



TOOLKIT

DEALING WITH POPULAR MYTHS

YOUTH WORK AGAINST
DISINFORMATION AND
DISTORTION OF HISTORICAL
FACTS





Youth work against disinformation and distortion of historical **facts**

This toolkit was created in the scope of the Erasmus + project “Dealing with popular myths. Youth work against disinformation and distortion of historical facts” (2020-1-HR01-KA205-077252).

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Youth work against disinformation and distortion of historical facts

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1. INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is the result of the work of five organizations brought together by the Erasmus + project „Dealing with popular myths. Youth work against disinformation and distortion of historical facts“.

Documenta – Centre for dealing with the past is the coordinator of the project. Documenta is a Croatian NGO established in 2004 to engage in the social process and dialogue of dealing with the past across different social structures.

United Societies of Balkans is a non-governmental organization based in Thessaloniki, Greece, working in the field of youth mobility, participation, and facilitating youth awareness of social issues.

The Association for Social History – Euroclio (UDI – Euroclio) gathers history teachers from Serbia and organizes activities focusing on the development of critical thinking about the past and changing the traditional discourses of history teaching.

Las Niñas del Tul is a cultural association from the city of Granada, Spain, which aims to develop and carry out cultural activities, promoting respect, empathy, diversity, inclusion, tolerance, and equality.

The Intercultural Institute of Timisoara (IIT) promotes an intercultural approach and democratic participatory processes in various areas of Romanian society, including education, cultural policy, civil society, and community development.

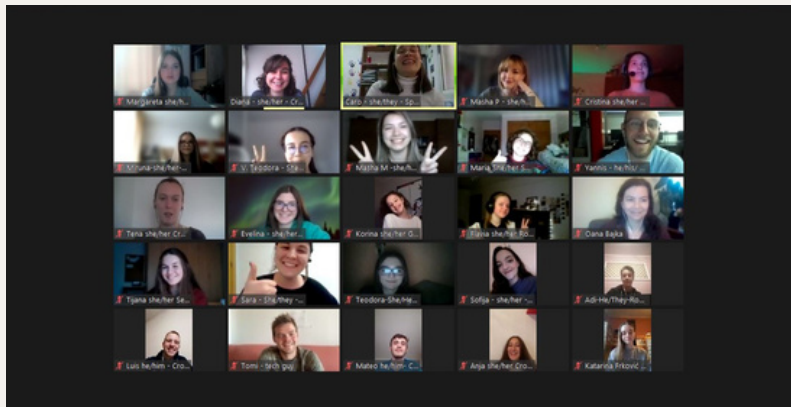
Together we created this project with the aim to map myths and distortions of historical facts among youth and deconstruct them through the tools of historic-civic education.

Myths and distortions are often carriers of stereotypes but, in many cases, young people accept these myths as truths and don't question them, thus becoming easy targets for groups spreading myths. The inability to recognize these myths leads to the growth of prejudices and stereotypes, hate speech, and radicalization; and becomes even more worrying in the era of the internet as these myths can easily reach young people through social media. By deconstructing popular myths and distortions of historical facts, the project contributes to giving young people the tools to combat radicalization, prejudices, and stereotypes and to decrease the attraction for populism and authoritarianism among European youth.

The project was conceptualized before the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the turn of events in 2020 and 2021 showed that deconstruction of myths is indeed relevant and needed. During those two years, various conspiracy theories, myths, and distortion of facts often connected with history and historical stereotypes and scapegoating were circulating in the public discourse blurring the lines between facts and fiction. That's why we decided to include these myths in the scope of our project. It makes our results more relevant and we believe it will help other youth workers and teachers to be more successful in their work with young people.

Our project started with a kick-off meeting in November 2020. On that occasion, all organizations discussed the most important questions regarding the content and the implementation of the project. Then, in March and April 2021, we organized two workshops with youth to find out which myths and distortions are most relevant to them.

