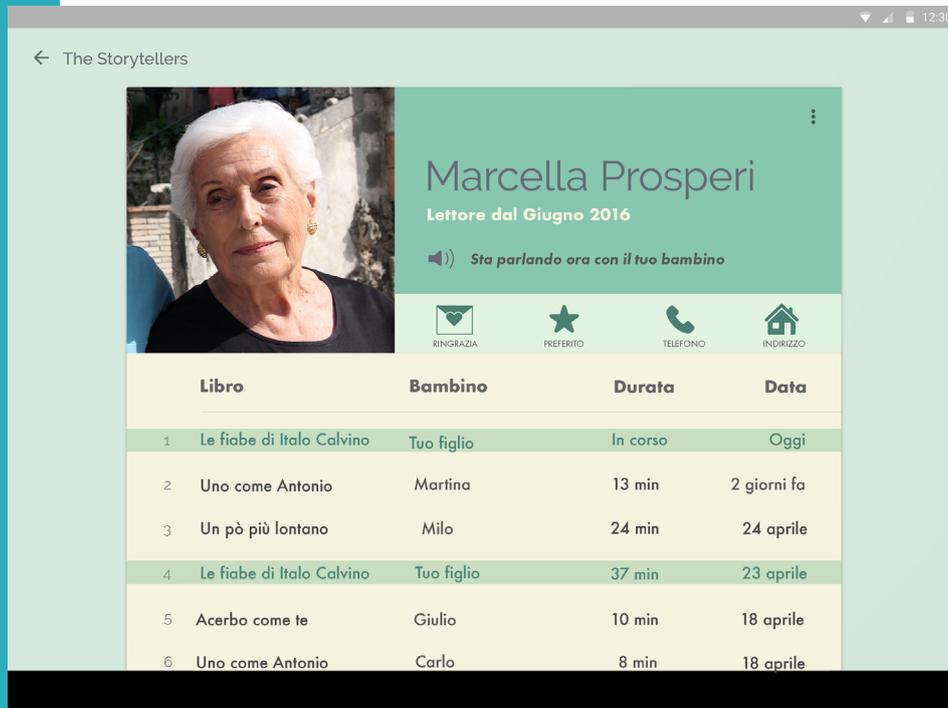
Relationships through physical rubber bands.



The tool as it was used in the co-creation session with ICDI experts in Leiden (NL)

## TOOL 3

## STORYTELLERS PROFILE



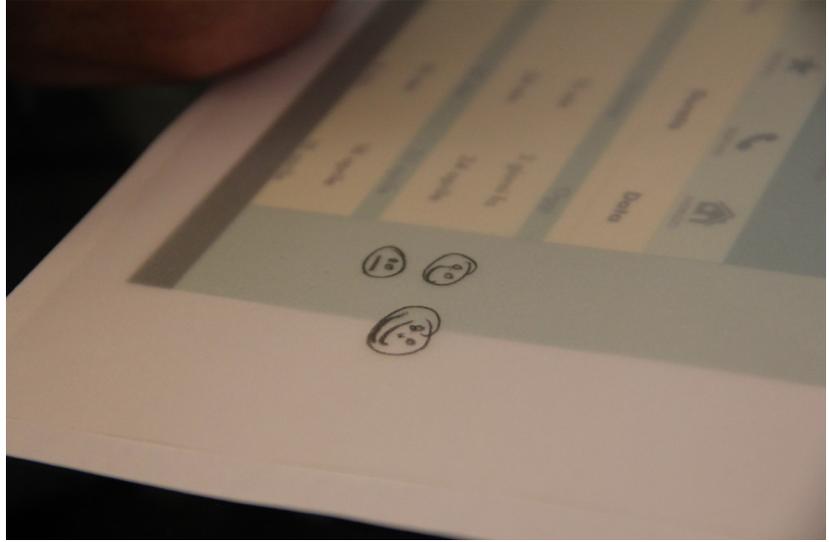
An early prototype of the Storytellers profile as it may be visible from the parents app. Some features are sketched, such as the address, in order to stimulate comments and inspire participants.

## WHAT TO PROBE

What information parents would like to have about the Storytellers; how the profile could be made in order to spark physical encounters between the Storytellers and the families.

## WHAT WAS SKETCHED

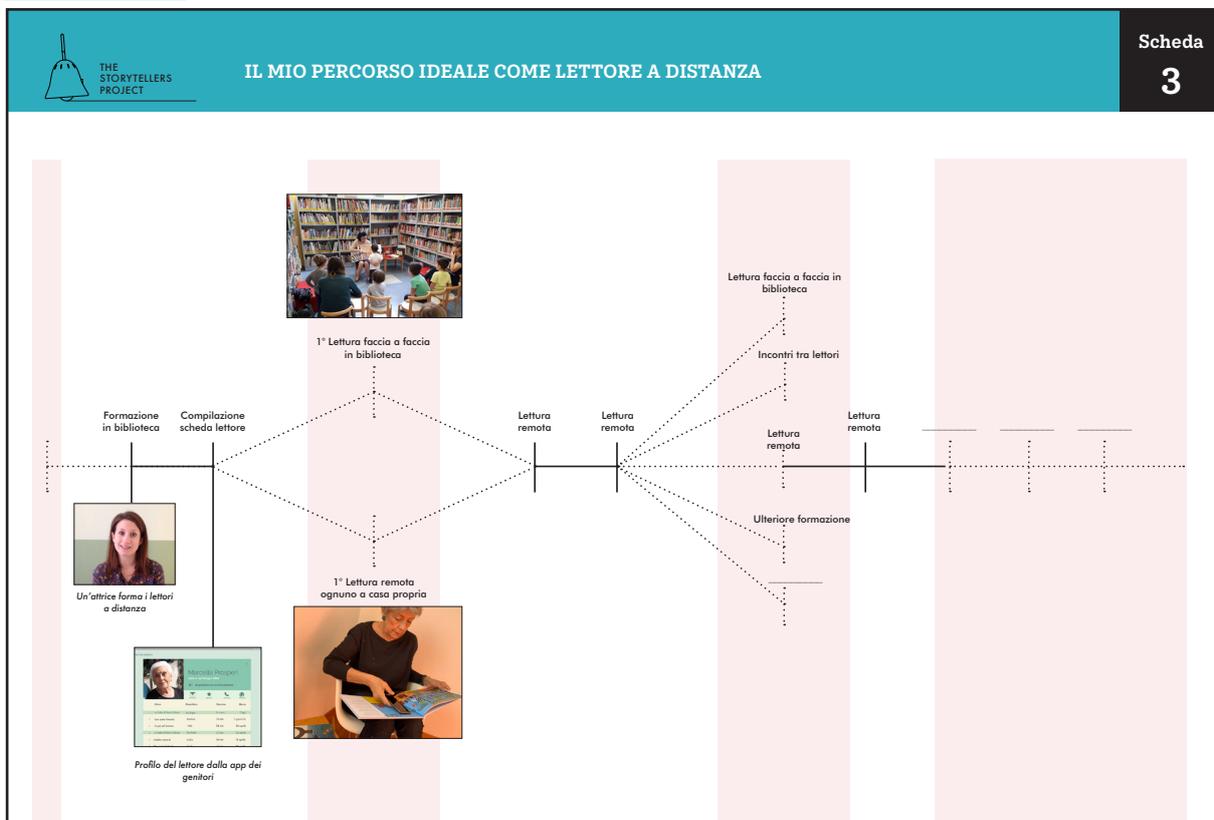
A tablet screen about a fictional Storyteller profile.



The tool as it was used in the co-creation session with parents and a librarian in Italy.

## TOOL 4

# STORYTELLERS IDEAL JOURNEY



A co-creation tool to sketch subjectives journey as a Storytellers, from training to performing reading aloud sessions remotely. Participants were given the template and could draw their ideal journey.

### WHAT TO PROBE

How to manage the first reading sessions; how to balance remote encounters with physical ones; how to keep the Storytellers community engaged; how to favour bonding between Storytellers and families

### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

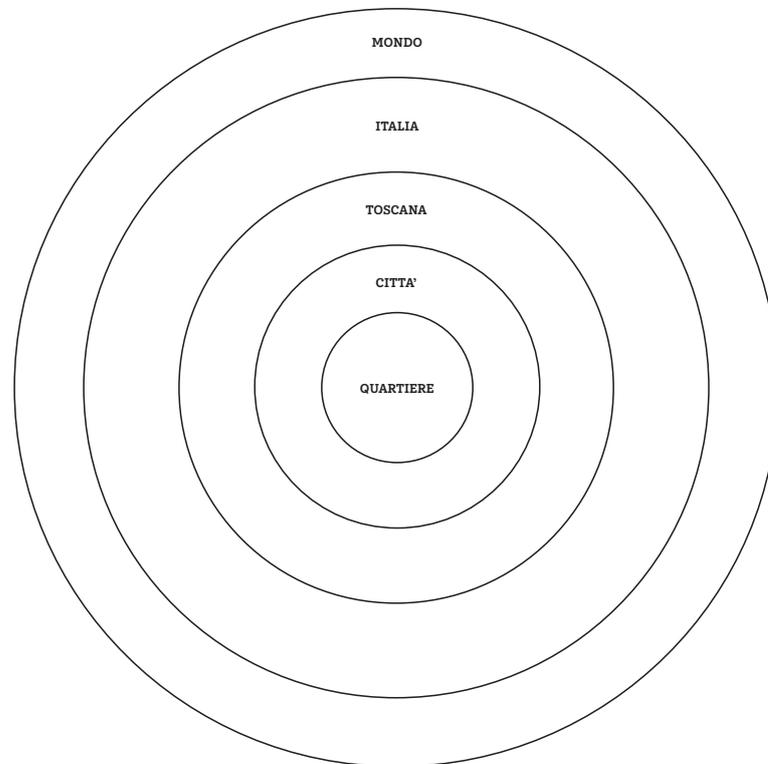
A rough, uncomplete journey was drafted in a chronological order. People could fill the gaps and give a preference when options were given.

