

## Committee for «Folktales and the Internet»

Coordinator: dr. [Theo Meder](#) (Meertens Instituut, Amsterdam)

e-mail: [Theo.Meder@Meertens.knaw.nl](mailto:Theo.Meder@Meertens.knaw.nl)

### **Introduction**

At the ISFNR conference in Tartu, Estonia (July 26-31 2005), one of the workshops was called 'Computer Mediated Communication - How Stuff Works?' chaired by Maria Yelenevskaya. During the discussion it was established that computer-mediated communication is already an important source for folk narrative research, and that the importance will only increase in the future. Folktales can be found on websites and in online databases, tales are told in discussion fora, jokes (either as text or as Photoshopped images) are sent by e-mail or Short Message Service, and contemporary legends circulate on Facebook and Twitter. On the one hand the internet makes it easy for us to find the stories we are looking for, but on the other hand we all have experienced that stories that we could find yesterday seemed to have vanished today - just like in oral tradition. So for contemporary research it is necessary to collect those stories ourselves as well.

At the General Assembly of the ISFNR the birth of a committee on folktales and computer based communication was announced by Maria Yelenevskaya and several members had already volunteered to participate. On Maria's request, I later on agreed to coordinate the first steps of what I would like to call the Committee 'Folktales and the Internet' – Internet taken in the broadest sense of the word: being the huge web of digital communications that is still expanding every day. During the General Assembly in Athens in 2009 the members of the ISFNR expressed their support for the committee and several new members joined the group.

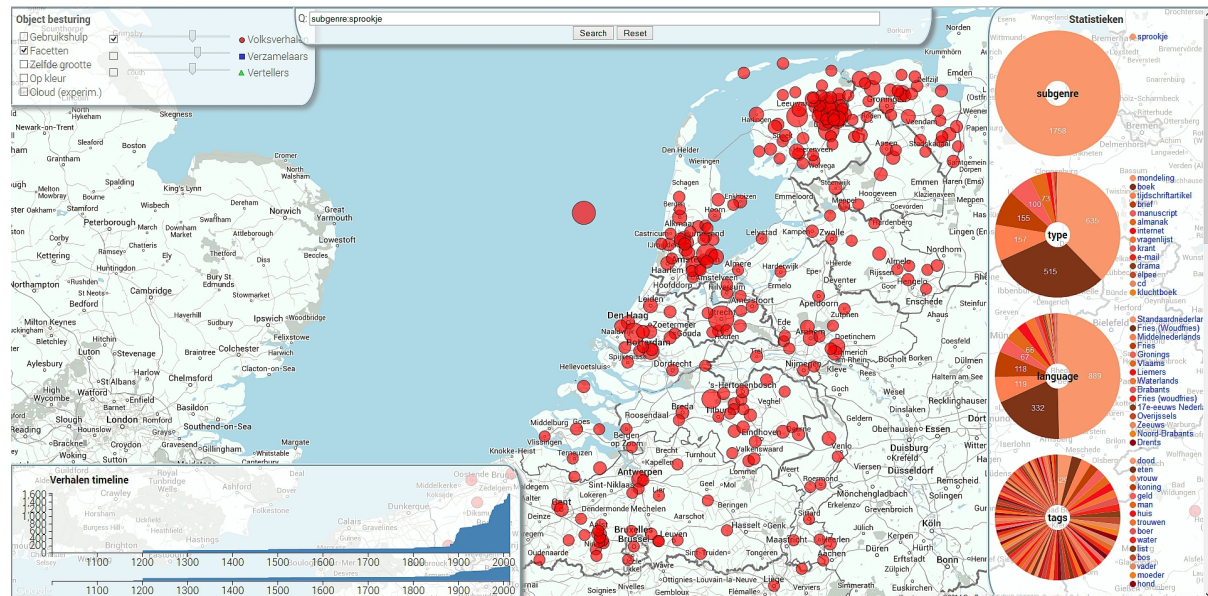
## Ambition of the Committee

The ambition of the committee is to use the Internet both as a source and as a tool. On the one hand the Internet is becoming an ever expanding source of narratives. Special collections for ethnologists, philologists and cultural historians are the folktale databases that work with the international Type-Index by Aarne-Thompson-Uther, and the Motif-Index by Thompson and other appropriate metadata to identify and enable to compare stories. Here are the European databases being used today:

Database	Country/Region	Number of tales	Founder
<a href="#">Dutch Folktale Database</a>	The Netherlands	43,000	Theo Meder
<a href="#">Flemish Folktale Database</a>	Flanders (Belgium)	48,000	Stefaan Top
<a href="#">Archive of Portuguese Legends</a>	Portugal	3,500	Paulo Correia & Isabel Cardigos
<a href="#">Rondcat</a>	Catalonia (Spain)	6,000	Josep M. Pujol † & Carme Oriol Carazo
<a href="#">Georgian Folklore Database</a>	Georgia	29,000	Elguja Dadunashvili
<a href="#">Danish Folktale Database (+ 2nd)</a>	Denmark	30,000	Tim Tangherlini
<a href="#">Sagnagrunnur</a>	Iceland	10,000	Terry Gunnell
<a href="#">WossiDiA</a>	Mecklenburg (Germany)	350	Christoph Schmitt
French Folktale Database	France	100	Anne Garcia-Fernandez (see Anne Garcia-Fernandez et al. 2014)

All these databases at least function as a national or regional archive of cultural heritage (oral tradition). In the second place these databases can be used as a research tools by scholars and students. Enriching the narrative texts with metadata (when and where was the story told, collected by whom? Is it an internationally known folktale?) enables researchers to perform more diachronical and synchronical research into oral variation

and stability, into local story communities and repertoires. Once a database is established, all kind of extra research tools could be programmed: visualisations like word clouds, geographical dispersion, timelines, diagrams and clustering tools.



*Dispersion of collected fairy tales in the Dutch Folktale Database*

Another wonderful future tool would be an international harvester that can perform queries in all the existing databases simultaneously, and with that feature improving international comparative research. An important condition would be that all the databases (at least in part) use the same kind of metadata, for instance the ATU Type-Index. However, an International Type-Index of Legends doesn't even exist; this would be another goal to strive for as well.

So here are the ambitions of the committee 'Folktale and the Internet' in a nutshell once more:

1. Study the World Wide Web as a means for narrative communication
2. Collect and preserve analog and digital folktales in online databases
3. Enrich the folktale databases (as digital archives of traditional oral heritage) with ample and internationally approved metadata
4. Develop digital tools for research (visualisation tools for geographical dispersion, word clouds, timelines, clustering tools)

5. Develop an international harvester with a sophisticated search engine for comparative research on big data
6. Make an International Type-Index of Legends (starting with Europe)

I hereby would like to invite more ISFNR members to join - just by sending me an e-mail.

[Dr Theo Meder](#) (Amsterdam, December 14, 2014)

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### **Members of the ISFNR Committee 'Folktales and the Internet'**

Rolf W. Brednich

21 Moana Road Kelburn

Wellington 6005

NEW ZEALAND

phone +64 49777912

[rolf.brednich@paradise.net.nz](mailto:rolf.brednich@paradise.net.nz)

University of Göttingen

Institute for Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology

Friedländer Weg 2

D-37085 Göttingen

GERMANY

phone +48 (0) 551399489

fax +48 (0) 551392232

[rbredni@gwdg.de](mailto:rbredni@gwdg.de)

Paulo Jorge Rodrigues Correia

C.E.A.O. - University of Algarve

Estrada de S. Luis 122-1º

8000-123 Faro

PORTUGAL

[paulojcorreia66@gmail.com](mailto:paulojcorreia66@gmail.com)

Larisa Fialkova

Koresh Street 5

33726 IL - Haifa

ISRAEL

phone +972 48673321 (home)

phone +972 48249713 (office)

[lara@research.haifa.ac.il](mailto:lara@research.haifa.ac.il)

Brigitte Frizzoni

Universitaet Zuerich

Institut für Populaere Kulturen

Affolternstrasse 56

8050 Zürich

SWITZERLAND

[brigitte.frizzoni@uzh.ch](mailto:brigitte.frizzoni@uzh.ch)