The first workshop gathered young people aged 18-25, while the second one focused on 14-18 year-olds. Each workshop lasted for five days and was held online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As much as we wanted to meet in person, the online format allowed us to collect all the online methods described in this toolkit. In these workshops we discussed, deconstructed, and collected different myths and historical distortions relevant to young people from all five countries.



In March and April 2021, we organized two workshops with youth to find out which myths and distortions are most relevant to them.

From the myths we collected in these workshops, each partner organization selected one myth which became a topic for a short educational video, and then two more myths for deconstruction in this toolkit. That is how we guaranteed that the chosen myths are relevant to young people, both in partner countries and in Europe.

Then, at the second partner meeting in May 2021, the five organizations created the methodology for the production of the educational videos. You can find the methodology described in this toolkit. Following this meeting, the partners started to work on the videos, by creating scripts, recording voiceovers, finding sources and photos that will help in further research, and translating the subtitles. With the help of a professional designer, the videos were finished and you can find them all [here](#).

This toolkit was created as a result of all previous project activities. It aims to contribute to the process of deconstructing myths and distortion of historical facts in youth work and formal education. In the toolkit, you can find two deconstructed myths per each partner country, meaning 10 topics in total. You can also see the methodology we used to deconstruct these myths and apply it in your work. You can find physical and digital working methods on how to use both the videos and the toolkit when working with youth on these topics. Also, inside the toolkit, there is a list of the digital tools we found most useful when implementing online activities with young people.

We hope that this toolkit will be useful to all youth workers, teachers, and other educators working with youth on these topics and that it will contribute to a better understanding of these myths and historical distortions. We created this publication with the aim to combat stereotypes and prejudices in local communities, in your countries, and in Europe.

Tena Banjeglav, project coordinator

1.1. Methodology for the creation of the educational videos

What was planned at the beginning was to have five short videos (one per partner country) which would, in their first part, present and explain one chosen myth, and in the second part, deconstruct the same myth. Our idea was to incorporate in the videos visual materials created by the young people who participated in our workshops in March and April 2021.

However, because of the Covid-19 pandemic at the time, both workshops were implemented online, so, although we achieved the main goal – to collect and discuss the myths and historical distortions relevant to youth in the partner countries – the wanted visual materials were not produced. Adapting to the new reality of the project, we hired an illustrator to create the visuals for the videos. Together with the designer, he was in charge of the final products. All other research and work on the five videos were done by the partner organizations:

- 1) At the second transnational partner meeting in May 2021, the partners agreed on the myths they will choose for the videos. Then, this methodology and the next steps were agreed upon.
- 2) The partners did desk research about the chosen myth, to find more information about it, to understand the myth and its significance better, and to be able to deconstruct it. Also, during this process, all partners were collecting different relevant sources, in English and their local languages, which are attached to the videos for further research of the topics.
- 3) The third step was writing a script for each video. Each partner wrote the script for the video, following the chosen topic, and we agreed on the duration of the video, around 5 minutes. First, the partners wrote the script in English, then that text was divided into scenes. The scenes were accompanied by photos, which helped the illustrator to create the visuals, following the partners' ideas.

After the scripts were sent to the coordinator, they were edited and adapted and were then sent to the illustrator.

4) The illustrator then sent the first drawings, for the partners to approve the style of the video. It was decided that the drawings for all videos will have the same style so that is immediately visible that all videos are part of the same series and the same project.

5) The next step for the partners was to record the voiceover for their video, first in English. What we needed for it was a professional setting, as close to studio conditions as possible, and professional equipment. That was the most problematic step in creating the videos, but finally, all the partners managed to do it.



A screenshot from the educational video "Holocaust denial and distortion"

6) Then, the partners needed to choose background music for their videos.

7) After the video was finished and approved by the partners, they also added subtitles in English and their local language, at least to their own video.

8) After the video in English was done, the partners recorded a voiceover in their local language, which was following the same dynamics of the previously done video. This recording was much easier than the previous one.

9) Finally, all videos were published on the YouTube channel of the coordinating organization.