The tool as it was used and discussed in the co-creation session with potential Storytellers in Italy



## TOOL 5

### READING MAP



A co-creation tool to reflect about how remotely as a Storyteller you are ready to read. Participants are asked to write their name according to the own preference about children's calls they would like to receive.

#### WHAT TO PROBE

What *remote* means to potential Storytellers; how far they can go remotely.

#### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

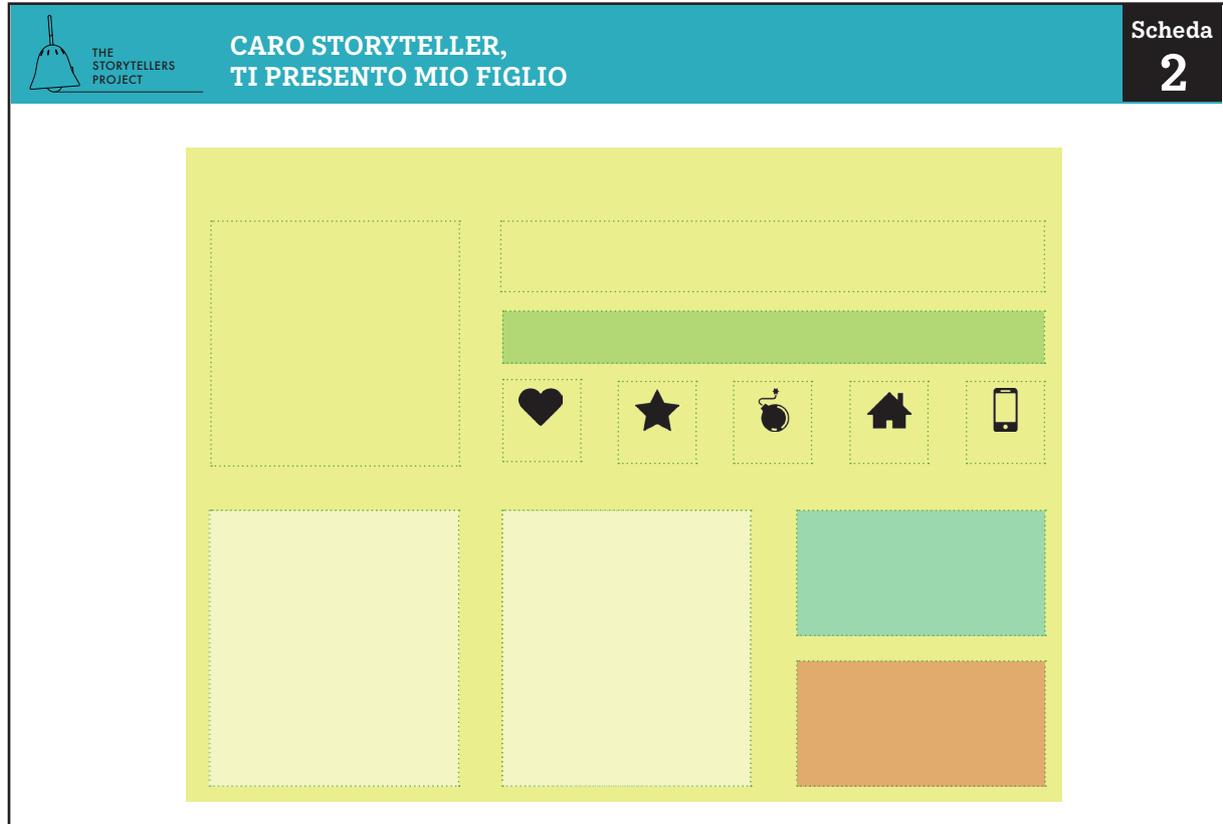
A map from the neighbourhood to the world.



The tool as it was used and discussed in the co-creation session with potential Storytellers in Italy

## TOOL 6

## CHILD PROFILE



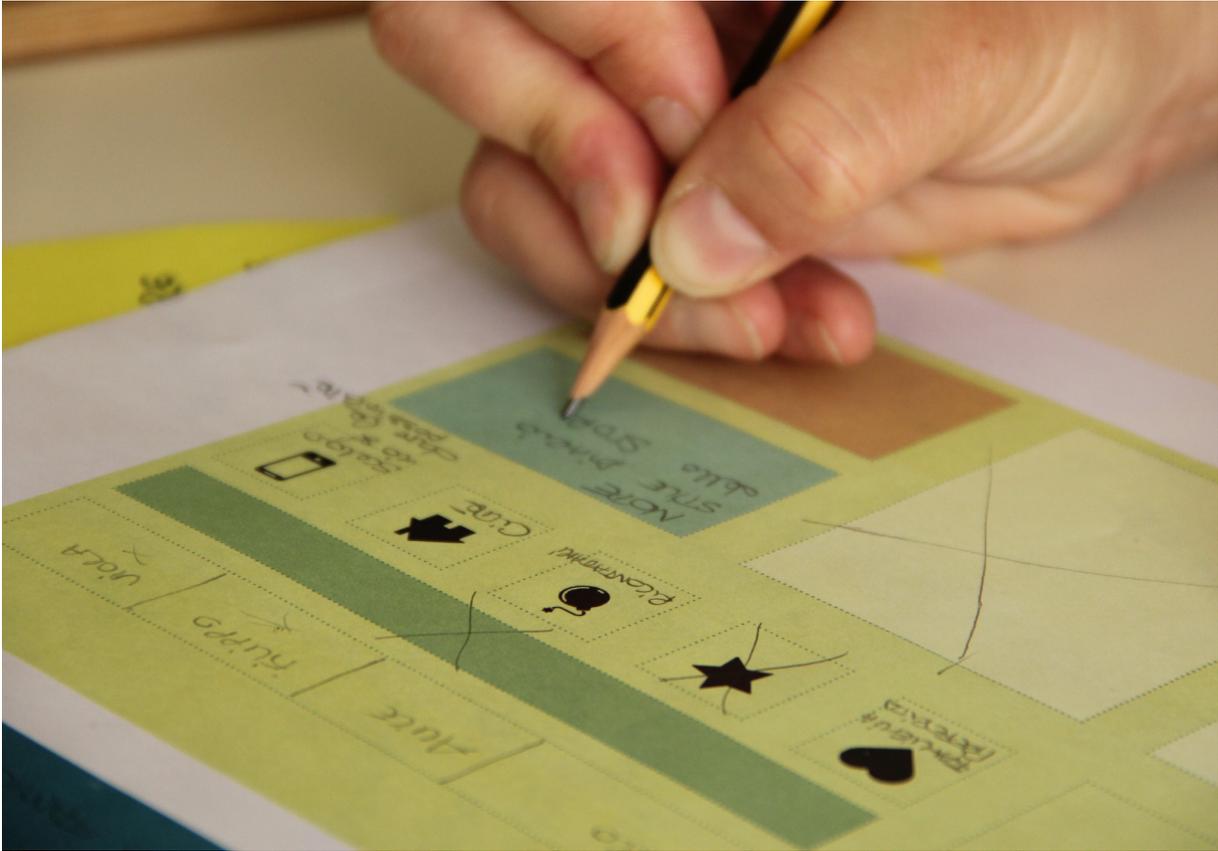
A co-creation tools to question if even a child or family profile should exist, so that Storytellers could look at it. Just empty boxes to fill for parents.

## WHAT TO PROBE

The idea of having a profile of the child or of the family available for Storytellers to consult.

