

METHODOLOGY

FOUR ELEMENTS - CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

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Introduction

The aim of the Four Elements Erasmus+ project is to enable intercultural learning through legends and stories associated with the four elements and to contribute to building *European identity*. Namely, legends and stories related to *water, fire, air, and earth* are deeply rooted and valued in *local, national or European consciousness* up to the point where they have become part of the *European intangible heritage*.

The legends and stories collected and selected in this project – three stories per project partner- are meant to be used by English teachers .They will be used as a learning tool and method in groups of adult learners. Teaching different learning audiences, the system of the language, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, structures, patterns of social behaviour, speech acts, etc. were things to bear in mind while summarizing the stories. So, legends and stories will be summarized to be easily comprehensible by learners.

The delivery of the stories, methods and exercises are to be adapted to the needs of specific learning audiences like adult learners with hearing impairments , dyslexia etc.

(1) Legends and stories impacting European consciousness/ European identity



A baker putting Max and Moritz, the bad boys, in the oven. Source: YOUTUBE. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngd3zohpvFM> Available on the 10th December 2018

When in Berlin you might get the chance to be invited to the Max und Moritz restaurant, named after a famous story told by Wilhelm Bush. From your German colleagues you might learn the story was connected with the so called *poisonous, black pedagogy*, the rearing of children by humiliating, denigrating and punishing them, because they were supposed to be utterly bad.¹ Back home you start thinking about stories from your own country and much to your surprise you may discover that in your own country there are stories similar to the story of *Max und Moritz*, *not necessarily with the same plot, but the same narrative and educational intentions/functions*; to frighten and disciplin bad children. Such scary and luckily also more happy and joyful stories, are rooted in European consciousness and identity, though you may not be aware of them, you may find out that they are a part of common European identity, which you share with other Europeans.

Discussing **European consciousness, European awareness or European identity** -of which legends and stories are constituent part, has never been an easy task. Thus in his work *Crisis of the European Consciousness* (fr. *Crise de la conscience européenne*) Paul Hazard describes the *mental revolution* that occurred in Europe in his time. Namely, around the year 1680, arts, sciences, literature and much more, philosophical and theological thinking started changing. At that time appeared a vast »movement of minds«

¹ https://www.google.com/search?q=max+and+moritz&client=firefox-b-ab&source=lnms&tbm=vid&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiTi9aD_prfAhVOaFAKHxaVAYAQAUIECgD&biw=2514&bih=1343

contributing to the emergence of a different kind of history of literature and history in general, there were changes in economic and scientific thinking and European identity.² Crisis of the European consciousness describes *the mental revolution* from the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century in Europe.

The concept of identity was introduced to humanities in 1950 by Eric Erikson in his work *Childhood and Society*. Today denominations like *identity crisis*, *recomposed identities*, *plural identities* are often heard, so much so that it has become difficult to formulate a definition of identity in humanities and social sciences.

Popular concerns about identity are due to numerous changes and cultural contacts, to the extent that European identity is not clear to us. Moreover, the confrontation of languages, traditions and ways of life make this identity even more unclear. (Jenkins, 2013)

Today, everybody, individuals, groups, companies, institutions, countries, Europe are searching to anchor anew due to numerous social transformations. Books and articles are meant to consolidate identities, it has become clear, however, that the concept of identity is necessarily related to social actors, but each social actor has also other characteristics than being social: they have emotions, situational feelings etc. So European identity (partly constructed through collected legends and stories) is also a matter of emotions that have to be understood.

Moreover, as to consolidate our **European identity** we are supposed to acquire bits of the European cultural identity by using European cultural resources. Such resources are to be found in European languages, European traditions in a given milieu, in a landscape, legends and stories, etc. They are available to everybody, but nobody owns them. "The basis of our individual and social identity are to be found in the identity of others and our own identity", argues

² Hazard in Paul Harsin. *La crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)*, *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* Année 1936 15-3-4 pp. 1071-1075.

Identity is not stable, be it personal, social, collective or European. It is not a state and can only be understood as a process. Human social life is possible on condition we know who we are and who the others are. To illustrate this point let us consider Irma's story.



