

# Three challenges for Informal Learning in Europe<sup>1</sup>

By Andrea Ciantar<sup>2</sup>

I would like first of all to thank the Italian National Agency for having invited me to speak at this meeting.

Let me briefly introduce myself...

I am a sociologist; I have been working in adult education for many years – as a researcher, a teacher and project coordinator – at the Università Popolare di Roma and Unieda, the Italian Adult Education Union.

I started out as a Yoga instructor, and in fact oriental studies have been an important aspect of my education; in addition to teaching, I also acted as the coordinator of the physical education department in my organisation. There is another passion that also influenced my professional path: a keen interest in autobiographical writing and story collection as learning opportunities – that is, a passion for what are called “autobiographical methodologies”.

My talk today includes three parts:

- first, I will give a brief definition of informal learning
- then, I will try to deal more deeply with the learning experience
- and finally, I will explore the subject on a more practical and concrete level, also by citing examples from a lifelong learning project with which I have been involved.

## FIRST PART: DEFINITION

As you know, educational contexts and related forms of learning are traditionally divided into three fundamental typologies:

- formal learning, which includes the traditional school system and all those training programmes leading to formal certification;
- non-formal learning – includes all those educational paths which – while structured and organized – do not lead to an educational qualification. Such courses are above all typical of Adult Education.
- informal education and learning.

One of the most commonly used definitions of informal learning is provided by the Commission of the European Communities (2001: 32-33).

*“Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional” (or “incidental”/random).*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Grundtvig Contact Seminar “MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE: VALORISATION OF ADULT LEARNING IN INFORMAL SETTING”, organized by the Lifelong Learning Program Italian Agency, 6-10 October 2010, Villasimius, Sardinia, Italy.

I am grateful to Prof. Loredana Golob, coordinator of the English Department at Upter, Università Popolare di Roma.

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Ciantar, sociologist, expert and trainer in autobiographical methodologies. He has created and realized various projects for Upter – Università Popolare di Roma, and UNIEDA, Italian Adult Education Union, under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

<sup>3</sup> See also: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF>; [http://www.see-educoop.net/education\\_in/pdf/lifelong-oth-itl-t02.pdf](http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/lifelong-oth-itl-t02.pdf)



## **The Contexts**

When we think back to occasions of informal learning in our lives, different characteristic elements emerge.

When we consider context, we see – as the definition cited above affirms – that informal learning occurs in many experiences and aspects of life:

- experiences connected to **work**, as well as **leisure time** and **play**;
- we learn from **art, books, cinema, music**;
- a **trip** – as we well know – is one of the most important sources of informal learning;
- one learns from **people we love**, our **relationships**.... In our encounters with others;
- today, we also learn from the many forms of communication, through the **mass media** and **the web**;
- also very important, in my view, is the kind of informal learning that occurs through contact with **nature** and through the **body**; such aspects, in fact, bring equilibrium to the excessive technology typical of the times we live in.

The experiences that came to mind just a while ago likely fall within one of the categories just listed.

## **How: The Processes**

Let us now go on to explore aspects connected more to the inner, mental and phenomenological processes of informal learning....

### *Non-intentional learning*

We spoke earlier, for example, of incidental and non-intentional aspects of learning. We often learn “by accident”, and often more from things that go wrong than those that go right.

As Carl Gustav Jung wrote, “*The person who avoids errors avoids living*”; and this is quite understandable, since errors often arise – as Gregory Bateson points out – from a calculation of reality that is exclusively rational, while the complexity of life eludes analysis. Bateson calls this characteristic of human knowledge “limits of conscious finality”, with respect to which the unexpected is an opportunity for learning, a way of “correcting” our expectations of having full knowledge and control of reality. Thus, the unexpected offers us many opportunities for learning.....

Over and beyond the apparently random nature of informal learning processes, there is in fact always the possibility of going over the basic questions – both implicit and explicit – which guide the search. Every individual carries within him or herself fundamental existential problems, which direct his/her pursuit of happiness and knowledge.

### *Curiosity, the need for “adventure”*

Another aspect at the base of most informal learning experiences is the thirst for knowledge, curiosity, the need for what is new, for adventure.

What impels us to travel, to experience new things? The metaphor of Ulysses gives expression to something that profoundly human: the need for nurture not only in physiological terms, but also on the mental and spiritual level. Moreover, our nervous system needs to be stimulated by what is new and different in order to nurture itself even in its biological constitution.