## WHAT WAS SKETCHED

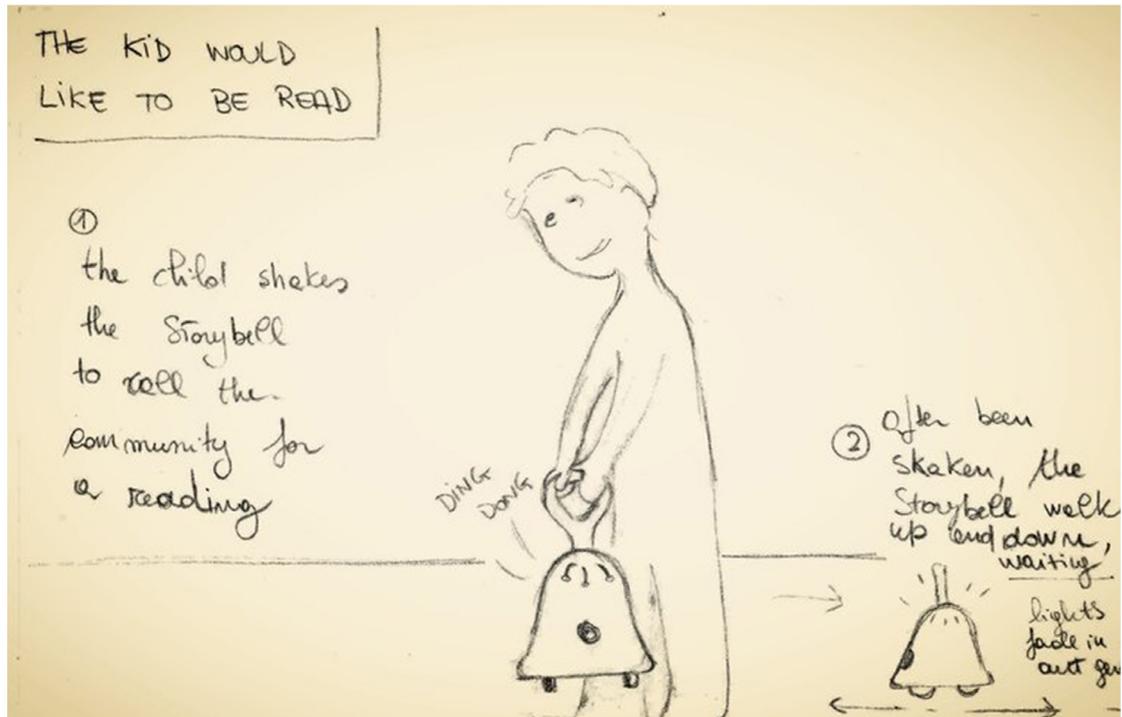
Just a wireframe for a tablet screen.



The tool as it was used in the co-creation session with a mother in Italy

## TOOL 7

## PICTURES SCENARIO



An early prototype of the concept as a set of drawings illustrating a scenario of use. It was printed and shown to potential users in the first co-creation sessions, when the experience prototyping video was not available yet.

## WHAT TO PROBE

The idea of the service; the idea of having a social robot at home.

## WHAT WAS SKETCHED

Just a set of 4 drawings illustrating the most important envisioned interactions in the service.



The tool as it was used in the co-creation session with a librarian in Leiden; NL

## TOOL 8

# ROLLED STORY SCENARIO



An early prototype of a new kind of book in the shape of a rolled story. The idea is at its initial stage and it was conveyed to participants as a physical scenario at a small scale.

### WHAT TO PROBE

The idea of having a physical rolled book at home with the child, which would come alive only if the remote Storyteller was performing the reading through the Storybell.

### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

Physical rough figurines and props, small scale.

## TOOL 9

# EXPERIENCE PROTOTYPING VIDEO



An edited 4 minutes video of the experience prototype which happened between the child Romeo and the storyteller Aristide as part of this research.

### WHAT TO PROBE

The idea of the Storytellers remote reading as it really happened in an experiment.

### WHAT WAS SKETCHED

A video was edited from the real experience. The video can be seen on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/334614958>).



The BplusC library in Leiden, NL

III.  
STUDY IN THE NETHERLANDS

# INTERVIEW & CO-CREATION WITH CHILD DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS

INTERNATIONAL  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
ORGANIZATION  
- ICDI -



GIULIA



MARGARET

ICDI is a knowledge organization in psychosocial development of children and young people growing up in difficult circumstances. They develop intergenerational projects where seniors and children do activities together.

## 01

### THE PARTICIPANT

Giulia and Margaret are two ICDI experts. They have a great experience in intergenerational projects. In ICDI they developed and run the TOY project - Together Old and Young. Their work focuses on creating children development projects, training for partner associations and education for local people implementing projects in remote areas, far from NL.

## 02

### THE SETTING

The interview took place at the ICDI headquarters in Leiden, NL.

## 03

### THE TOOLS

A semistructured interview plot was created in order to guide the conversation. The plot focuses on: the role of ICDI in intergenerational projects and on the attributes that make a project truly intergenerational. Giulia and Margaret then worked with the Hexagons tools to visualize the relationships among the different actors of The Storytellers Project.





“ You need to provide occasions for the different generations to meet and get to know each other, no matter if a child will actually know the Storyteller reading to her/him remotely. ”

## KEY LEARNINGS

- Two new actors in the service need to be added: schools and a privacy/children rights authority
- In the TOY project, ICDI had to cope with parents assumptions that children would feel scared by old people
- Physical meetings between old and young are important for an intergenerational project and need to take place beyond the remote reading aloud sessions
- An intergenerational project takes into account the needs of each generation and creates benefits for each one as well
- An intergenerational project links generations
- Storytellers could become social grandparents for children not having their grandparents living near them
- Storytellers could read to group of children at schools
- Children’s grandparents should be invited to join
- The service could be very convenient to busy parents

## INTERVIEW & CO-CREATION WITH LIBRARIANS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- BplusC -  
LEIDEN



ELS



BAS



JORIEN

The interview part with Dutch librarians focused on the work volunteers do in the library. They know volunteers (and their motivations) better than everyone else and watch over the work they do with little children.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANT

Els, Bas and Jorien are 3 librarians working in BplusC. Jorien is specialized in children books and curates that part of the library. Bas coordinates volunteers and has direct contact with users at the library desk.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The interview took place at the public library in Leiden, NL.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

A semistructured interview plot was created in order to guide the conversation. The plot focuses on: the interviewee's own experience of reading to children, Dutch culture of doing volunteer work and on the role of senior volunteers at the library. They also reacted on the Pictures scenario, the Rolled story prototype and on the Storybell.





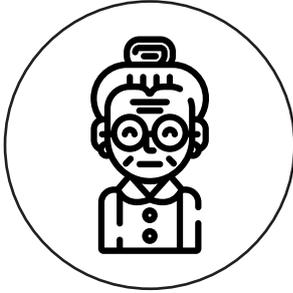
“ Volunteers refer to us that it is really important for them to create a relationship with the child, to understand if the little one likes him/her or not.”

## KEY LEARNINGS

- The Storybell is useful to mark a moment, the ritual.
- The library promotes STEM education and the Storybell could be used in the library for special reading session (not only at home)
- Pictures are a possibility for the child to elicit back to the reader
- In the library volunteers are treated as colleagues and their work is pretty much appreciated and celebrated. The library offers courses run by trained volunteers
- A physical reading session to children is announced through the speakers in the library, so that everyone knows it is happening
- The Storytellers project really needs to create a new way of remote interactive reading, it should not try to simulate what happens when you read in the same place. It would be too much of a stretch.
- The service should have a local connotation so people would be encouraged to meet physically as well
- When Jorien reads aloud to children, she prefers to show the images after reading the paragraph, so children are stimulated to imagine the scene

## INTERVIEW & CO-CREATION WITH POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- BplusC -  
LEIDEN



TRUS



HUBERT

Both of them are very active seniors. Trus is reading a lot to her grandchildren and to friends of them, who visit her just for that. She has lots of books at home. Hubert runs Dutch courses at the library as a volunteer teacher.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANT

Trus and Hubert can be considered super users. Trus has a great daily reading activity at home with her grandchildren and their friends or at schools; Hubert is a *professional* volunteer at the library.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The interview took place at the public library in Leiden, NL.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

A semistructured interview plot was created in order to guide the conversation. The plot focuses on: the interviewee's own experience of reading to children, own experience of doing volunteer work and on the motivation/reward of doing such activities. They also reacted to the Pictures scenario and on the Storybell.

“ For me it is really important to see the children’s faces while I read, to sit her/him on my legs...At home, I do not even like to use technologies such as Facetime... ”

## KEY LEARNINGS

- Seeing each other is missing, so The Storytellers project needs to create a powerful interaction that can be as strong as that
- Storytellers could start reading on the phone with children they know already and have a kind of relationships with, in combination with physical reading.
- The Storytellers could gift the Storybell to children who need to be read to
- Volunteering makes people feel useful for the community and suits a kind of egocentricity
- Volunteers maybe even like to look for their own students, children to read to
- In Leiden library there are more volunteer coaches than students: lots of seniors want to be a volunteer
- Reading on the phone seems to be too impersonal to interviewed seniors
- Still, the interviewed seniors would like the project to keep on doing the investigation and to be kept upodated about the next steps



IV.  
STUDY IN ITALY

## INTERVIEW WITH LEYLA VAHEDI



LEYLA, CHILDREN LITERATURE EXPERT

Leyla is a children literature expert who co-runs the Cartastraccia cultural association in Rome. I interviewed her on the relationship between children and books and on the experience of reading aloud to children.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANT

Leyla Vahedi was interviewed as an expert of reading to children and of children literature. She has extensive experience in running reading sessions and workshops with kids. She is also interested in how digital technologies can expand the reading experiences to children.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The interview took place at the Biblioteca Europea in Rome, who kindly hosted the session. The interview was recorded.