Irma the main character of the film *Das Kind* selected for the Project RefugeesIn has difficulties defining herself and her personal and social identity.

"I was born in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. When it fell apart we found ourselves deprived of our identity. Cernowitch became Romanian but was Austrian. A Treaty was signed, minorities were put together, and Romania was created."

Being a Jew, she was not Romanian, she was not Austrian, she was not French either or was she a part of all that. Her music was not their music, her poetry was not their poetry. *»My darling, even today I do not feel entirely French. But who am I? Romanian, Austrian? French? A part of each...."* Moreover, she does not even have a language of her own: Yiddish, German, French, Romanian, which language is her language? She says that she has never felt entirely French though her second husband was French, though her children were born and raised Paris.

Based on a system of symbols **National identity**, has some constituent elements like; a long history, role models, heroes, a language that is illustrated by literature (legends, stories), typical monuments, folklore, sites and landscapes, mentalities, an anthem, a flag,

a currency, cuisine, costumes etc. Has Europe any of these common symbolic elements to offer? Probably not so many or at least not enough.

No wonder Europe was created, but Europeans are still to be made by all sorts transactions and common endeavours. To illustrate this point: Jean Monet contributed to the creation of the binding formula. This formula consists of creating numerous links between the nation states; common laws, policies and institutions, common European method governing the member states' economic activities.

European identity is still to be constructed through common endeavours of Europeans working together towards a common goal, comparing and finding similarities and dissimilarities of local, national or transnational cultures, where legends and stories play an important role as well.

It is said that today's *European identity* is based on common *European values* like peace, freedom, tolerance, democracy, pluralism, equality, multiple facettes of European cultures.

But what is **culture**? In our view the idea of culture ", said the French poet Paul Valéry, " has always been associated with the very old idea of Europe." Culture is "the common language of 'Europe'" argues the French historian Fernand Braudel. "Europe will be cultural or there will be no Europe!" keep saying convinced Europeans. As a result of it, *European identity might be getting ever more defined by culture and less by economy and policies.* "

(2) In the four elements are concentrated the prevailing images of our culture

"The four elements are constituent of both the Universe and poetic imagination" argues Gaston Bachelard. The following example illustrates this point. Theo Van Gogh's brother offered Van Gogh a pencil to draw and sketch people whereas the mountain in vicinity (earth) was alive and an attentive listener. The force of his imagination and images was immense.

In western civilisation *earth, fire, water and air*, the four material elements were long believed to be essential for living. Moreover, in ancient Greece the four elements stood for the complexity of the nature and indeed of all substances. Universe and dreams were related to them as well as the fundamental images that still dominate our western culture. These images became archetypes of Man's imagination. "It has become obvious that Man has an excessive power to produce images, being more skilled at imagining things than thinking about them. With his power to imagine things, Man provokes Universe".

"The four elements are a concentration of rich, though unstable images that have been changing through the evolution of literature" argues Bachelard.

Further, the four elements have been considered to be simultaneously material substances and forces dialectically related to each other. The four elements are constituent of both Universe and Man's imagery, giving Man the freedom to dig in depth the meaning of images.

Images of the four elements are everywhere, particularly in legends, stories and poetry and Man affects them. That's how Man's affection for **water** has inspired thousands of stories and myths among them the *Myth of Narcissus* who loved no one till he saw his own reflection in water and fell in love with that; finally he pined away, died, and was turned into the flower of like name.

Finally, he fell in love with his own image, a reflection of himself on the water surface.

Moreover, there is no poetic soul that would not be able to admire water, its calm and serene surface, its power. Water has come to symbolise maternity, purification. Water has become a psychic element dominating both Man's conscious and subconscious.

In the eyes of Gaston Bachelard **fire** gives rise to images of destruction, flames of hell, of what is diabolical. Bachelard proposes to explore the ambiguity of this element and approach it through the myths of Prometheus and Empedocles: the thief of fire (for

Prometheus) or the one who decided to be burned in the flames of Etna, to annihilate himself (legend of Empedocles).

The **earth** feels soft or hard. Mother earth symbolizes maternity but also rest and irresistible danger.