### *Learning by heeding one’s inner self*

There is another aspect to informal learning processes – almost the opposite of the one just mentioned, but just as important: “being at one with oneself”. Through this kind of introspection, we observe ourselves, heed our inner self, ask ourselves questions and try to understand who we are and what we are experiencing. Our society does not always understand that meditation and self-

observation are like muscles: they are abilities that can and must be trained. Both on specific occasions and on a daily basis. In our hectic society running at top speed, with no pause, taking the time to stop, listen and meditate is indispensable to informal learning.

### ***“Over the top” experiences***

The most intense experiences of life have an important place in this list of informal learning processes. These experiences can on the one hand be connected to pain – physical or psychological wounds – and on the other hand to experiences of love. Such experiences leave a profound impression on the life of a person and a society. Let’s consider pain. At times, certain traumas, wounds, fractures leave scars on our psyche. They are like radioactive waste which continues to emit its destructive potential unceasingly, for years and years.

Yet, a painful experience can teach us great lessons. Pain compels us to embark on the difficult path of introspection – a seeking that in our happier moments we might have never thought of pursuing. Pain can turn us into ugly beings, make us less than human, or on the contrary it can make us more fully human. Pain can lead to a decisive experience of informal learning, the kind of experience that change the direction of our lives, in one way or another...

But joy too – extreme happiness – can have a similar though different power. An unexpectedly intense and perfect experience of happiness, can leave deep impressions on our lives so that from that moment on, we will no longer be able to ignore the fact of having experienced this ineffable aspect of life as well, and we will – consciously or unconsciously – seek to achieve such moments once again.

Pain and joy are extraordinarily intense instances of learning – both at conscious and unconscious levels.

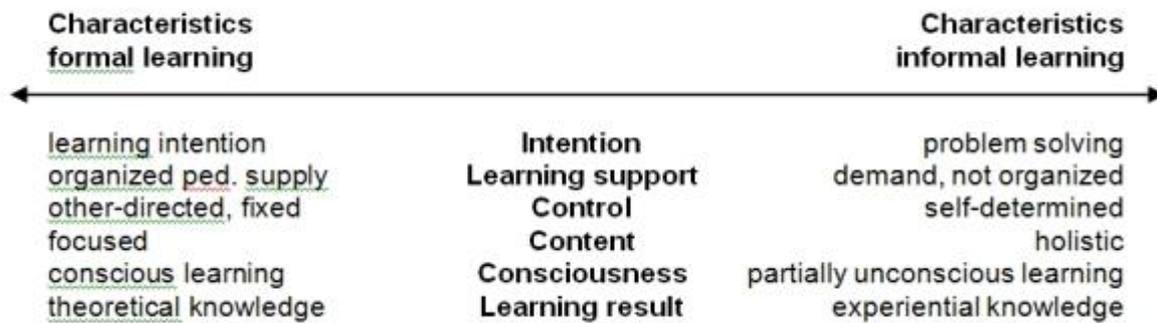
### ***Every human being is “an artist”***

As we complete this list of experiences we come to realize just how complex the elements characterizing informal lifelong learning are. What do we do with all this “material”? According to Mary Catherine Bateson, every human being is an “artist” insofar as he/she constructs a unique and original personal vision of reality, starting with the material which life and the environment put at his/her disposal. In other words, we can say that one characteristic of informal learning is that it is highly self-organized.

### ***The implicit dimension of informal learning***

Finally, it is important to emphasize that precisely because of its non-intentional, emotional and self-organizing nature and its connection to life experiences, informal learning plays a very important role in the creation, maintenance and transformation of our “implicit beliefs” – that is, those convictions and emotional reactions – often implicit and automatic – on which our vision of reality and our personality are based.

*The following scheme proposed by Rohs (2007), is a good summary of some of the aspects of the informal learning process which we listed above:*