### 03

#### THE TOOL

A semistructured interview plot was created in order to guide the conversation. The plot focuses on: the interviewee's own experience of reading to children, the child- book relationship, the many kinds of physical books available to kids, the reading aloud session as a ritual, an overview of a books selection.





**“ The book *Dalla chioma* is a revolution for me: it takes interactions that are proper of a tablet and brings them inside a physical book!”**

## KEY LEARNINGS

- A picture book has multiple communication codes: it has text & pictures, it has the physical properties of a book, it has a rhythm.
- Oral narration is different from reading a book: having a written text makes a difference.
- The book is a tool. It stands in the middle of the relationship between the reader and the child.
- Reading is to relate to others, to all the voices that you find in the book.
- Sometimes children find answers to their multiple questions in the stories you read to them. Children are super curious, also about science.
- App books somehow simulate interactions that are similar to the ones that physical books create between the reader and the child. The way you read is similar because most of the time the app books are designed after the book.

## EXPERIENCE PROTOTYPING



ROMEO, 5



ARISTIDE, 70



LAURA, MOTHER, 38

A child and a reader performed for the first time a remote reading session using an early prototype of the Storybell. The mother was the facilitator.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

A 5 y.o. child from Italy (my son) and his 38 y.o. mother (myself). A 70 y.o. senior as reader. He was recruited before the project was awarded the grant and followed the video tutorials for becoming a volunteering reader.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The mother and the child were sitting inside the child's toy house and the mother introduced the Storybell to the child. The child shook the bell. As soon as the the child and the reader started talking, the mother left the toy house and watched the session from the room.

### 03

#### THE TOOL

The tool used was the low fidelity prototype of the Storybell. It was given to the mother and the mother introduced it to the child.

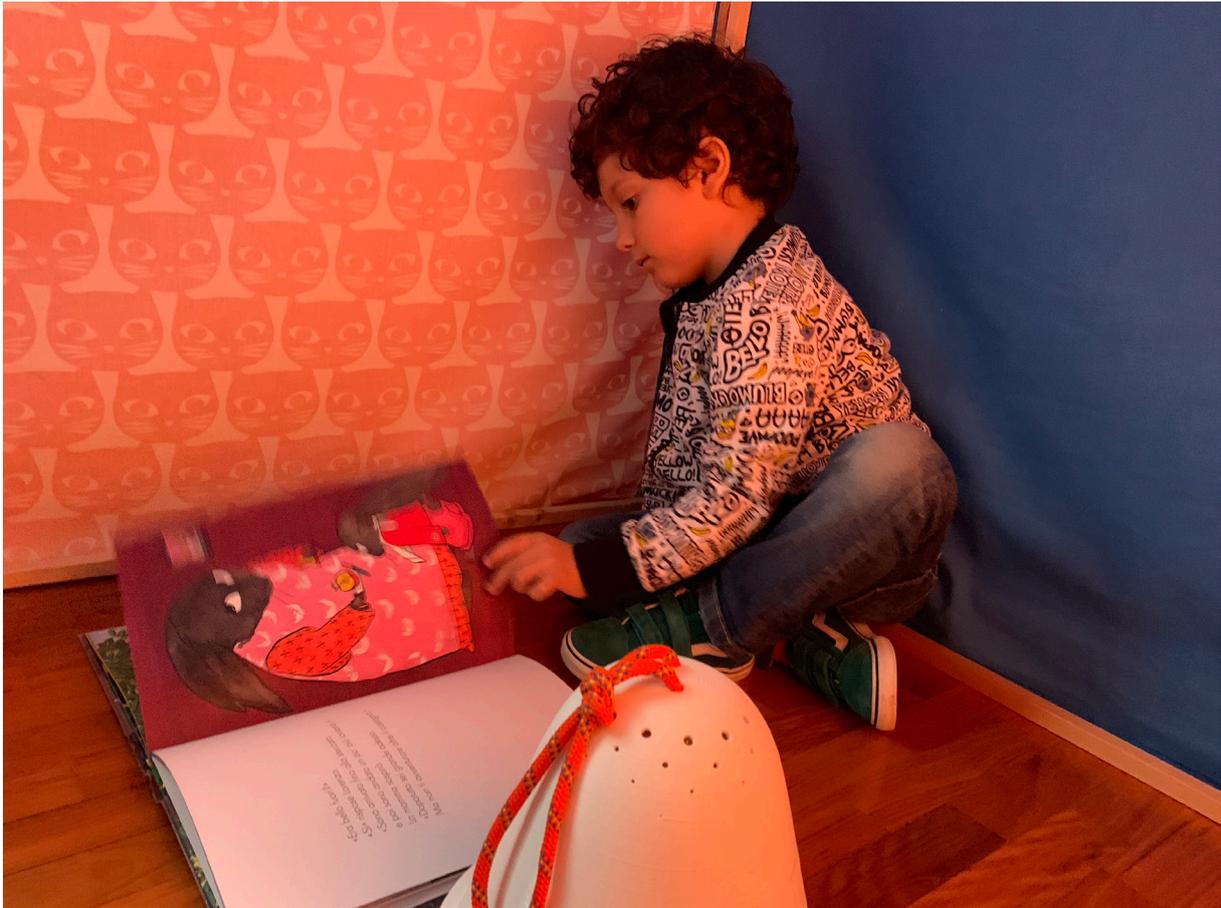
### 04

#### BACKSTAGE & EXPERIMENT DESIGN

The reader and the mother agreed on a day and a time to perform the reading. The reader was instructed to read first a story without pictures and then an illustrated book, a copy of which was also given to the child to follow the story. The reader was explained that for the illustrated story the child could follow with a copy of the book, but wouldn't know when to turn the pages.

The sessions lasted around 40 minutes.

After the session, the reader was phoned by myself, as the researcher, and shared his comments. The child was instead asked by his father about his experience and the comments were collected.



## KEY LEARNINGS

- The child enjoyed the experience. was concentrated and didn't leave the Storybell unattended for the whole duration of the reading. The child even asked for a second reading
- The child tried to ask things related to the reading to his reader, but the microphone and speaker of the Storybell were not working fine and made the comprehension of the story and any conversation really difficult (the child had to scream to the bell)
- The child managed to follow the illustrated story and turned the pages when instructed by the reader
- The reader tried to engage the child in a conversation asking questions about the story, such as "Are you understanding? What do you think about the rabbit in the story? "
- The reader reported it was difficult to hear what the child was saying to him (because of technical functioning of the microphone in the Storybell)



“ I enjoyed talking to Aristide, my new friend, even if I didn't really understood the whole story because I couldn't hear well...”

Romeo, 5 y.o.

“ I want to send Aristide the books I like so he can read me those stories.”

Romeo, 5 y.o.

“ Sometimes it seems I was talking to myself because the child couldn't hear me well. I need to know he is still there, listening...Maybe an adult could be next to him.”

Aristide, 70 y.o.



- The reader was trying to understand if the child was engaged by asking questions. Being distant made difficult for him to understand if he was engaged and focused
- The reader said that maybe an adult might be next to the child to ensure that the child is engaged
- Both asked questions to each other to know more about themselves at the beginning and at the end of the session. No formal or previous introductions seemed to be needed
- They said to each other to meet again for another reading session in 2 days
- The child reported that the story without images was more difficult to understand. (It was long and maybe not matching his age)
- The child asked particular stories to be read to Aristide and even had the idea of sending him his own books so that he would know the right stories to read
- At the beginning of the conversation the child was pointing at the bell looking at a particular part of it where there was a kind of opening in the surface. The design of the bell will need a particular focus to understand how it can focus the





The experience prototyping between a 5 y.o child and a senior reader as it was video recorded

## INTERVIEW & CO-CREATION WITH LIBRARIAN CRISTINA BARTOLI

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- RENATO FUCINI -  
EMPOLI



CRISTINA, LIBRARIAN & PEDAGOGIST

Cristina is a librarian, a children writer and a pedagogist who is specialized in the educative power of narration. She also trains teachers and volunteers about reading to children.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANT

Cristina was interviewed as a librarian and a pedagogist of narration. She is an expert concerning how narration shapes the way children think. She is also a professional adult tutor and makes workshops for teachers and volunteers about reading to children and children literature.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The interview took place at the public library in Empoli, Tuscany, IT.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

A semistructured interview plot was created in order to guide the conversation. The plot focuses on: the interviewee's own experience of reading to children, the app books, how potential Storytellers could be trained; how Storytellers could be profiled and introduced to parents; how the Storytellers session should be enacted.

The Storytellers profile was also given to Cristina to react on it and to modify it.

**“ You may also need to train the parents on the particular aim of the Storytellers project and on the role of the Storybell...”**



## KEY LEARNINGS

- An introduction formula should be thought for the Storyteller to introduce himself to the child and for the child to greet the Storyteller at each remote reading session, so to create the ritual.
- A bibliography needs to be created for each different age group: 3-4, 5-6, more than 6.
- Children will tell if they have appreciated a Storyteller. If as a Storyteller you did not receive appreciation, then the library is encharged to improve your reading skills.
- The Storytellers should be prompted to share interesting information with the child, so that children could build their own narrative scheme about him/her. That information should be consistent to the child's world and imagination (for example: how far they live from each other).
- Storytellers should be well trained on how to read and how to create a dialogue during the reading session. They should learn on how to do a text analysis of children books, so that they could point particular parts of the story to the children.