Finally, **air**, another element is related to the dream of flying, imaginary of falling, the blue sky, stars, clouds, trees and wind.

In the Four elements project partners will be collecting and analyzing European stories, legends and myths related to the four elements and their images-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z65E177AEHc>

(3) Legends and stories are part of the intangible cultural heritage

What comes to your mind when you hear *intangible cultural heritage* of which legends and stories are constituent parts? Is it community, culture, tradition, skills, knowledge, customs, ideas, family, memory, identity, what relates to people, what connects people, legends and stories that can be found on ***the lists of cultural heritage or just in the collective memory of a community.***

Primarily established for diplomatic reasons the lists of Cultural Heritage (CH) bring recognition and value to cultural heritage as well as respect and responsibility to its bearers. By no means such lists can serve particular or nationalist interests. Thus, unable to comply with this agreed requirement, the USA withdrew from UNESCO, when Palestinian cultural heritage was recognized.

This may be to our regret, but cultural heritage has a lot to do with human rights giving communities and individuals the right to be what they culturally are. Moreover, cultural heritage is not limited to the territories where, shall we say, excavations take place. On the contrary! It can be found everywhere: in the country, cities, even under water.

Cultural heritage as right, responsibility, process and resource. Cultural heritage is less a state than a process. Precisely because it is a process CH is not stable. Cultural heritage also fosters the idea of homeland controlling a variety of societal processes like urbanization, industrialization, migration, the use of chemical fertilizers etc. Not being neutral, cultural heritage may support political systems though it should not support ideologies!

Cultural heritage is an important resource, based on the processes of selection and instrumentalization simultaneously revealing social processes and has to be safeguarded for the future generations. Lists of cultural heritage may be established from the local to the global level. They are supportive of expression and interpretation of cultural heritage, giving respect to its bearers, and encouraging conservation of cultural heritage though in themselves they do not protect it.

“Cultural heritage may change, and lists should be adapted accordingly” Lists of cultural heritage which support cultural expression at the same time impact CH policies and CH management. They should be flexible and evolutive while transforming cultural heritage into something that is controlled. They give us the answer regarding who is going to be responsible for CH development, who will benefit from it, who are its bearers and how customs are going to develop.

Cultural heritage becomes heritage on condition people and institutions attribute them cultural and social values. On condition they embody their memories, they give them aesthetic chills.

Put under a lot of pressure, heritage needs to be better recognized, protected and preserved by institutions, civil society organisations, experts, as well as policies. etc.

Therefore, it has been decided to collect spread to other European countries nationally important legends and stories.

While the idea of heritage is still drawing heavily from the history of Western European architectural and archeological conservation and preservation debates where heritage is mostly defined as material (tangible), monumental, grand, of good aesthetic... intangible heritage breaks from these currently dominating western perceptions. Intangible cultural heritage is a body of knowledge, it is *a political and cultural process of remembering/ forgetting and communicating*.

Intangible cultural heritage is not easy to define precisely because it is intangible and constantly evolving, because it is less concentrated on the products than it is focused on processes. To illustrate this point *knowledge acquired is less important than how it is acquired*. Cultural spaces like a town square where traditionally artists have been performing is a cultural heritage because of oral traditions that have been concentrating there.

Intangible heritage is mostly about "oral history of humanity", it is "living culture" which lives within cultural communities. This is particularly true of legends and stories that are pieces of oral culture passed on from generations to generations before being written down. sometimes heavily transformed.

(4) Roles, functions and structure of legends and stories

In order to make your learners of English aware of the value of legends and stories, and of the European identity they bear, make them aware of *the structure of the story*.

In his *Morphology of Folk Story* Propp points out that there are **just 6 basic stories based on the following ancient tales;**

Cinderella stands for unrecognised virtue,

Achilles, a hero with a weak spot. Every super hero has a weak spot.

The Legend of **Faust** about the debt that must be repaid.

Tristan and Isolda, the love triangle.

The by the syren **enchanted Odysseus**.

Orpheus, the gift that is taken away.