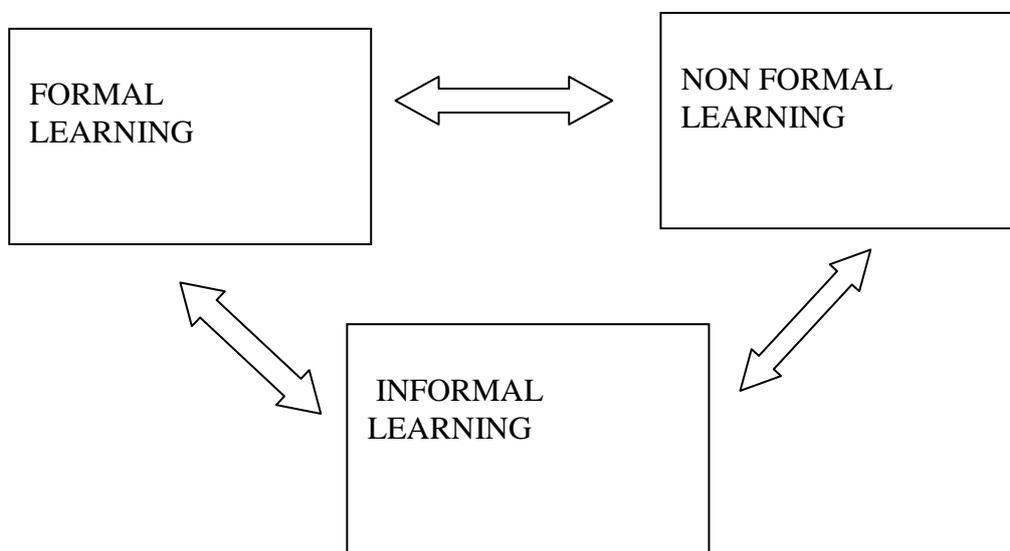


We see here that these characteristics are placed along a continuous line with formal learning at one end and informal learning at the other. This brings us to the consideration that there is no clear separation of mental processes between formal and informal and non-formal learning; rather, certain characteristics prevail over others.

***Interaction of the processes: informal, non-formal, formal***

Another important aspect has to do with the concurrence and reciprocal interaction of the three forms of learning: formal, non-formal, informal.

On the one hand, in fact, within informal contexts we use tools and knowledge learnt in formal and non-formal contexts; this knowledge is indispensable to us in making good use of experiences and knowledge gained in daily life. On the other hand, individuals come to formal and non-formal learning contexts by bringing with them world visions and learning gained in informal contexts, and these are indispensable aspects to be considered if we wish to create effective learning processes.



This last observation is very important for us.

Informal learning, in fact, is not at all “automatic”.

***The fact of undergoing experiences – even extraordinary ones – is not guarantee that we will be able to learn appropriate lessons from them.***

***Educators and teachers can, however, try to offer the tools – in formal and non formal paths – that help individuals to effectively exploit and develop experiences of informal learning.***

***Just as they can contribute to creating contexts of effective informal learning...***

## SECOND PART

### What: content and significance of informal learning.

*“It is not in silence that men are made, but in speech, in work, in action-thought.”*  
Paulo Freire

Now, I would like to go on to explore the following question: is there a specific object in informal learning?

There are certainly loads of practical things we learn and knowledge we gain in informal ways.

But this is not really what I want to talk about now; I wish rather to discuss other types of learning related to the profound significance of learning in the life of individuals and society. The ultimate significance of learning, in fact, is closely related to the problem of knowledge – knowledge of ourselves and the reality that surrounds us – to the pursuit of happiness and one’s place in society, in the world... Many educators who have left a strong legacy in the past century in the adult education field – such as Paulo Freire, don Lorenzo Milani and.... Nicolai Frederik Grundtvig – proposed holistic education concerned with the whole person, as individual and as part of a community of human beings. (They were well aware of the importance of curriculum and practical learning, but very much aware too of the significance which learning takes on in the life of the individual). Most likely, Grundtvig was first of all thinking of an education “to life” when he wrote:

*“I saw life, real human life, as it is lived in this world, and saw at once that to be enlightened, to live a useful and enjoyable human life, most people did not need books at all, but only a genuinely kind heart, sound common sense, a kind good ear, a kind good mouth, and then liveliness to talk with really enlightened people, who would be able to arouse their interest and show them how human life appears when the light shines upon it.” (1856 quoted in Borish 1991: 18).*

(This passage also reminds us of the informal dimension of this type of learning). The next step in the exploratory process I propose is to observe the importance of informal learning with respect to three fundamental issues:

- knowledge of oneself;
- knowledge of the world;
- our acting in the world.

In other words, while in the first part of this paper, we examined the definition and processes of informal learning ( the “how”,) now we ask: what are we to do with this type of learning?