Terry Gunnell

Rekagrandi 1

107 Reykjavík

ICELAND

phone +354 5254549

fax +354 55268066

[terry@hi.is](mailto:terry@hi.is)

Mare Kõiva

Department of Folkloristics

Estonian Literary Museum



Vanemuise 42-235

51003 Tartu

ESTONIA

phone +372 7377740

GSM +372 56218119

fax +372 7377706

[mare@folklore.ee](mailto:mare@folklore.ee)

Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska

Department of Folklore

University of Lodz

Ul. Jaracza 78

90-244 Lodz

POLAND

phone +48 426356207

[wasil@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:wasil@uni.lodz.pl)

Emily Lyle

University of Edinburgh,

Celtic and Scottish Studies

27 George Square

EH8 9LD Edinburgh

Scotland

UK

phone +44 (0) 1316504152

or +44 (0) 1316504163

[e.lyle@ed.ac.uk](mailto:e.lyle@ed.ac.uk)

Theo Meder

Meertens Instituut

Joan Muyskenweg 25

1096 CJ Amsterdam

THE NETHERLANDS

phone +31 (0)20 462 85 58

fax +31 (0)20 462 85 55

[theo.meder@meertens.knaw.nl](mailto:theo.meder@meertens.knaw.nl)

Mrinal Medhi  
Department of English  
Damdama College  
Kulhati District, Kamrup  
Assam  
INDIA  
Phone: +91 (0)361-2820069  
[mmedhi8@gmail.com](mailto:mmedhi8@gmail.com)

Dr Mahendra Kumar Mishra  
State SC/ST and Minority Education Coordinator  
Unit-V OPEPA  
Residential Address:  
D-9 Flat Kalpana Area  
Bhubaneswar 751014 INDIA  
phone 91+674-2310167(r)  
094376-36436(m)  
Sadhana Naithani  
Centre of German Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
IND - New Delhi 110067  
INDIA  
phone +91 1126166572  
[sadhanan@mail.jnu.ac.in](mailto:sadhanan@mail.jnu.ac.in)

Sanjukta Naskar  
B-4, Teachers' Flats, Janki Devi Memorial College  
Sir Gangaram Hospital Road  
New Delhi - 110060  
INDIA  
Phone: +91-0-9899703350  
[sanjuktan2002@yahoo.co.in](mailto:sanjuktan2002@yahoo.co.in), [sanjukta.sinha@gmail.com](mailto:sanjukta.sinha@gmail.com)

Marilena Papachristophorou  
University of Ioannina  
School of Philosophy, Dept. of History

and Archaeology, Folklore Section

45110, Ioannina

GREECE

[mpapach@cc.uoi.gr](mailto:mpapach@cc.uoi.gr)

Yoel Perez

Ben Gurion University

ISRAEL

972-4-8383510

34 Bikurim St. Haifa, 3457707, Israel

[yoelprz@netvision.net.il](mailto:yoelprz@netvision.net.il)

Sanita Reinsone

Archives of Latvian Folklore

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art

Akademijas laukums 1

Riga, LV-1050

LATVIA

tel. 371 72 28 632

[sanita.reinsone@lulfmi.lv](mailto:sanita.reinsone@lulfmi.lv)

Shojaei Kawan, Christine

Enzyklopädie des Märchens,

Friedländer Weg 2

37085 Göttingen

GERMANY

phone +49 551395359

[ckawan@gwdg.de](mailto:ckawan@gwdg.de)

Carme Oriol Carazo

Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Departament de Filologia Catalana

Campus Catalunya

Avinguda Catalunya, 35

43002 Tarragona

ESPAÑA

Phone +34 977 558 131

[carme.oriol@urv.cat](mailto:carme.oriol@urv.cat)

Piret Voolaid

Department of Folkloristics

Estonian Literary Museum

Vanemuise 42

51003 Tartu

ESTONIA

phone +372 7377742

fax +372 7377706

[piret@folklore.ee](mailto:piret@folklore.ee)

Maria Yelenevskaya

Ein Gedi 3

Haifa 34529

ISRAEL

phone +972 4833363

fax +972 48332952

[ymaria@tx.technion.ac.il](mailto:y maria@tx.technion.ac.il)