Cf. Vladimir Propp



Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp was a Soviet folklorist and scholar who analysed the basic plot components of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements.

He took a corpus of stories. He dissected the fairy tales into components wanting to tell us how they can be combined. He wanted to understand the structure of the fairy tales his assumption being that the fairy tales had a very determined structure.

At the very beginning he gives some examples of the scenes from fairy tales that are very different at the surface but in fact play the same role in the story.

For instance, a tsar gives a hero a rug and the rug carries the hero away to another kingdom.

An old man gives the hero a horse, and the horse carries the hero away to another kingdom.

God gives Ivan a little boat and the boat takes Ivan away.

A young man appearing out from a ring carries Ivan to another kingdom.

In one sense these scenes are clearly different but in fact no. *There is interaction of different people with different objects* at different locations. The hero is on the quest and the donor gives the hero an object. Propp says that there are the same *functions /story events*: the reception by the hero of the magical thing and the guidance of the hero where he needs to go.

Propp systematically investigates all the roles and all the story functions in Russian fairy tales. There are two basic characters in these tales: *the hero* and *the donor* as well as basic story events called functions.

According to Propp and his character theory in every narrative there are seven types of different characters or roles

The Hero. This character may not necessarily be the main character. However, the hero fights against the villain and is normally lead by/shares a tight bond with the donor, another of the seven characters.

The Donor The donor prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object. This is often the fairy godmother.

The Princess or prize The Princess The 'princess' is the person the hero marries, Occasionally, the princess can fall for the false hero before finding the real hero.

The villain — fights the hero in some way

The dispatcher — character who makes the villain's evil known and sends the hero off c

The (magical) helper — helps the hero in the quest, The character does not have to be magical, but usually is

The False Hero The false hero is perceived as good character in beginning but emerges as evil later on in the narrative.

What makes a character a hero? Is it because he is courageous, strong, smart? Yes, but most important is that he struggles against the villain. A hero is not a hero because of any intrinsic virtues of his own but because he has a certain role among other roles. The hero, the villain and the princess and maybe some other roles.

His identity as a hero depends on his place in the larger structure. What is true of the hero is also true of the other roles. You cannot have a fairy tale hero if there are no princess no villains. No role is defined by intrinsic characteristics. The villain does not have to be evil, the princess does not have to be beautiful, but she has to be a part of the story structure.

Narrative functions (31 functions according to Propp) . We have already seen some of them. A magical agent given to the hero that transfers him to the location and the guidance that is vital for his quest.

The two functions I suggest to look at are **Interdiction** and **violation**. Interdiction is a scene in which the hero is warned not to do something because that would spell disaster.

Now, what combinations of these function are possible? Propp points out that if you have violation you also need interdiction. Violation can always happen after the interdiction. Not only interdiction requires violation, but violation also requires interdiction. You cannot have an interdiction that is not violated in fairy tales. Propp finds many rules of the genre which determine which **combinations of functions** are possible and which are not. He tells us which combinations of story functions create a fairy tale. He has found not only the structures of the roles of the fairy tales but also the structure of the Russian fairy tales. This structural analysis would be more difficult to apply to less conventional structures

In any case, while there have been many studies of language learning, there have been very few dealing with the acquisition of folklore.

In opposition to Propp Levi-Strauss observed that simple narrative patterns underlie most stories:

the dialectics of struggle/victory;

bound/free;

lost/found/;

problem/solution:

universal plot-themes are constructed around desire and catharsis.

Fairy stories. The Ur- stories of our culture that are available to all, are *the folk or fairy tales* with their own formal and familiar patterns, rituals and rules. They define universal plot themes from (Cinderella's) hidden worth being finally recognized to the theme of re-birth. (In this sense *The Sleeping Beauty* is a story about stories: about how story's kiss wakes us up and produces desire; produces reality.) The overarching tale that shadows all this daydreaming and wishful hoping is the one where the questing self meets helpers and enemies and the ending is always happy.

The first true storyteller is one who tells fairy tales. They communicate directly! They lack psychological explanation and do not deal with details. Fairy tales are true stories with Man in the center of the action. Nevertheless, the four elements are there as well, supporting or opposing Man's action. The fairy tales are simple, direct and complete.