***It’s as if we were examining a car. After having seen how it works, we ask what use we can make of it, where we can go by it.***

### First aspect: who am I?

In constructing personality, from childhood onwards, family and environmental contexts, characteristic of the informal learning context, are extremely important factors. Informal learning therefore contributes greatly to the formation of our implicit beliefs about ourselves and the world around us.

This aspect first appears in the form of relationship structures even before systems of meanings. Feelings like anger, hate, shame, or trust and love are the first premises with which we relate to the world.

Afterwards, the individual will have to deal with models, conceptions and cultures that have to do with sexual identity and social roles, and this process (which is unconscious for the great part) will

come about mostly within an informal learning process, although it will use learning within formal and non formal learning contexts as well.

Thus, every individual in one way or another asks the question: who am I? And this question is asked more than once during a lifetime, often on occasions marking a rite of passage.

Why do we become so passionate about films and novels of an introspective nature, if not because by looking at others we seek to understand ourselves better?

### **The first challenge: bringing to the surface our implicit knowledge and ideas about ourselves and the world...**

This aspect of informal learning, as the “place” where our ideas of ourselves and ourselves in the world are formed, brings with it a challenge: can informal learning contexts and processes also be occasions for bringing to light experiences, learning and acquired knowledge? Where I can make visible to myself – and therefore share – the heritage and wealth of experience of which I am the bearer?

This question, in turn contains another – one which is more complex: how can we bring to the surface implicit beliefs about ourselves and the world, in order to become conscious of them and – if the case may be – transform them?

This becomes even more important in a multi-cultural society, where identity – even in adulthood – must be re-defined and necessarily modified...

Indeed to make visible implicit and invisible informal learning , became more and more important today, also in order to support and redesign the professional life<sup>4</sup>.

### **The second aspect: image of the world.**

Where and how do we gain a sense of what is normal and what is not? Of what is right and what is wrong? Of what our “proper place” in society is?

Here, too, informal learning plays an important role.

In fact, we learn to know our “reality” not so much at school or by following a course, but in living life on the practical level. This takes on particular significance in Western societies with representational democracies and capitalistic models of development. Here, the models of consumption, work and of life in general are no longer proposed through clear and explicit propaganda (as was the case in totalitarian regimes) but are adopted in a more implicit way through practice. This comes about thanks to the power of persuasion held by the mass media but, even before, through the simple fact that the individual finds himself within a system – of education, work, relationships – that is proposed to him as “reality”, as “normality”.

But this soothing social control over the life of individuals and society does not always lead to positive outcomes, and examples of negative results are plentiful.

For example the work-consumption-work cycle can often have perverse effects, when we are doing work that is alienating, in which we find no meaning, in order to maintain levels of consumption which we are told will bring us “happiness”, and then going back to work in order to consume more, etc. Often, within this vicious circle, we may not be aware that we are participating in work and consumption processes that seriously harm the environment or cause poverty and injustice in other parts of the world.

---

<sup>4</sup> For the certification of informal learning see: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/4041.aspx>

The “frenzy” in which we often participate unawares becomes clear to us in fact when we reflect on the tremendous gap between north and south. It seems “normal” to us (because it doesn’t directly concern us), that there are thousands of poor people dying every day from diseases which can be easily cured, or because they lack food and water – not to speak of economic exploitation, restrictions on human freedom and the wounds inflicted on the natural environment. In September 2000, all 191 member states of the United Nations pledged to achieve the famous “millennium objectives” by 2015, which included halving the rate of extreme poverty, ensuring primary education for all, halting the spread of the HIV-AIDS virus, halving the number of people without access to clean water, etc. Ten years later, these objectives are still very far from being achieved, and the major governments in the world have not in fact included these objectives in their political agenda in any significant way. (Moreover, we might remember that a tiny part of what is spent each year in armaments, or on rescuing banks in this economic crisis, would suffice to make real breakthroughs in solving these and other urgent problems).

We might cite many other examples of how mechanisms of social control can lead to participation in mechanisms of injustice in an obscure and non-critical way.

To summarize briefly, we can say that:

- we learn and consolidate our idea of society, social roles and proper behaviour in our practical life – thus in great part as informal learning (even though we also avail ourselves of what has been learned in formal and non-formal contexts);
- European societies – fortunately – have over time seen the affirmation of world visions and practices which in the long term have demonstrated significant improvement in rights and opportunities;
- but strong aspects of social inequality remain to this day; for example in the economic disequilibrium between “North” and “South”, or – even more recently – in relation to the unstoppable phenomenon of migration and the mixing of cultures, and the consequent emergence of intolerance and racism.

