

Trans in Form, Trakai, Lithuania: February 17th 2010 *Bjørn Frode Moen*, Project manager

Dear partners, co-partners, friends and guests. I have been looking forward to this event.

Finally we are going to start our journey in narratives, - our journey into transnational learning and transformation. I am not talking about transformation in a religious way, but why not be inspired?

A wise Italian woman working with municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, Veia Vecchi, once said something that might be convenient for the start of our journey:

– If you are going to be able to listen, you will have to put your own convictions or meanings to rest!

I will, in my short address to the kick-off conference pay my attention to some concepts that have become important for me in my reading, writing and speech, and thus important for me as a Project manager.

These are: Speech and language, storytelling and narration, form and content.

The famous Russian or should I rather say Belarusian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky who practised in the 1920- and 30, stressed that it is impossible to think and speak simultaneously. Thus I have written something today that have given me the opportunity to reflect my speech and hopefully do better than I normally do – with automatic speech.

When folklorists started collecting fairytales in Norway some 150 years ago, the storytellers, often women, could tell their stories by heart, and even change small parts to fit their audiences, the context and their state of mind – at the moment. On the other hand, most of the stories told had the same start: Once upon a time! I have come to think that these fairytales are related to our journey in Trans in Form – our struggle to find new narratives for our regions and places. Our journey in the intention for change and making learning visible! You seldom do something new without a strong interdependency on others!

Some of us started doing narratives together a long time ago in the PIPE project. Here we tried to engage young people in storytelling. New and previous partners followed us in the Innovation Circle addressing young and grown-ups together, and today we continue more or less with the middle-aged and oldies like me. However, young people will hopefully be engaged in our regions and cities!

In Trans in Form we are going to go beyond, or transgress what we have done before, and hopefully manage to refine our storytelling and new narratives, - and narratives are of course more than fairytales! But fairytales as well as Trans in Form communicate intention and a **will** to achieve something!



Jerome Bruner an American law and psychology professor - still in practise at the age of 94 - has tried to organise narratives in a way that might be of interest for our Trans in Form effort. Narratives, he says, is transformation. In his work he is launching a theory on narratives and storytelling.

Being a lawyer and a psychologist he starts to look at narratives in these two fields. Narratives in law, established for a jury to say guilty – or not guilty. And further narratives in psychiatry, for a patient to get well.

I have come to think – and now to utter: Our “attractivity barometer” is somewhat in relation with these kinds of narratives. By means of objective and subjective criteria: finding our regions and places guilty or not guilty – or perhaps finding a trigger to make us well? The objective data found in the research to be performed, should reveal:
Are we attractive or not?
Could the research conclude that we are guilty or not guilty?
Could these narratives help us to get well?

Our “attractivity barometers” are narratives and storytelling. But – this kind of storytelling is more for finding problems than solving problems!

Juristic narratives and psychiatric narratives look to the past to find its legitimacy;
Our **new** narratives should be fiction seeking the possible!

New narratives try to cultivate the illusion of reality – unmask one perspective and reveal another. In my thinking, - and now in speech, this could mean that the new narratives for our regions, cities and places should reflect multiple possibilities. There are probably no truths that will last forever!

And further, is there going to be a grand narrative or grand narratives? Or do we have to make multiple subjective narratives, as our regions, cities and places are diverse and multiple? Presumably we will anyway tell different stories of the same events in the presumably real world. We must never forget that the tyranny of the single true story led our politicians to guaranty freedom of expression. I would like to say with Jerome Bruner: “Let many stories bloom!”

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, another Russian living outside Moscow, and a temporary with Lev Vygotsky worked with philosophy, literary critics, and semiotics lead me to an additional reflection. He claims that the forms we choose in a text or in speech overrule the content in a text and in speech as well.



I live in a tradition were content used to be everything. Probably it is time to reconsider in depth what form we are going to give our new narratives; also in perspective of the fact that our local and regional inhabitants are getting more and more diverse.

So, what kind of forms do I see?

We have of course the “facts” as in our “attractivity barometer” - the countable. And still there are facts!

We have our efforts to make unambiguous narratives, and of course also the ambiguous narratives. In our search for the right answers we don't like the ambiguous very much.

And of course we have a new and strange term heteroglossia that describes the coexistence of distinct varieties within a single narrative. The term translates the Russian *разноречие* [raznorechie] (literally different-speech-ness”), which was introduced by the same Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin argues that the power of a narrative originates in the coexistence of, and conflict between, different types of utterances or narratives:

The speech of characters, the speech of narrators, and even the speech of the author. He defines heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express the narrator's intentions, but in a refracted way." - Or narratives like an image in a kaleidoscope!

The narratives I have made in the past have often been abstractions or too general. That is probably why they don't work as I hoped they should. If ever doing narratives again I will try to do particular narratives. Particulars are concrete entities existing in space and time as opposed to abstractions. For example, Socrates is a particular (there's only one Socrates-the-teacher-of-Plato and one cannot make copies of him, e.g., by cloning him, without introducing new, distinct particulars). What I'm trying to do now is a particular narrative – as I put “I” in front of my verbs!

Particular narratives are perhaps made abstracted narratives in the process of translation or transformation taking place in every individual that listens to my story! As we are very diverse we have to – in some way or other – to categorize – and generalize.

If I want to attract a woman I should consider collecting her particular narratives. As gender matters!

If I want our places to be attractive for young persons I should consider collecting some of their particular narratives. As our youngsters is our future!

If I want to reach a bigger audience I should consider pictures, movies and multi-media.



Transforming in our time will probably need new agents and new forms and figures as well. Transformation might also have something to do with transfiguration!

What happens with ideas and narratives when they travel from one context to another? What happens with the ideas and what happens with the receiving context? In a time defined as globalized it is reasonable that also these questions should be asked.

I am often lost in translation, probably because I really don't understand you, but partly also because I want right answers or other answers, and because I really didn't listen what the other said.

Probably there are many answers, and the Polish proverb is as close to the truth I can get: "A truth lasts for 20 years at the most" and added with the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, it should be "and long before its becoming a lie".

Thank you for your attention!