## CO-CREATION WITH POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- RENATO FUCINI -  
EMPOLI



A GROUP OF NINE PERSONS, ALL WOMEN

Most of the participants come from a local association for which they volunteer to read and record audio books for visually impaired people. Those persons are very well trained and embrace the remote approach of the service.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

The group consisted of retired ladies who already volunteer for a local reading association and record audio books for visually impaired people and other younger ladies who were interested in the Storytellers project.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The co-creation sessions took place in the children's room of the public library in Empoli.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

The session started with the projection of the experience prototyping video. Then the participants were given the Ideal Storyteller Journey template. At the end of the meeting, each one had to stick her name on the Reading map to indicate the preferred origin of the Storybell calls everyone was aiming to get.

**“ Since I would be a remote volunteer, I suppose it will give me the possibility to last longer...”**



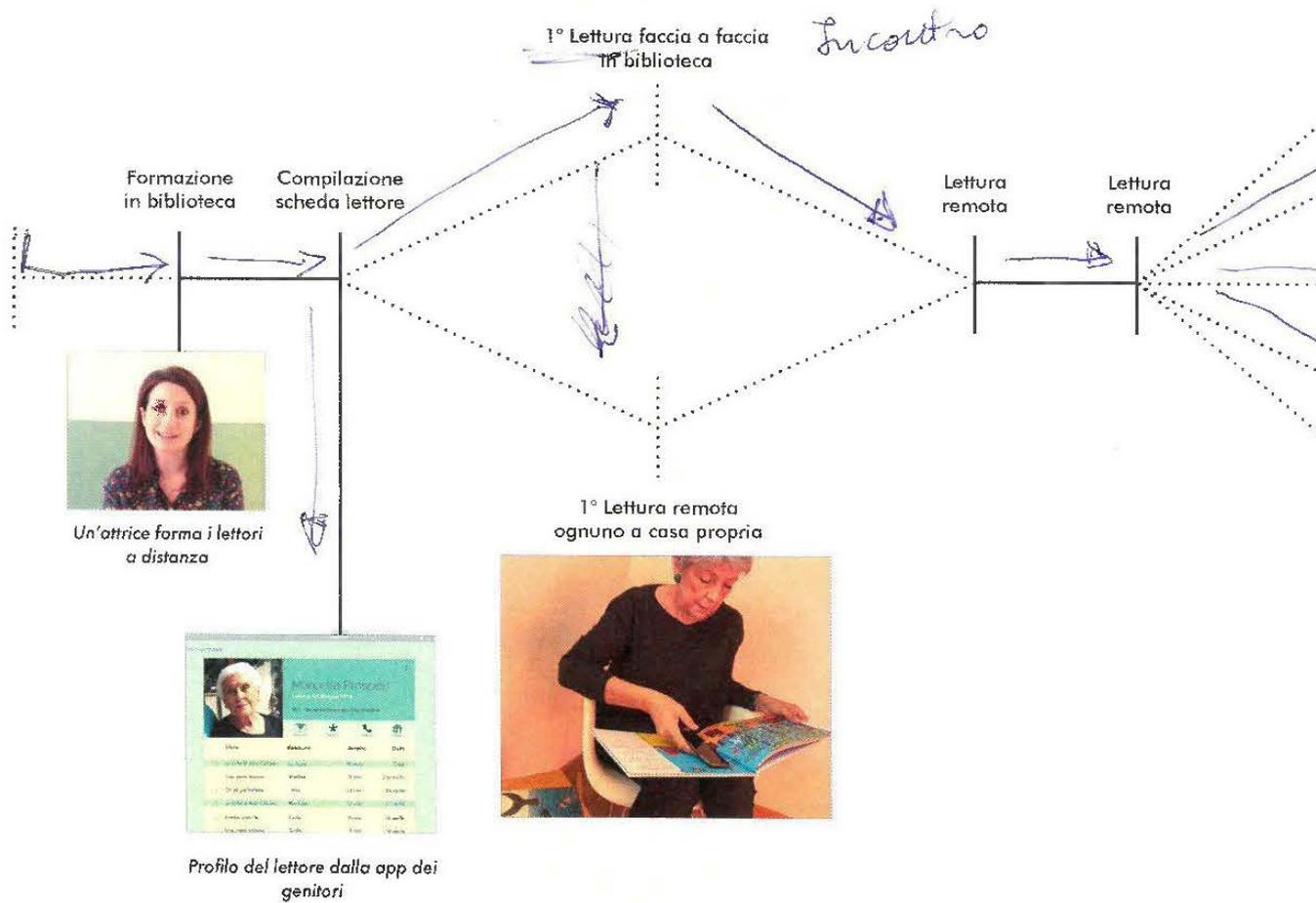
## KEY LEARNINGS

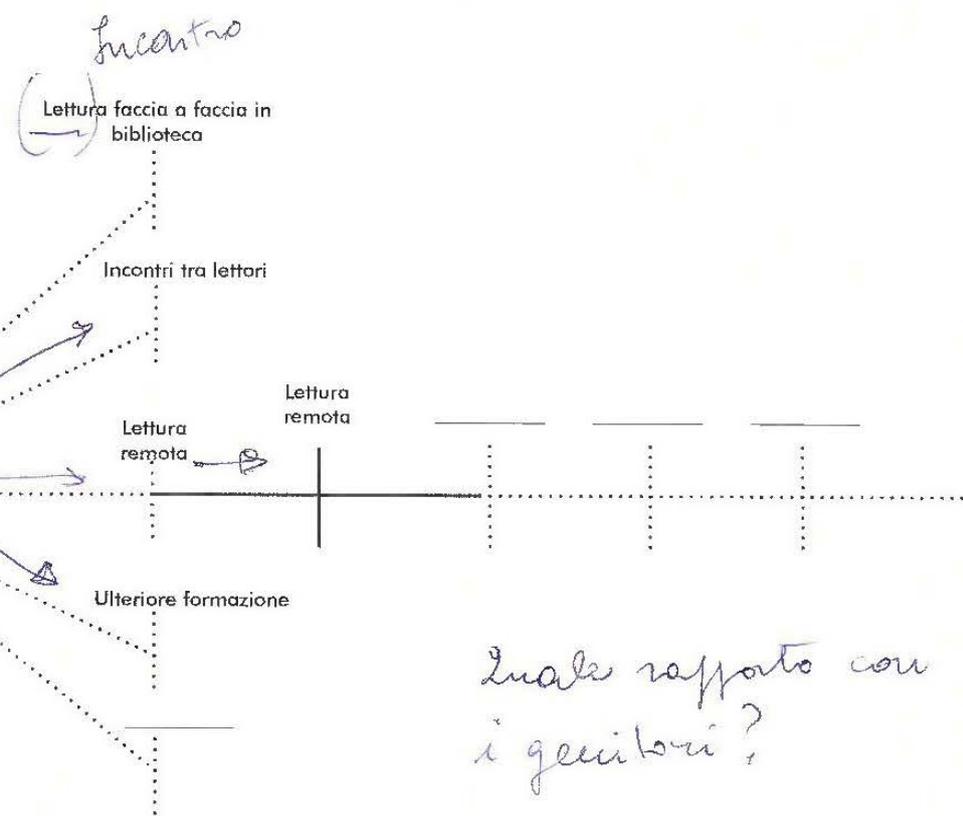
- The training is key to getting prepared and forming a group.
- The first reading could coincide with a physical meeting at the library with kids and parents
- Physical reading at the library could be done by each Storyteller from time to time as a way to check if the own reading is done properly and engaging the audience
- Storytellers could meet regularly to share experiences or to request additional training
- Meetings with parents to know children tastes would be beneficial and also to get to know if the children like or do not the service
- In general, Storytellers would like to have the possibility to know the child and her/his tastes, through the parents or by having meetings all together.
- Most of people would start reading locally and then accept calls from other territories
- They acknowledge that reading books with images or without require two different approaches to reading. It needs to be offered according to the age of the child.