### **The second informal learning challenge: developing critical knowledge, breaking through the social myths**

Here then we have the second challenge of informal learning: how to facilitate informal learning through which individuals can develop critical knowledge?

Can contexts and processes of informal learning become places where we can deconstruct social structures based on unjust premises but which society presents as “normal”, to then build up modes of co-existence which are peaceful and just?

There is an age-old challenge at play here: the human being – in fact – always exists within a culture, pre-existing symbolic codes, and he must free himself from such codes to create new ones ...to bring culture back to its function as a “tool”, a “means” more than an “end”...

### **The third aspect: informal learning and participation ...**

In his book, “Change the World Without Taking Power”, John Holloway offers an interesting way of conceiving participation and democracy. A real contribution to social change, according to Holloway, does not come about by rising to the top of the system (thus being even more assimilated by it) but by helping individuals and society “take control of means of doing”. This concept can have many applications. It may mean “taking back control of production processes”, and here we are thinking of the movements for solidarity and an alternative economy, purchasing clubs, and all those forms of food production which are more respectful of nature and the well-being of individuals, and more just in economic terms and human rights. It can mean “retaking control of

symbolic production” and we are thinking here of “grass-roots bottom-up knowledge”, both in terms of communication and artistic production (which today are facilitated by digital technologies and the web).

### **The third challenge: taking back control of the “means” of doing**

If informal learning is a place for self-organized and spontaneous learning – for self-development – can it also become an occasion for individuals, groups and communities to develop and take back control of their own “means/tools” of doing?

## **THIRD PART**

### **Informal learning in Lifelong Learning Programme projects**

Informal learning, as we have seen, is thus very important for the individual and society. It consists of a thousand occasions and activities, ranging from travel, to reading, physical activities, relationships, the natural environment.

It is a type of learning that is often accidental, involuntary, implicit and often stimulated by a change of context and a desire for adventure, but also through introspection, meditation, silence.

The opportunities and possibilities offered by informal learning – even though it is for the greater part unplanned – are tremendous, as we have seen.

More particularly, we have identified three challenges, posed in the world of today:

- bringing to the surface experiences and implicit beliefs, hidden even to ourselves along with our implicit beliefs;
- developing critical knowledge, in order “to deconstruct the social myths”.
- “taking possession of the means and tools of doing”.

Informal learning has always been very important within the Longlife Learning Programme. And I believe that in some ways the programme has met the three challenges we have identified, thanks to some fundamental principles which are part of its DNA:

- Valorization of the individual;
- Building co-existence;
- Offering people opportunities to “learn by doing”.

### **Valorizing the individual’s experience**

One element which strongly characterizes the spirit of the Lifelong Learning Programme and its different projects, is that attention is focused on the individual. This is indeed an important aspect because it is difficult to find the same kind of attention and respect for the individual in the business world. Nor will we find it in the political world, unfortunately. But we will find it in adult education.

This attention finds concrete realization in the greater diffusion of educational tools and approaches aimed at valorizing personal experience. The list of methodologies is a long one: cooperative learning, methodologies based on autobiography, play, physical activity, participation, and so on.

Very important too for informal learning are the methodologies which offer participants tools for independent valorization of learning, as well as instruments permitting learners to manage their learning experiences autonomously and to develop their capacity for relating to others.

Among the various approaches I would like to mention the autobiographical method, since this is the field I deal with mostly.

*I remember...*

The mere fact of beginning to remember and talk about one's recollections is the first step towards valorizing the person. It means rescuing experiences, images, stories from oblivion, stories which would otherwise be lost. It means discovering that one's possesses a unique living legacy.

*The time I learned*

*Try to recall a time in your life when you learned something*

*What happened?*

*What made the learning possible?*

*Why is this memory still important to you today? What remains of that experience?*

Remembering is a kind of reconstruction, an attempt to find meaning, to bring to the surface what is implicit and invisible and giving it form through language.

Another important function of memory is communicating with the world. Writing and telling one's story constitutes at one and the same time a communication with one's inner self and sharing one's experience with others.

### **Building coexistence...**

Informal education and learning has as well an enormous role in the the second informal learning challenge: developing critical knowledge, breaking though the social myths

The actual encounter with the "other" is in fact the first stone in building up peaceful coexistence. Such encounters lead to two-fold knowledge: learning about other aspects of reality so that my knowledge of the world increases; and at the same time I "really" get to know myself in my relationship with the other.