A screenshot from the educational video "The Kosovo myth"

1.2. Online methods used in the workshops with youth in March and April 2021

Energizers

1. Two truths and one lie – 3 minutes

In breakout rooms the participants are sharing three statements about themselves, two of them are true and one is a lie. The other participants have to guess which one is a lie. The same energizer can be implemented in physical activities, with the participants divided into smaller groups.

2. Touch blue – 5 minutes

One moderator is telling the participants the things they are supposed to touch, for example, touch something blue, touch something warm, etc. The moderators ask the participants about the items they have touched to encourage discussion and sharing details from the participants' surroundings, interests, etc.

3. Change three things – 3-5 minutes

With their cameras on, the participants were divided into pairs. They are supposed to watch the other participant's surroundings for half a minute or a bit longer. Then one participant switches their camera off and changes three things in their surroundings. After turning the camera on again, the other participant needs to guess which three objects changed their place.

4. Pick a picture of how you are – 10 minutes

The participants had two minutes to pick one picture, gif, or short video to share how they are feeling. They paste it in Padlet, so others can see it, and explain in short how they are feeling.

5. Non-verbal improvisation – 5-10 minutes

Prepare in advance a few phrases in Notes, Word, or Google Docs. One participant reads a phrase and has to mime or use non-verbal communication to explain the phrase, while the rest of the group is trying to guess the phrase. When they guess the first one, the facilitator asks for another volunteer who will explain the next phrase.

6. Genie in a bottle – 10 minutes

The facilitator asks the participants the following question: *“If you had three wishes, what would they be?”*. The participants have to name their three wishes and explain them in short.

7. Shape up – 5 minutes

The facilitator has to call out a shape, a heart, triangle, etc., and ask the participants to create the shape using their arms. The cameras need to be on all the time and you can ask the participants to stay in the position while the facilitator is making a screenshot.

8. Pick one object – 10 minutes

The participants have one minute to pick one object from their surroundings that represent them the best. Then, they need to show it to the group and explain why they chose it.

9. Shake it off – 5 minutes

The participants need to have their cameras on and unmute their microphones. Then, the facilitator tells them to, for example, shake their left hand 10 times. All the participants stand up and count together up to ten while shaking their left hand. Then, they can shake their right hand, their left or right leg, and make circles with their head.

10. Tweet yourself – 3 minutes

The task is for the participants to present themselves in 140 characters quickly and to paste the text on Padlet, so the others can see it.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- **Introduction and context**

The Second World War and the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995) occupy a central place in the culture of remembrance in Croatia nowadays. Certain aspects of these conflicts are subject to historical myths, distortion of historical facts, and disinformation. Such distortions are fruitful ground for populist interpretations and political propaganda which cause divisions in Croatian society and influence the worldview of youth in Croatia. To minimize the negative effect of such distortions and to provide professionals from formal and non-formal education with new tools and methods to work on these topics, this chapter of the toolkit will deconstruct the following historical distortions relevant to young people in Croatia:

1. The Bleiburg commemoration as glorification of the fallen Croatian (fascist) soldiers
2. The Jasenovac concentration camp as an example of historical distortion of the Holocaust
3. The black-and-white division of roles in the Croatian War of Independence: Croatian victims and Serbian perpetrators

The controversies which surround these historical distortions are alarming. That is why this chapter of the toolkit will provide context, deconstruct the distortions and suggest methods on how to work with youth on these controversial topics.

The historical distortion of the Holocaust in Croatia is the focus of the first educational video made in the scope of this project, available on this [link](#), so in this text we will focus on deconstructing the other two historical distortions.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

The Bleiburg commemoration as glorification of the fallen Croatian (fascist) soldiers

During the Second World War the Croatian fascists, the Ustaša, allied themselves with Nazi Germany and sent many Serbs, Roma people, and most of the country's Jews to their death. Nowadays, Croatia is among the countries which struggle with Holocaust distortion and growing revisionism.

