

***Grundtvig Contact Seminar***

***MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE:  
VALORISATION OF ADULT LEARNING  
IN INFORMAL SETTING***

***6-10 October 2010, Villasimius***

***Three challenges for Informal  
Learning in Europe***

My talk today includes three parts:

1. first, I will give a brief definition of informal learning
2. then, I will try to deal more deeply with the learning experience
3. I will explore the subject on a more practical and concrete level, also by citing examples from a lifelong learning project



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;
- Informal education and learning.

*“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).*

Commission of the European Communities (2001: 32-33).

*"Life is the thing that happens to us while we are busy making other plans."*

(Antony De Mello)

Try to think of an object, a place, people or contexts associated with an occasion of informal learning in your life...

*“For example, what came to my mind while I was preparing this article was a day spent at the airport, because of an error made while booking a flight to Brussels...”*

*I remember that day, because I had just come out of a hectic period of organizing a big event, and finally, being stranded at the airport, I was able to stop, rest and find myself again...”*

## The Contexts

Informal learning occurs in many experiences and aspects of life:

- experiences connected to **work**, as well as **leisure time** and **play**;
- one learns from **art, books, cinema, music**;
- a **trip** – as we well know – is one of the most important sources of informal learning;
- we also learn from the **mass media** and **the web**;  
we learn from our **relationships**.... In our encounters with others;
- very important, 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...

# How: The Processes

## *Non-intentional learning*

*“The person who avoids errors avoids living”*

(Carl Gustav Jung )

- We often learn “by accident”, and often more from things that go wrong than those that go right.

Errors often arise from a calculation of reality that is exclusively rational, while the complexity of life eludes analysis. (*Gregory Bateson*)

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.

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

The thirst for knowledge, curiosity, the need for what is new, for adventure.

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

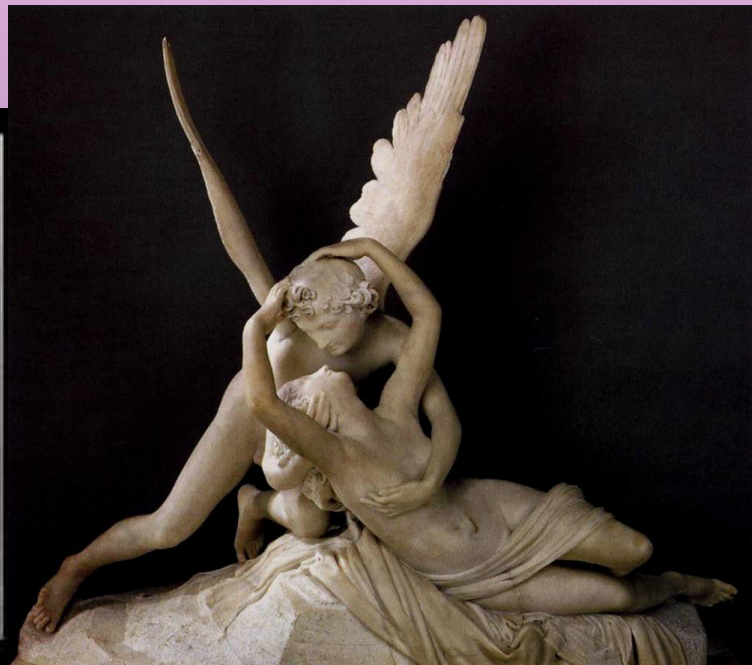


- “Being at one with oneself”. Through this kind of introspection, we observe ourselves, heed our inner self.
- In our hectic society running at top speed, with no pause, taking the time to stop, listen and meditate is indispensable to informal learning.

# ***“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.



- Pain compels us to embark on the difficult path of introspection and change.
- Joy too can have a similar though different power. An unexpectedly intense and perfect experience of happiness, can leave deep impressions on our lives...

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

Informal learning is highly self-organized...