THE  
STORYTELLERS  
PROJECT

# IL MIO PERCORSO IDEALE COME LETTORE A DISTANZA

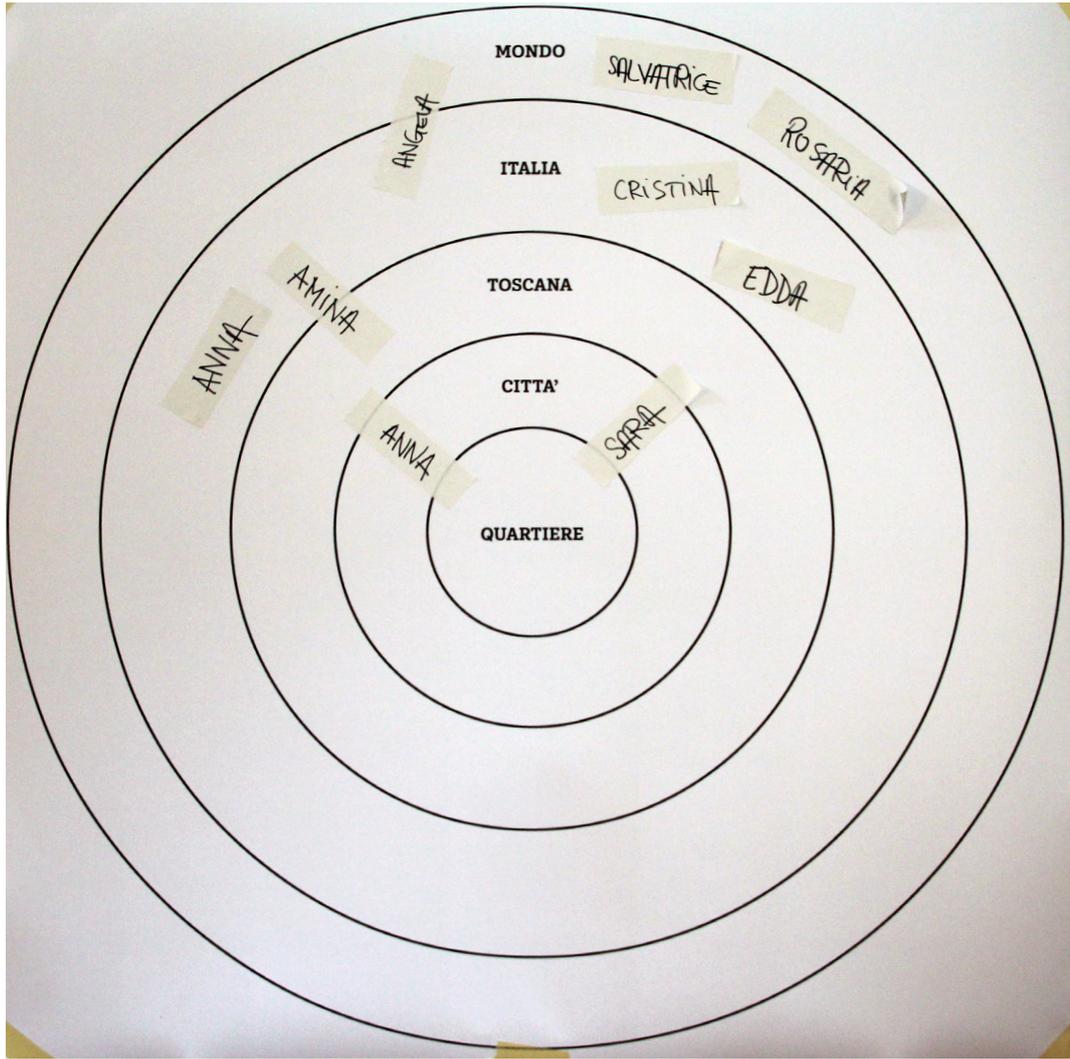




ANNA

The Ideal Storyteller Journey as filled by participant Anna





The Map of the origin of the Storybell calls from the perspective of each potential Storyteller

## CO-CREATION WITH PARENTS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- RENATO FUCINI -  
EMPOLI



SHEILA, MOTHER OF A CHILD OF 7



PATRICIA, MOTHER OF A 4 Y.O. CHILD

The two mothers pay already a great attention to reading to their children. Their children grandparents live near them.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

Sheila is a mother and also works at the library. She uses audiobooks with her children especially when driving.

Patricia reads a lot to her little girl and makes a great use of the public library.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The co-creation sessions took place in the children's room of the public library in Empoli.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

The session started with the projection of the experience prototyping video. Then the participants were given the Storyteller profile to react on and modify.

**“ Reading aloud remotely would stimulate the child to listen carefully, to focus on the voice.”**



## KEY LEARNINGS

- Having the possibility of going to a physical reading at the library with the Storytellers reading would be nice, but parents do not look to know exactly a particular Storyteller
- If a child gets really affectionated to a Storyteller, grandparents could feel bad about that
- They would use the listening-only feature of their parents app and leave the child with the Storybell in another room of the house
- Parents would love to give feedback after a reading to the Storytellers (through an icon or text)
- Not sure about showing the picture of the Storytellers, this may create some expectations in the child or assumptions.
- A small biography of the Storytellers could be good to read for parents (including info about how long she/he is a Storyteller)
- Parents could suggest books to read to their children to the Storytellers through the parents app

## CO-CREATION WITH POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- DEGLI INTRONATI -  
SIENA



ERNESTO



ELISABETTA

They are both retired persons and seasoned volunteers. Elisabetta volunteers in the children's section of the library, Ernesto takes care of the small library service inside a local supermarket.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

They are both retired persons and seasoned volunteers. In this research they act as super users since they have great experience as volunteers whose work gravitates around books. Elisabetta is also a former teacher.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The co-creation sessions took place in the children's room of the public library in Siena.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

The session started with the projection of the experience prototyping video. Then the participants were given the Ideal Storyteller Journey template. At the end of the meeting, each one had to stick her name on the Reading map to indicate the preferred origin of the Storybell calls they were aiming to get.

**“ Reading aloud remotely would stimulate the child to listen carefully, to focus on the voice.”**

## KEY LEARNINGS

- The Storybell is a pedagogic toy
- Storytellers should not choose the books themselves, there should be a bibliography to follow, set up and updated by experts
- Storytellers should be trained and be specialized to read to a particular age group each
- It should be a service for children up to the end of primary school
- Not being physically near is a challenge, yet it could be magic. Voice is key. Nobody should reveal their real identity in order not to spoil the magic
- As super users and *professional* volunteers, the potential Storytellers interviewed would not wish to have a relationships with children's parents outside the service
- The first reading should be a check point, a general rehearsal done on the phone to experts listening or recorded and sent via Whatsapp to peers in order to get comments and suggestions

## CO-CREATION WITH PARENTS

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
- DEGLI INTRONATI -  
SIENA



MARCO, FATHER OF 10 & 7 Y.O. CHILDREN



LUISA, MOTHER OF A 3 Y.O. CHILD

They both pay already a great attention to reading to their children. The grandparents, in Luisa's case, live far away.

### 01

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

Marco is an engineer while Luisa is a researcher in the domain of semiotics.

### 02

#### THE SETTING

The co-creation sessions took place in the children's room of the public library in Siena.

### 03

#### THE TOOLS

The session started with the projection of the experience prototyping video. Then the participants were given the Storyteller profile to react on and modify.

“ I would rent a Storybell from the library just to try it out. Then I would keep it if my child was engaged and focused while listening or if she was interested in the Storytellers.”



## KEY LEARNINGS

- Storytellers would lack the visual feedback of the face of the child they are reading to
- For children not having grandparents living in the same city, Storytellers could become reading nannies. An intimate relationship based on trust could be built between children, Storytellers, parents
- The Storytellers profile is key for the parents to get more intimate with the (preferred) readers of her/his child. The app interface should prompt and facilitate physical encounters. An *Interact* button should work as an invitation to meet physically at the library
- Parents would really make use of the listening-only mode of their app. The reading session would always be attended by them, even if the child is in another room.
- To leave the child unattended it means that: the reader is trusted, lives near them and is a great reader



V.  
LESSONS LEARNT & RESULT



## INSIGHTS

Following the fieldwork, the co-creation sessions and the experience prototyping, the information collected was synthesized into main learnings, also called *insights*.

In this section, I show 18 actionable insights that I draw from my research and that are linked to observations and quotes from my participants. The insights are formulated in a way that prompt immediate action and boost the design process forward towards the next iteration.

01

INSIGHT

It is key that the reader and the child can listen and speak smoothly without any technical difficulty in order to enable real conversations.



ROMEO, 5

“ I enjoyed talking to Aristide, my new friend, even if I didn't really understand the whole story because I couldn't hear well...”



ARISTIDE, 70

“Sometimes it seemed I was talking to myself because the child couldn't hear me well...”

02

INSIGHT

The reader needs to be constantly reinsured that the child is engaged and listening to the story since there is no visual feedback.



ARISTIDE, 70

“I need to know he (the child) is still there, listening, he is engaged. When you read and the child is next to you, you can see the face. You miss this interaction when you read remotely. I was always trying to ask the child if he was understanding...”

03

INSIGHT

The Storybell shape and physical attributes offer affordances to the child to fidget and concentrate during the reading.



LAURA, MOTHER, 38

“Romeo (the child) was blowing into the speaker holes, touching the rope and looking into the big hole of the Storybell while listening to the story.”



MARCO, FATHER

“During the experience prototyping video you showed me, I could realize that the child was concentrating on the story while playing with the Storybell.”

# 04

## INSIGHT

The Storytellers profiles in the parents app foster interactions between parents and readers and should provide just enough info to quickly jump from a remote encounter to future physical encounters.



LUISA, MOTHER

“Before seeing the Storyteller profile, I told you that I may not be using this service at home with my child. Reading for me is an intimate activity... But now that I have seen the profile, I changed my idea because a trusted relationships could be built among the parent, the child and the storyteller. I imagine a kind of *interact* button...”

05

INSIGHT

For children having grandparents not living near them, the Storytellers may become through time reading nannies and meaningful relationships may be nurtured with physical encounters.