Mythic stories

Fairy tales are essentially optimistic in spirit. In Mythic stories there are other forces at work not so easily domesticated: deeper troubles that might never be finally resolved, where the energy and wit of one individual is not enough.

(4) Story telling is a performance, an art of telling, requiring a dramatic personality

Story telling can be approached from angles of different disciplines or study fields: andragogy, pedagogy, history, psychoanalysis, sociology, linguistics etc. proving that story telling is associated with both individuals and community as well as their long-lasting evolution. It is connected with concepts like language, speech, word, text, narration, etc.

Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the founding fathers of linguistics, makes a distinction between *langue* (a system of signs) and *parole*, a chaotic system of personal language as Language is a convention that any story teller has to use and respect, while narration is his individual language. Each of the speakers use language each of them in their own way. Their linguistic skills differ but also their experience of the world differ, their personality is structured in different ways.³

Possessing language essentially means memorizing language. Therefore, story tellers have to memorize language as to have it at their disposal while telling stories. Language is a kind of treasure consisting of words and words carry meaning. How these words are put together is a narrator's individual act, it is a part of their "parole". Moreover, telling stories draws on the narrator's individual experience of the world contributing to his or her interpretation of the story. What is important as concerns story tellers:

- (1) Language they are at their disposal, which they keep improving. The better they memorize it through reading, listening, studying, the better is their story telling.
- (2) The way in which their language is individually put to life. Other linguists like Noam

Chomsky also opposes linguistic competency to linguistic performance. -Performance is not just about possessing language it is also about our experience of the world and others.

Storytelling has an important function. It should maintain languages and their grammatical richness alive.

³ Saussure, F. (1977) (*Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, with the collaboration of A. Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; trans. W. Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins

We talk and we communicate, and we are possibly not aware of the fact, that out of many events we build stories, tell stories, communicate facts as we have experienced and felt them. Through telling stories the audience and interlocutors are impacted. Thus, storytelling is present in everyday life while but there is a tendency to forget that story telling used to be an important community bondage.

Story telling is a social act. There is no story telling without story tellers without human bonding, communicating, without senders and receivers of messages and their mutual reactions.

Stories are born out of chronologically, or causally linked representations of the world and its phenomena, people's mental states and abstract concepts.

The narrated text is not composed solely of facts, we would like to pass on the others, the narrated text is also an expression of our intentions-

Telling a story is mostly done by heart. Popular stories were put to life through many story tellers who told them in their own way so that each time stories were told in a slightly different way. Story tellers are never neutral since they are emotionally involved in their story telling. Their story telling creates the personalities of the actors in the story.

Communication

Staged within family, school class, company, etc., the process of communication can be direct and interpersonal. (Brajša, 1993) In addition communication can also be indirect when related to the media, public, massive communication (Brajša, 1933a)

It is possible to communicate using words or else not using them. Finally, it has been admitted that there is always communication. It seems that it cannot be avoided.

Wherever the tradition of storytelling, it is passed from one generation onto another. Grandparents tell stories and grandchildren tell stories as well.

What do they say?

Storytelling creates links between people notwithstanding their thinking is similar or dissimilar.

Since telling stories requires emotions, storytelling is very personal.

Stories to be told have to be understood in depth, each detail counts. It is important to understand what is essential in a story.

Story telling is about relationships and it makes story tellers more confident.

Story telling makes you more engaged, alive, more useful, more self-confident.

There are senders, receivers and there is a story getting shaped with them and between them.

Story tellers like working on the same text and thus going ever deeper.

It is important to learn about storytelling, to tell what your audience would like to hear.

Storytellers are satisfied when their story was understood. If the audience repeats bits of it. This is pleasant.

Storytelling is an important experience challenging yourself. Confidence.

It is about learning to be empathetic and emotional.

It helps expressing true emotions, not to hide them.

Due to learning storytelling relationships change. Effective relationships as well as good relationships require compromising.

Good story tellers should not be tensed.

It is important that stories are told using the right tempo, rhythm, silence, voice, to attract the audience's attention.

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