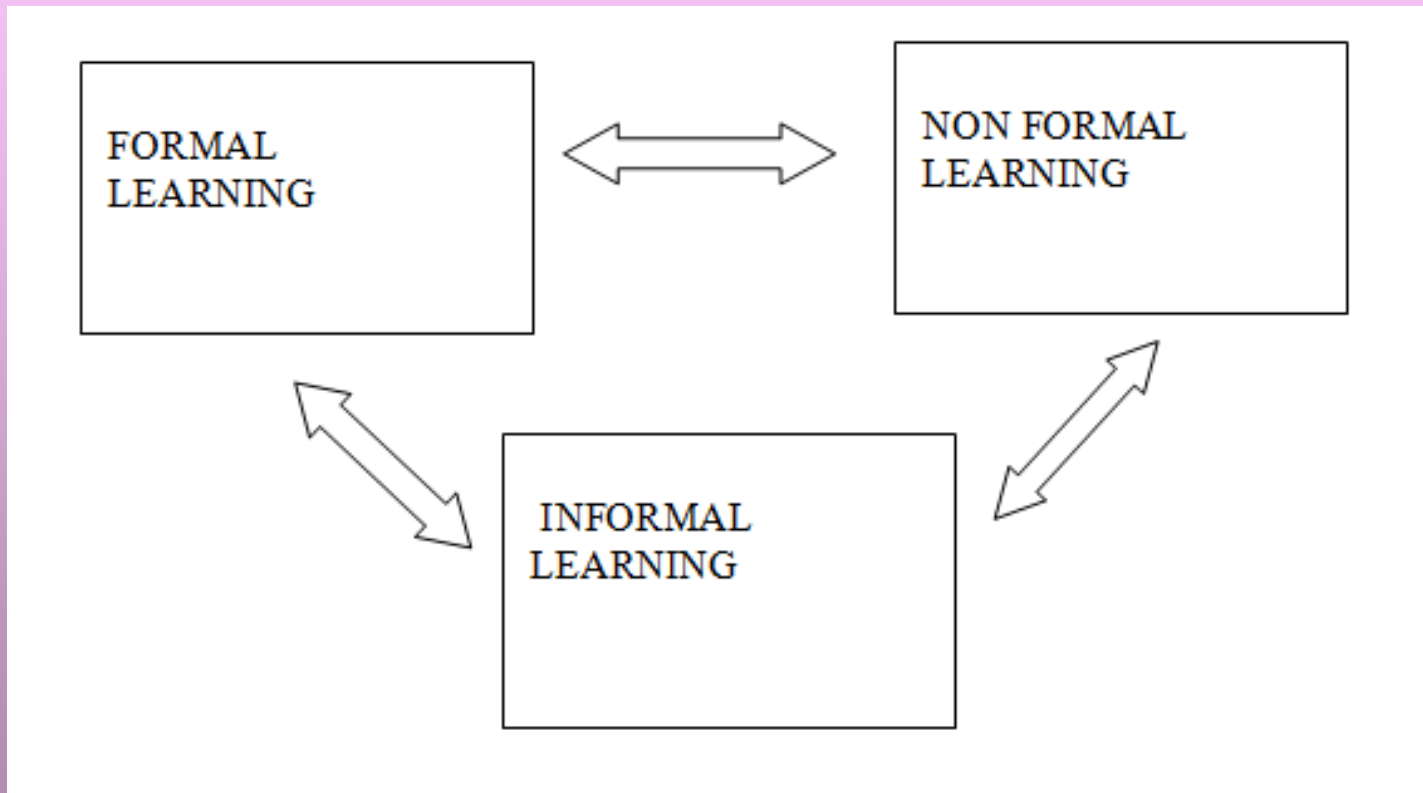
*Every human being is an “artist” insofar as he/she constructs a unique and original personal vision of reality, starting with the material which life and the environment put at his/her disposal.*

Mary Catherine Bateson

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

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” on which our vision of reality and our personality are based.