Actions within the Lifelong Learning Programme are – in some aspects – a huge "workshop" for encounter between different people, cultures and generations.

For example, we might cite the aspect of mobility, of how many people – young and old – have under the programme been able to travel in Europe, to meet people from other countries, making important friendships, learning about places, customs and traditions.

Very often the value of such experiences lies in the fact of gaining familiarity with places and cultures through the people who live there and thus in a typically informal way.

For example, I recall the first Grundtvig 2 project in which I participated, Townstories, in Ulm, Germany. We, in small groups of two or three, were guests at a dinner given by the Ulm participants in their homes; and after the initial awkwardness, it became an extraordinary occasion for getting to know each other. And I still remember the experience nine years later.

In general, some expressions and concepts such as "intercultural dialogue" that have circulated also thanks to the LLP programme have helped thousands of people in Europe to look at the meeting of cultures differently. They have provided useful keys of interpretation.

This type of activity must be developed so that encounter is facilitated further and other key words and ideas are produced, expressions which can help us to decodify daily experiences which are lived increasingly within a global dimension.

Here, too, the autobiographical aspect is important.

One of the main tools for getting to know others and other cultures is – in fact – the narration of one’s own experience and vision of the world...

### **Offering tools for “doing”**

Adult education activities and projects can play a fundamental role in helping people taking back control of the “means” of doing. The LLP program realize this also by informal learning, and by “learn by doing”.

A quick survey would show that all occasions for informal learning are part of our projects: travel, artistic expression, reading, visual images, the body, play, relationships... all of which enter into synergy with non-formal and formal learning. These opportunities offer people to use their creativity – to create something.

This “something” can be material – a book, a CD, a film – or immaterial – new relationships within one’s community, for example.

This “doing” becomes even more important when it takes on the form of “doing together”. Learning to “work with others”, to relate to people of different ages and cultures, to relate to others within public context – these are among the most important informally learned skills to be found in LLP projects

Another important aspect of the programme is that it blends together contexts of formal, non formal and informal learning. Associations, schools, universities, adult education centres can find themselves together as partners within the same project. These organizations can thus share and enrich their experiences and skills and create new knowledge, activities and educational products.

Again, Lifelong Learning Program projects often help people to play an active role in communicating with society.

Here, too, narrative methodologies can play an important role, by making it possible for individuals to “take the floor”, to express themselves...

In general, the informal learning listed above, as the ones related to the second challenge, contribute to develop active participation and citizenship.

## **A concrete example: the European Memories Project**

To conclude I should like to cite a concrete example relating to one of these methodologies – that is, the autobiographical methodology. And this example is “European Memories”, a multi-lateral Lifelong Learning Programme project, carried out by UNIEDA from October 2008 to September 2010<sup>5</sup>.

### **Valorizing personal experiences**

The usefulness of telling one’s story is that it provides an occasion and instrument for learning. We learn from our own stories, for they draw out and give value to our experiences and the hidden and implicit knowledge that is in each one of us.

In this sense, the archive, the products and permanent activities created by European Memories make up a great space for informal learning, which we hope will engage more and more people and organizations in Europe.

The project European Memories has created a digital archive of stories of inhabitants of Europe, who could send or upload their stories in the form of written works, videos, audios, photo narrations and other forms of expression (poetry, theatre, etc.).

Tools were created, both by offering situations in which narrative methods could be learned and by providing ideas through the web.

Examples of such ideas can be found by looking through some of the content in the three macro areas which make up the digital archive:

#### ***Pathways through Europe (through its diversity):***

- *Briefly recount one or more memories of your life – about your childhood or adult life, work, family, love, friendship, important people in your life – memories of what you have learned in life – in short, about everything that is part of human life ...*
- *Are there traditions or customs – past or present – which have been important in your life? Do these traditions contain lessons or values which may be valid today as well?*
- ...

#### ***Experiences of feeling part of Europe;***

##### ***Life experiences which have contributed to creating in us a sense of belonging to Europe;***

- *Have there been particular moments and experiences which have created in you a sense of belonging to Europe?*
- *Talk about a photograph in your life which seems in some way to represent your experience of Europe...*
- ...