LUISA, MOTHER

“As trust is being built through time, the reader may become a kind of reading nanny and this is would be very valuable to families having grandparents living far away.”

06

INSIGHT

The Storytellers service should engage with different age groups from 3 up to 10 years and design different reading experiences according to those.



CRISTINA, LIBRARIAN & PEDAGOGIST

“Small children might need images while listening to the reading, otherwise they would lose concentration.”



ELISABETTA, POTENTIAL STORYTELLER

“You might need to differentiate the experiences according to the different age groups. Books would need to be different...You need a bibliography done by experts.”

07

INSIGHT

The children's age range should be extended to 10 y.o. so to include primary school children. At that age there is a drop in reading: parents stop reading to children and children themselves can't read much due to their still poor skill.



MARCO, FATHER

“ My 7 y.o. child has kind of stopped reading at home. She prefers Ipad...it is more interactive. Moreover, I am not reading to her as much as I was doing when she was younger. ”



CRISTINA, LIBRARIAN & PEDAGOGIST



ELISABETTA, POTENTIAL STORYTELLER

“ I think this could actually work for older children...nobody reads to them any longer when they go to primary school... ”

08

INSIGHT

The actors of the services would need to include:

- a privacy and child protection authority
- kindergarden/schools



GIULIA, ICDI EXPERT



MARGARET, ICDI EXPERT

“Schools are key to reaching children: storytellers could read to a group of children from time to time... Then you also need somebody who can guarantee that children’s rights are respected.”

09

INSIGHT

Storytellers, as senior volunteers, need their new role and work to be recognized by the children they read to and by the whole community in order to feel privately rewarded by the new affective relationships and publicly valued by society. Public interventions of the Storytellers- beyond any remote and domestic reading- are needed to let them emerge on the social surface.



HUBERT, POTENTIAL STORYTELLER

“ I have no problem to admit that I am a volunteer teacher here at the library for my egoistic purpose...I even recruit to myself my potential students on the bus...Reading on the phone will not be rewarding to me, I would rather go to the library and start reading to children.”

10

INSIGHT

An intergenerational project takes into consideration the needs and opportunities of all the different age groups, and strives to find integrated solutions that are at the same time beneficial for all.



GIULIA, ICDI EXPERT



MARGARET, ICDI EXPERT

“The difference [when talking about intergenerational projects] is that you care and accomodate the needs of each generation involved.”



Children build a relationship with the book. The physical attributes of the book and the story in it shape this relationship.

Most of the time this relationship is interactive: books and children influence each other. For example, the book has pages to be flipped, the child flips the pages and the story goes forward.



LEYLA, CHILDREN LITERATURE EXPERT

“As an object, children’s books are very interactive for the child: a child can touch a book, disassemble it, carry it around... ”

12

INSIGHT

A reading session between a reader and children is a ritual. It has specific formulas and gestures that are repeated at each meeting (the opening, the closure, etc.). In this way the reader creates the magic and the trust.



LEYLA, CHILDREN LITERATURE EXPERT

“ A reading aloud session to children is an exchange between the reader and the children. You approach it as a ritual, there is an opening and a closure. In between, you experience an alliance.”

13

INSIGHT

Potential storytellers need to be trained to suit children of different ages. The first reading needs to be checked/supervised by expert tutors.



CRISTINA, LIBRARIAN & PEDAGOGIST

“ Readers need to have proper training. They need to learn how to approach a child and how to read to children of different ages...”



ELISABETTA, POTENTIAL STORYTELLER

“ The first reading could be just a rehearsal with experts, done on the phone from home. You could even record it as a vocal message in Whatsapp and then ask suggestions from peers and experts. ”

14

INSIGHT

Potential storytellers wish to build their local community through physical meetings. They would meet to talk about their reading experience, learn from each other and get extra training from experts. They would even like to meet parents before engaging with children remotely.



ERNESTO & ELISABETTA, POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS

“There could be meetings with parents to share with them the suggested bibliography.”

15

INSIGHT

Reading remotely is a challenge because you remove the physical enablers of the experience, yet this could make the reading truly magical by focusing exclusively on the voice as a unique enabler.



LUISA, MOTHER

“ If you read remotely, you miss the multimodality of a co-presence reading: the dialogue, the faces, the rhythm in jumping from pictures to text... Children linger at details... ”



ERNESTO & ELISABETTA, POTENTIAL STORYTELLERS

“ You lack the bodies, but you realize that the voice, the conversation is all for you. The magic is all in that. It could be a magical experience...”

16

INSIGHT

Remote reading could educate children to a focused listening and to drop distractions.



SHEILA, MOTHER

“ I use audio books pretty much with my children. It helps them to learn to listen. Storytellers would even allow live conversations...”

17

INSIGHT

The Storybell is a pedagogic toy through which parents can educate children to respect people and their time, to take turns, to thank people for their time, to be patient and wait, to be kind to people they do not know, to meet and relate to unknown people from different cities, cultures and ages.



PATRICIA, MOTHER

“ I think it would be my task to brief my child about the Storybell and the way it behaves at home. There are real persons behind it, it is not good if she starts shaking it like a crazy ...”

18

INSIGHT

Storytellers and children need to have physical meetings from time to time, to know each other and to build memories out of lived experiences. Libraries could be safe places for the first physical meeting.



LUISA, MOTHER

“Ideally I would push the *Interact* button on the profile in the app and then we (Storyteller, my child and myself) would meet at the library to introduce each other.”



GIULIA, ICDI EXPERT



MARGARET, ICDI EXPERT

“ Old and young need to see each other’s faces, talk to each other...Libraries can provide the space and the occasions.”



## OPPORTUNITY AREAS

5 new opportunity areas are the main result of my study. They ground the next design iterations around meaningful insights emerged from fieldwork, co-creation and experience prototyping. Opportunity areas can lead to new prototypes to build, to changes in the user journey or, in general, to explore unexpected territories that were not even foreseen before the design research.

This study allowed me to frame 5 new opportunity areas which focus on: new remote reading interactions, the balance between remote reading and physical encounters and on building intergenerational relationships within the local community through the public library.

01

OPPORTUNITY AREA

BACKWARD  
READING INTERACTION

Providing the reader with a backward reading interaction to sense the child's engagement, guide his reading style (to keep the child focused) and motivate him to read further.

02

OPPORTUNITY AREA

SENSING THE CHILD  
ENGAGEMENT

The Storybell can act as a probe sent from the reader to the child to sense the child's engagement in the remote reading session. Physical affordances of the object could act as sensing organs.

03

OPPORTUNITY AREA

BALANCING THE MAGIC  
AND THE BODIES

Physical co-presence is essential since the beginning for intergenerational benefits, yet Storytellers can be more fascinating to children if they are kept disembodied until they ask to meet each other.

04

OPPORTUNITY AREA

LIBRARY AS A GATE KEEPER  
FOR RELATIONSHIPS

The local library acts as a custodian for the community relationships at every stage: at the beginning it preserves Storytellers anonymity, yet enabling intergenerational occasions to meet; later in the service, it provides the physical space for one to one introductions between Storytellers and children and curating their first meeting.