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



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.***

## 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*

I propose 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 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?

## **First aspect: who am I?**

In constructing personality, from childhood onwards the individual will have to deal with family and environmental contexts...models, conceptions and cultures that have to do with sexual identity and social roles...etc.

This process (which is unconscious for the great part) will come about mostly within an informal learning.

So, every individual in one way or another asks the question: who am I? And this question is asked more than once during a lifetime....

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

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?

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?

# **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?

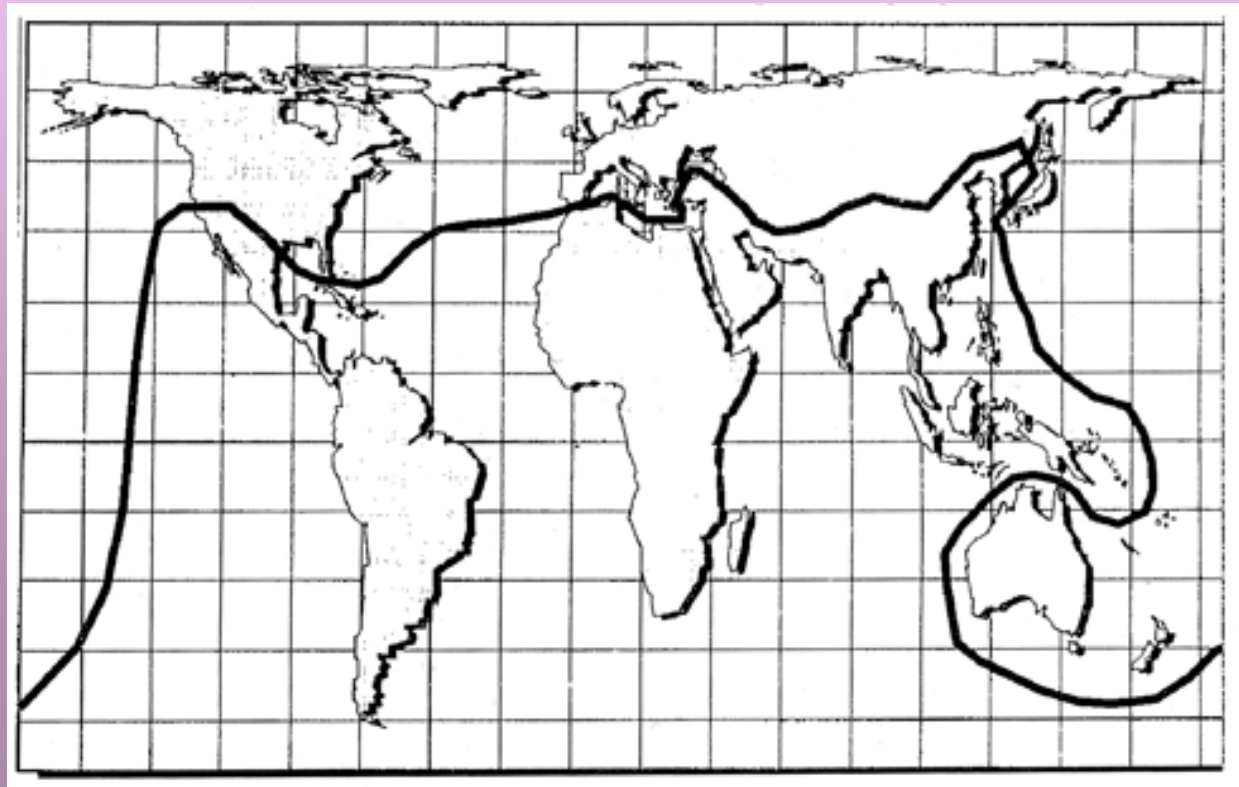
We learn to know our “reality” not so much at school or by following a course, but in living life on the practical level.