#### ***Another Europe is possible***

##### ***Stories of social commitment and change in Europe...***

- *Recount your experiences towards another possible Europe, within the different spheres in which social commitment for human rights and democracy is manifested: solidarity and communitarian economy, intercultural dialogue, labour, minorities, housing, health, public assets, fight against poverty, education and training for all, participation, etc. These can be*

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.europeanmemories.eu](http://www.europeanmemories.eu).

*personal or collective experiences, already completed or still ongoing, experiences which have been successful or which have not achieved the expected results.*

- ...

Another activity involved a European competition for life stories which aimed to encourage narration and participation. Competition products included publication of a book in eight languages and a CD Rom.

## **Encouraging critical knowledge**

The power of stories lies in the fact that – through the experiences narrated – they can make us familiar with many invisible and little known realities. Stories bring us knowledge in a very direct and emotional way. We understand macro-historical events through micro-stories. Another aspect about which we invited narrations involves the experiences of people and organizations working in Europe for inter-cultural dialogue, highlighting in particular experiences of the informal type which are often invisible.

The archive also aims to be, through some of the themes it proposes, a strong stimulus to the development of a critical knowledge of the history of Europe and contemporary issues. Here are examples of the some of these themes.

### ***Pathways through Europe (through its diversity):***

#### ***Stories of European Inhabitants, Yesterday and Today.***

#### ***History, culture and traditions of Europe seen through the lens of personal experiences.***

- *My story within the history of Europe. Try to recall your personal experience of historical events, representing moments of upheaval or change....*
- ...

### ***Another Europe is possible***

#### ***Stories of social commitment and change in Europe...***

- *Experiences of intercultural dialogue. Personal experiences of intercultural dialogue (meeting the 'other', in everyday life, in the different contexts and situations where intercultural conflict arises and the need to overcome it is manifested...); experiences of projects and collective social action in the promotion of intercultural dialogue in Europe...*
- ...

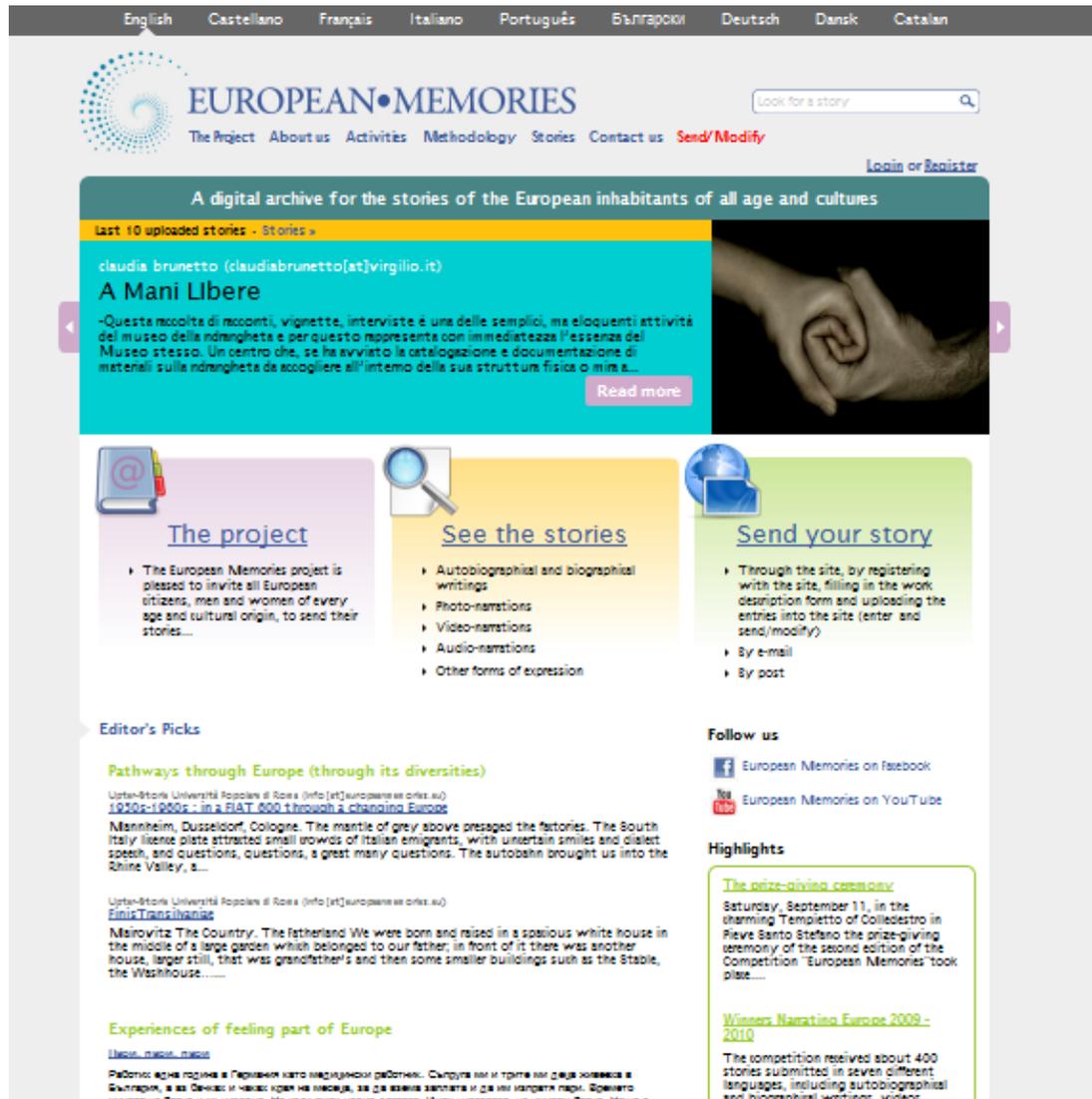
## **Taking back control of ways and means of doing**