In 2022 the Austrian Parliament's Committee on internal affairs officially asked the Austrian interior minister to ban the commemoration in Bleiburg. The annual Bleiburg gathering commemorates tens of thousands of Croatian Nazi-allied Ustaša troops and civilians who were killed by the Yugoslav Partisans in 1945. But it has become controversial because some participants display symbols of Croatia's Nazi-allied Ustaša movement. This led Austria to ban the display of certain Ustaša symbols. In 2016 the Croatian Parliament decided to reintroduce state sponsorship of the Bleiburg event after it was withdrawn in 2012 due to concerns that it served to rehabilitate the ideology of the Ustaša regime. Each year, Croatian ministers and state officials lay a wreath in front of a monument in Bleiburg that reads: *"In honor and glorification of the fallen Croatian soldiers."*



Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandrokovic speaking at the Bleiburg commemoration

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The Jasenovac concentration camp as an example of historical distortion of the Holocaust

Croatia still doesn't have a consensus about the country's main wartime concentration camp Jasenovac. In 2018 a revisionist book was promoted by the public TV broadcaster. The book claimed that Jasenovac was merely a labor camp and that no murders took place there. The author stated that the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelic had the greatest responsibility for rescuing camp inmates. Two years before, a Croatian documentary film claimed that the number of victims has been exaggerated. The Croatian culture minister at the time praised the film.



Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and members of the government at the 2021 commemoration in Jasenovac. As a rule, the Jewish community refuses to participate in the commemoration together with representatives of the government and it pays its respects separately.

In an interview in 2020, the Israeli ambassador in Zagreb also recognized that in Croatia *"there are individuals and organizations, although they are in the minority, whose goal is to change the accepted historical narrative of the Holocaust and the Ustasha regime, as well as the use of the greeting 'For the homeland ready'".* This greeting was used during World War II by the Croatian Ustaša. It was their equivalent of the Nazi salute Sieg heil.

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In 2017 the Croatian President at the time Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic made a controversial comment about the greeting: *“My position on the “Za dom spremni” (“For the homeland ready”) salute is clear. It is an old Croatian salute, but unfortunately, it was compromised during the Ustaša days.”*

The black-and-white division of roles in the Croatian War of Independence: Croatian victims and Serbian perpetrators

During the Croatian War of Independence, the Croatian Defence Forces adopted the salute *“For the homeland ready”*. At football games, rallies, protests, and commemorations alike, some Croats continue to use this infamous greeting even today. The Croatian War of Independence fueled a strong reservoir of nationalism in the sphere of values, comprising antagonist attitudes toward the ethnic Serb minority in the country.

According to a survey on the attitudes of Croatian youth by the Zagreb Office of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 45% of young Croats consider the war to be something sacred that should not be questioned. Also, 2/5 of the youth reject the idea of prosecuting war crimes committed by the Croatian army. 26% believe that censorship should be applied in public debates about the war. The survey also shows another worrying trend after the country's accession to the EU: 38% of young Croats state that nationality is a key factor when choosing a life partner, while in 2012 that percentage was down to 33%.

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FIGURE 7.5: Youth attitudes toward the Homeland War: "agree" and "strongly agree" (%)



2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

Myth 1: The Bleiburg commemoration as glorification of the fallen Croatian (fascist) soldiers

"The blurring of the past and the present is an integral part of the Bleiburg commemorations; not only do the participants dress in Ustaša uniforms, display Ustaša insignia and iconography, and sell paraphernalia associated with the NDH and its leaders, but there is an active discourse about the Croatian War of Independence accompanied by images of heroes (as well as individuals guilty of war crimes) from the conflict in the 1990s."

Vjeran Pavlaković,
Assistant professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at the
University of Rijeka

Context

Bleiburg is a town in Austria near the border with Slovenia. It holds a specific place in the culture of remembrance in Croatia and is imminently connected with the Bleiburg massacre of 1945.