- In Western societies the models of life are no longer proposed through clear and explicit propaganda but are adopted in a more implicit way through practice.
- This 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 that is proposed to him as “reality”, as “normality”.
- This soothing social control over the life of individuals and society does not always lead to positive outcomes....

For example the  
work-consumption-work cycle



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 people dying every day from diseases which can be easily cured, or because they lack food and water...

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...



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

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?

# The third aspect: informal learning and participation

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”.

*“Change the World Without Taking Power”, John Holloway*

It may mean “taking back control of production processes”, and here we are thinking of the movements for solidarity and an alternative economy, 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” both in terms of communication and artistic production (which today are facilitated by digital technologies and the web).

.....

### **3) 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

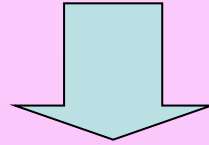
## Informal learning in Lifelong Learning Programme projects

Informal learning has always been very important within the Longlife Learning Programme.

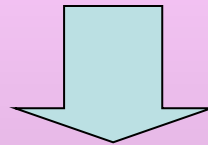
In my opinion the programme has met the three challenges we have identified, thanks to some fundamental principles which are part of its DNA:

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

**First aspect: who am I?**



**The first challenge: bringing to the surface  
our implicit knowledge and ideas...**



## **In the LLP Program: Valorizing the individual's experience**

- 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 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.

# *I remember...*

*ICH ERINNERE MICH...*

*LEMBRO – ME...*

*MI RICORDO... CNOUH M CU*

*RECUERDO... Спомням си....*

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

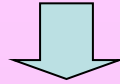
## *The time I learned*

- *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?*

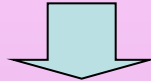
Remembering is a kind of reconstruction, an attempt to find meaning, to bring to the surface what is implicit and invisible and giving it form through language.

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

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



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



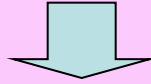
## **In the LLP Program: Building coexistence...**

- Informal education and learning has as well an enormous role in this second informal learning challenge.
- 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.
- the Lifelong Learning Programme: a huge “workshop” for encounter between different people, cultures and generations.

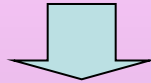
- Thanks to Mobility, many people – young and old – have under the programme been able to travel in Europe, to meet people from other countries, making important friendships, learning about places, customs and traditions.
- Very often the value of such experiences lies in the fact of gaining familiarity with places and cultures through the people who live there and thus in a typically informal way.

- 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...

## The third aspect: informal learning and participation



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



## In the LLP Program: Offering tools for “doing”

- All occasions for informal learning are part of our projects: travel, artistic expression, reading, visual images, the body, play, relationships.... 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...

- Another important aspect of the programme is that it blends together contexts of formal, non formal and informal learning..
- Again, Lifelong Learning Program projects often help people to play an active role in communicating with society.
- Autobiographical methodologies can play an important role, by making it possible for individuals to “take the floor”, to express themselves...

## **A concrete example**

- “European Memories”, a multi-lateral Lifelong Learning Programme project, carried out by UNIEDA from October 2008 to September 2010.

# Valorizing personal experiences through life stories

- 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.
- 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.
- The project has created the second edition of the European competition Narrating Europe. Competition products included publication of a book in eight languages, a CD Rom, and a festival that we hold in Tuscany last September.

Here some of the thematic proposed by the archive and by the competition:

***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 ...*

•

***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...***

• ,,



A digital archive for the stories of the European inhabitants of all age and cultures

Last 10 uploaded stories - [Stories »](#)

claudia brunetto (claudiabrunetto[at]virgilio.it)

### A Mani Libere

-Questa raccolta di racconti, vignette, interviste è una delle semplici, ma eloquenti attività del museo della ndrangheta e per questo rappresenta con immediatezza l'essenza del Museo stesso. Un centro che, se ha avviato la catalogazione e documentazione di materiali sulla ndrangheta da accogliere all'interno della sua struttura fisica o mira a...