Stories give individuals the opportunity to “take the floor”...to express their ideas and narrate the experiences of which they have been the protagonists.

Through the European Memories project, activities have been created to promote the practice of writing about oneself and collecting stories. The activities of narration groups created have given rise to permanent groups of people who continue to collect and write stories in the different countries involved.

The project aimed to be a constant stimulus for the production of narrations which we believe permits “taking back control of the means for producing knowledge”.

The project also aims to stimulate and support a phenomenon which is spreading more and more: individuals and informal groups who decide to play an active role in the environment they live in through activities involving collections of memories of the past in order to safeguard a cultural heritage that is at risk of being forgotten<sup>6</sup>; or memories of the present, in order to bring to the attention of others aspects of invisible or little known experiences, and thus contributing to defending rights and working towards peaceful coexistence.



<sup>6</sup> It might be interesting to recall here that Svend Hersleb Grundtvig, second son of Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, dedicated his life to the study and preservation of Danish folk traditions, and also created a network of people to collect, catalogue and interpret the material.

## References

- Allchin, A.M. (1998) *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- A.A: V.V. (2010) *Eurobiographia 2*. Rome: Edup (Proejct "European Memories", Multilateral LLP project. Coordinator: UNIEDA, Italian Union of Adult Education)
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. University Of Chicago Press.
- Borish, S. M. (1991) *The Land of the Living, Nevada City*: Blue Dolphin.
- Centre for Grundvig Studies - <http://www.teo.au.dk/cfg/enhed/praesent>
- Ciantar, A., Veri, L. (2008) *Eurobiographia*. Rome: Edup (Proejct "Telling Europe", Partnership LLP project. Coordinator: Upter, People's University of Rome.
- Ciantar, A., Peca, M. (2010) *Seven Good Ideas for Intercultural Dialogue in Europe*. Rome: Edup.
- Commission of the European Communities (2001) *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF>.
- Demetrio, D. (1995) *Raccontarsi*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore,.
- Demetrio, D. (1996) *L'educazione nella vita adulta*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Holloway, J. (2002) *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press.
- Knowles, M. (1996) *La formazione degli adulti come autobiografia*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.
- Pineau, G., Le Grand, JL (2003) *Le storie di vita*. Milano: Guerini.
- Rohs, M. (2007) *Zur Theorie formellen und informellen Lernens in der IT-Weiterbildung*. Hamburg: Helmut-Schmidt-University. [http://opus.unibw-hamburg.de/opus/frontdoor.php?source\\_opus=1230](http://opus.unibw-hamburg.de/opus/frontdoor.php?source_opus=1230). In Zürcher, Reinhard (2010).
- Smith, M. K. (1999, 2007) 'N. F. S. Grundtvig, folk high schools and popular education', *the encyclopaedia of informal education* <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-grund.htm>
- Zürcher, Reinhard (2010). 'Teaching-learning processes between informality and formalization', *the encyclopaedia of informal education*. [www.infed.org/informal\\_education/informality\\_and\\_formalization.htm](http://www.infed.org/informal_education/informality_and_formalization.htm).