During the Second World War the Croatian fascists, the Ustaša, allied themselves with Nazi Germany and on April 10, 1941, established the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). It was a puppet state of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy ruled by the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelic. All Jews, Serbs, and Yugoslav-oriented Croats became „unwanted“, anti-semitic propaganda, and Race laws were enforced. Ustaša concentration camps were established and the ustaša sent many Serbs, Roma people, and most of the country's Jews to their death.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

How are historical facts distorted?

When we talk about Bleiburg, there are various levels of distortion of historical facts:

How many people were killed?

The exact number of victims of what is colloquially called the "Bleiburg tragedy", in fact, a series of massacres committed in Slovenia and Austria in May 1945, will probably never be an indisputable historical fact. Estimates vary from 20 000 people to even 200 000. Due to the chaos of the post-war period, but also due to the outcomes of the war, it is impossible to pin down a precise number of the people killed.

There are, of course, estimates, but they vary and are fertile ground for the spread of misinformation. Distortions aside, it is safe to conclude that the number of killed is within the borders of the specter of 20 000 dead given by historians Slavko and Ivo Goldstein and the assessment of the demographer Vladimir Zerjavic, who later revised his figure to between 45,000 and 55,000 killed.

Bleiburg as a "Croatian tragedy"

Aside from manipulating history by exaggerating the numbers of the killed, the distortion of historical facts about Bleiburg is often done by ignoring the fact that in the retreating groups there were not only Croats but also Slovenes and Serbs. Ignoring the fact that at the end of the Second World War, Serbian nationalist and fascist formations withdrew with the Ustaša and Home Guards feeds the nationalist myth of exclusively Croatian suffering at Bleiburg.

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Contemporary distortion of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH)

The Republic of Croatia, by an act of the Croatian Parliament, started to officially commemorate the victims at Bleiburg in 1995, a time when nationalism was fueled by the ongoing war for independence. Nowadays, the commemorations are attended by people wearing Ustaša uniforms and include a display of Ustaša insignia and iconography. Many high-profile state and religious officials attend the event each year. The association Pocasni Bleiburski vod – Bleiburger Ehrenzug (Honorary Bleiburg Platoon) which actively participates in the organization of the annual event also uses Ustaša insignia.

In 2012 the state sponsorship of the Bleiburg commemoration was eliminated due to concerns that the annual event at the beginning of May served to rehabilitate the ideology of the Ustasa regime. In 2016 the Croatian Parliament reintroduced the state sponsorship. Each year, Croatian ministers and state officials lay a wreath in front of a monument in Bleiburg that reads: *“In honor and glorification of the fallen Croatian soldiers.”*

The same monument, placed in 1987, a time when nationalism in the former Yugoslavia was on the rise, bears the coat of arms used during the Independent State of Croatia. In 2019 the Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic also laid flowers in front of the monument. In 2022 local authorities in Bleiburg removed the Ustaša coat of arms from the monument. The Croatian government answered by sending a diplomatic protest note and initiating a conversation with the Austrian ambassador in Zagreb.

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In 2021 Austria suggested a complete ban of the annual gathering in Bleiburg. The Austrian Interior Ministry expert group's report says that the Bleiburg commemorations violate the country's obligations under the Austrian State Treaty which re-established its independence in 1955. The treaty prohibits Nazi and fascist organisations.

Deconstruction

It is a historical fact that the Yugoslav Partisan army massacred tens of thousands of Croats fleeing the collapse of the Nazi-allied Independent State of Croatia without a trial. Commemorations of the Bleiburg massacre should be a vital part of Croatia's coming to terms with its own history. However, it should be made clear that the killed were not Croatian heroes. They were members of the Croatian armed forces commanded by the Nazi-allied Independent State of Croatia. By allowing/not forbidding Ustaša insignia and iconography, Croatia is distorting the facts of its WWII history and is nourishing harmful influences of far-right groups and individuals.

The Bleiburg commemoration in its current format is a distortion of the historical truth that during WWII the Ustaša were systematically killing Serbs, Roma people, and Jews living within the borders of the Independent State of Croatia. This distortion is worrying as it demonstrates the sentiment that some still have toward the far right. It is a blur between the past and the present and it is dangerous as it can affect the worldview of young people who are forming their political and national identity in an atmosphere where the conflict between the Ustaša and the Partisans seems much more recent than it is.