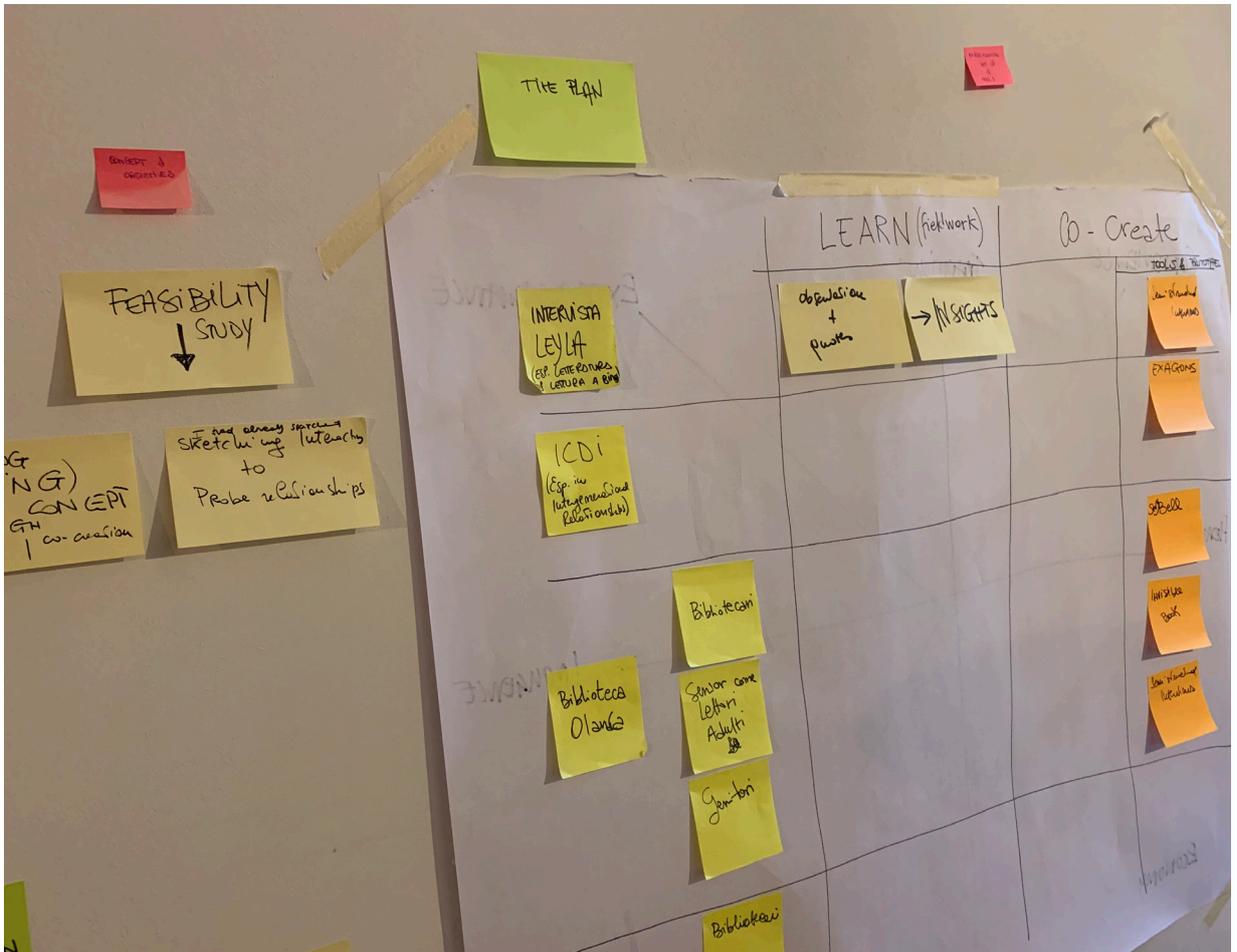
05

OPPORTUNITY AREA

ENABLING REMOTE  
READING INTERACTIONS

Remote reading interactions should not simulate co-presence reading, mediated by the book, but should enable new dialogues and actions based on the two main tools of The Storytellers project: the reader's voice and of the child's Storybell.

VI.  
IMPACTS ON NEXT STAGE



## ENVISIONING PHASE 2 - PROTOTYPING

This Feasibility study produced 18 actionable insights and 5 new opportunity areas which will have a direct impact on the Phase 2 - Prototyping of The Storytellers project in terms of:

- prototypes to build & test
- modifications in the user journey of the different actors
- an improved resolution of the service blueprint

At the moment of writing this feasibility study, I am in parallel:

- brainstorming new ideas of physical books for the child that come alive while the Storyteller reads and I am checking with the FabLab Castelfranco Veneto the involved technology development and budget
- defining new steps in the user journey of the Storytellers, child and parents in order to allow the deep training wished by seniors; the creation of a motivated group of local readers; the intergenerational physical encounters

Moreover, thanks to this Feasibility study I had the chance to initiate several collaborations with different partners, such as ICDI, BplusC, the public library in Empoli and Siena, Leyla Vahedi, Cristina Bartoli and the FabLab Castelfranco Veneto. I could personally experience their professionalism and commitment, as well as getting to know their own motivation

Synthesis work on the wall of my studio

to team up with me on this design-driven project.

Now I am very well informed about their single expertise and I feel enabled to narrow down my selection to the only ones I would like to bring with me along to Phase 2.

Infact, as I interpret Phase 2 - Prototyping of The Storytellers project, it would consist of a rehearsal of the service in context. For this reason, I would need to set up a consortium with all the different partners having a role in the service, from the library to the FabLab producing the Storybell.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGNSCAPES

The Feasibility study grant has been key for me in order to focus on the needs of the seniors when volunteering and performing a remote reading aloud session with children. Before embarking in this study, my attention was pretty much concentrated on the experience of children and parents. By meeting potential storytellers in The Netherlands and Italy I gained their personal perspective in joining The Storytellers Project, as well as getting to know their doubts and frustrations about the service.

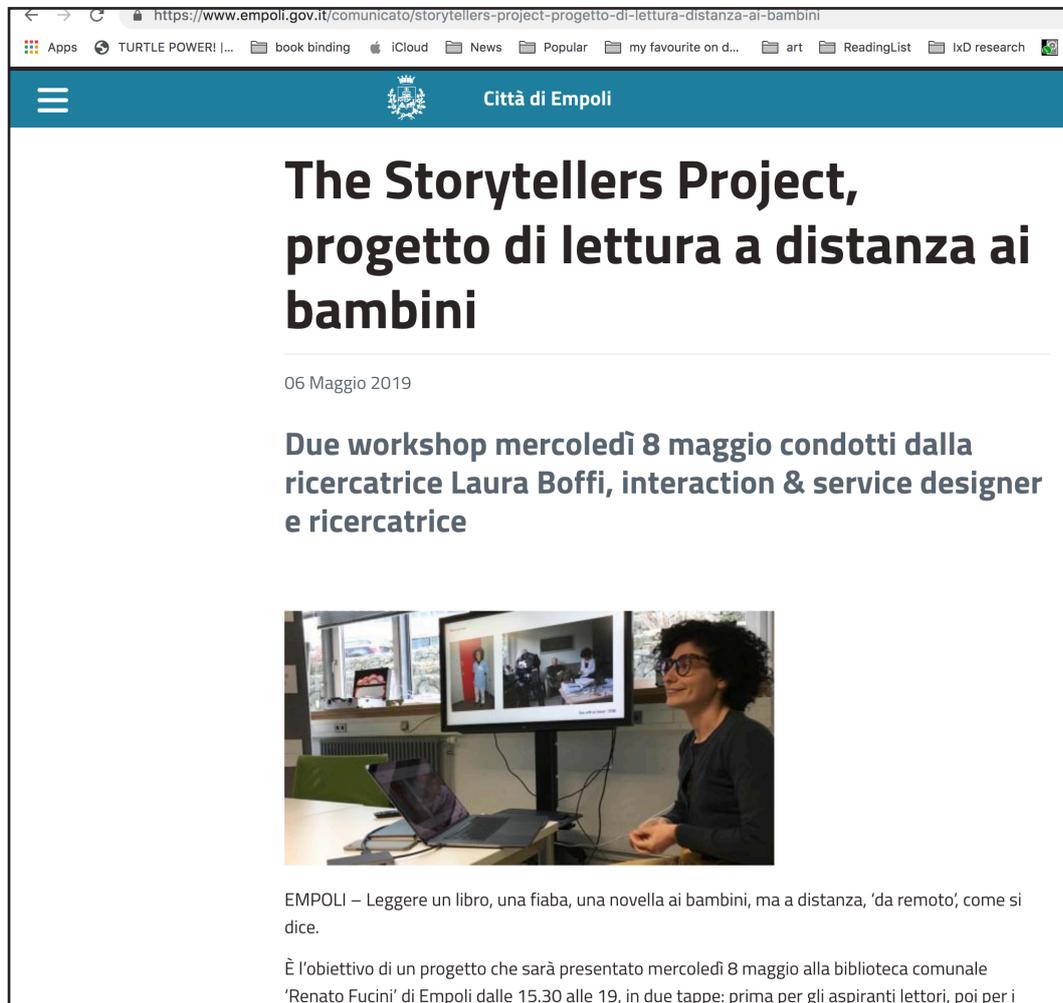
Designscapes gave me the possibility to eventually travel to people and organizations that I have been talking to for more than a year about the project. Without the grant I couldn't physically reach them, have workshops with them and pay for their work with me.

Wishing to follow on with The Storytellers Project and the collaborations I have woven so far, this Feasibility study stands as the foundation on which my submission to Phase 2-Prototyping will be grounded upon.

# APPENDIX

## PRESS RELEASE

The co-creation workshops in the public library in Empoli and Siena were publicly announced by the municipality of Empoli through an official press release.



https://www.empoli.gov.it/comunicato/storytellers-project-progetto-di-lettura-distanza-ai-bambini

Apps TURTLE POWER! |... book binding iCloud News Popular my favourite on d... art ReadingList IxD research P

☰ Città di Empoli

# The Storytellers Project, progetto di lettura a distanza ai bambini

06 Maggio 2019

## Due workshop mercoledì 8 maggio condotti dalla ricercatrice Laura Boffi, interaction & service designer e ricercatrice



EMPOLI – Leggere un libro, una fiaba, una novella ai bambini, ma a distanza, 'da remoto', come si dice.

È l'obiettivo di un progetto che sarà presentato mercoledì 8 maggio alla biblioteca comunale 'Renato Fucini' di Empoli dalle 15.30 alle 19, in due tappe: prima per gli aspiranti lettori, poi per i

## TV INTERVIEW

I was invited by local Italian tv RTV38 in Tuscany to a live interview during the tv program Tada', may 23rd, to talk about the project and the co-creation sessions in Empoli and Siena.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RufqPrI4BSY&list=PLFVSUc0etIzeZk0E\\_7W2d1pCZv9kzhHEp&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RufqPrI4BSY&list=PLFVSUc0etIzeZk0E_7W2d1pCZv9kzhHEp&index=2)



THIS WORK HAS BEEN POSSIBLE  
THANKS TO THE PHASE-1 GRANT  
OF THE DESIGNSCAPES PROJECT