[Read more](#)



### The project

- ▶ The European Memories project is pleased to invite all European citizens, men and women of every age and cultural origin, to send their stories...



### See the stories

- ▶ Autobiographical and biographical writings
- ▶ Photo-narrations
- ▶ Video-narrations
- ▶ Audio-narrations
- ▶ Other forms of expression



### Send your story

- ▶ Through the site, by registering with the site, filling in the work description form and uploading the entries into the site (enter and send/modify)
- ▶ By e-mail
- ▶ By post

### Editor's Picks

#### Pathways through Europe (through its diversities)

Uptn-Btork Università Popolare di Roma (info[at]europeanmemories.eu)  
[1930s-1980s: in a FIAT 600 † through a changing Europe](#)

Mannheim, Düsseldorf, Cologne. The mantle of grey above presaged the factories. The South Italy license plate attracted small crowds of Italian emigrants, with uncertain smiles and dialect speech, and questions, questions, a great many questions. The autobahn brought us into the Rhine Valley, a...

Uptn-Btork Università Popolare di Roma (info[at]europeanmemories.eu)  
[Finis Transilvanie](#)

Măișovitz The Country. The fatherland We were born and raised in a spacious white house in

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### Highlights

#### The prize-giving ceremony

Saturday, September 11, in the charming Tempietto of Colledara in Rieux-Saint-Stefan the prize-giving

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.

English Castellano Français Italiano Português Ελληνικά Deutsch Dansk Catalan

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« arte generale zan boni » (« arte zan boni ») [st] [libero.it]

## racconti della memoria

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100.1412.182 (877.81 KB)

Appartengono alle ultime avanguardie dell'arte i 119 libri d'Artista che girano svissolati e un po' monumentali per il mondo e alcuni finiscono in qualche museo. All'Archivio dei libri di Rieva Santo Stefano fra gli scaffali ritroviamo diversi e non pochi esemplari di tali gli sutori non sono così che possono essere considerati "Libri d'Artista". E sono splendidi e preziosi esemplari di umanità vissuta.

Quello di Maria Zamboni, lavoro manuale e immaginario, è un collegamento di memorie che varando i confini della geografia e della realtà entrano in una dimensione quasi magica, quasi utopistica per rivivere le esperienze e le sensazioni dei vari Paesi europei visitati e vissuti da lei. Un libro da guardare e pensare e da toccare. Nei "Libri d'Artista" i testi e le immagini non sempre servono. Quando si tace è la mente che parla.



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**Thematic areas:**  
Experiences of feeling part of Europe  
» Europe in a Snapshot

**Author - authors:**  
maria.germans.zamboni (mazzzamboni32[at]libero.it)

**The author or the authors participate as**  
Individual author

**Indicate in which of the following indicate section your work belongs to**  
Narrations

**Narrative language adopted:**  
Photostories

**If you have chosen "other languages", please specify which one (for example comics, photo-story)**  
mail art

**Other technical specifications about your work (production, duration, format, procedure of translation, dubbing, subtitling, etc)**  
mail art: arte postale

**Do you want to participate to the**

## Create new story

### Narrations

Autobiographical and biographical writings

 **Autobiographical and biographical writings**

### Photo Stories

 **Photo Stories**

### Audio Stories

 **Audio Stories**

### Video Stories

 **Video Stories**

### Other languages

**Digital format and works dimension** : both if work deals with texts, images and video, reference can be made to the respective suitable formats shown in the various categories above.

 **Other languages**

## **Encouraging critical knowledge through life stories**

- Stories bring us knowledge in a very direct and emotional way. We understand macro-historical events through micro-stories.
- the autobiographical aspect is important also for the intercultural dialogue. 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...
- 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.

## **Taking back control of ways and means of doing; through narrating, writing and collecting stories.**

- 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.

*Many thanks!*  
*Grazie dell'ascolto!*

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.