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Relevant sources for further research:

- Jasenovac i Bleiburg nisu isto / Slavko Goldstein, Ivo Goldstein / Zagreb 2011
- <https://faktograf.hr/2020/06/09/sto-se-doista-dogodilo-na-bleiburgu/>
- <https://balkaninsight.com/tag/bleiburg-commemoration/>
- <https://www.dw.com/bs/bleiburg-mit-o-%C5%Bertvi/a-48780173>
- <https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/za-jutarnji-pise-ivo-goldstein-tko-izjavi-da-su-u-bleiburgu-ubijeni-nevini-vojnici-nema-sto-traziti-u-jasenovcu-8504192>

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

Myth 2: The black-and-white division of roles in the Croatian War of Independence: Croatian victims and Serbian perpetrators

Context

In the 1990s a series of wars, often described as Europe's deadliest conflicts since World War II, led to the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

On June 25 1991 Croatia declared its independence and dissolution of its association with Yugoslavia following an independence referendum held in May.

The sizeable ethnic Serb minority in Croatia openly rejected the authority of the newly proclaimed Croatian state citing the right to remain within Yugoslavia. With the help of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serbia, Croatian Serbs rebelled, declaring nearly a third of Croatia's territory under their control to be an independent Serb state, the Republic of Serbian Krajina. Croats and other non-Serbs were expelled from its territory in a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Heavy fighting in the second half of 1991 witnessed the shelling of the ancient city of Dubrovnik and the siege and destruction of Vukovar by Serb forces. That was just the beginning of the conflict. The Croatian War of Independence was fought from 1991 to 1995 between Croat forces and the Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and local Serb forces.

Although establishing facts about war events and their consequences is immensely important for the victims' families, as well as for the society as a whole, no official, credible, verifiable, and indisputable list of killed in the wars between 1991 and 2001 has been published in any post-Yugoslav country so far.

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How are historical facts distorted?

The war fueled nationalism, hate speech, and distortion of historical facts resulting in antagonist attitudes toward the Serb minority in the country and a black-and-white division of roles in the war between - Croatian victims and Serbian perpetrators.

In 2000, the Croatian National Assembly issued a 'Declaration on the Homeland War', which states that its legacy is unequivocally accepted by all citizens of the country, leaving no room for questioning the victor's perspective.

The victory narrative fuels memorialization that focuses predominantly, if not exclusively, on Croatian war victims and veterans. With a few exceptions in recent years, commemoration ceremonies for Serbian civil victims are not attended by representatives of the Croatian government. While monuments and commemorative plates dedicated to the Croatian forces are abundant and generously financed from the state budget, the locations of suffering of Serbian victims are left unmarked or being vandalized with hate speech graffiti.

As a part of the school curriculum, study visits to Vukovar are organized for 14-year-old students. During the war, the city was besieged and destroyed. Severe fighting took the lives of more than 3 000 people. After the fall of Vukovar on November 18, 1991, several hundred people were executed at the nearby Ovcara Farm and in other nearby places. Thousands of non-Serbs were expelled and thousands were transported to prison camps in Serbia. When visiting Vukovar, the students meet Croatian veterans who have occupied the function of storytellers. The narrative is not adapted for adolescents and the students are told nothing about non-Croat war victims.

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Each year Croatia celebrates August 5 as Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day and the Day of Croatian Defenders. On August 4 1995 the Croatian army launched Operation "Storm" to retake control of territories under the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina. While Croats celebrate it as Victory Day, Serbs regard it as a moment for national mourning, an occasion when hundreds of thousands of ethnic Serbs were ethnically cleansed from their ancestral homelands. In the public discourse around that date, there is little to no space for mentioning the hundreds of Serbian victims who lost their lives in the military operation and for the responsibility of the Croatian army.

Deconstruction

While the predominant victory narrative about the war glorifies Croatian victorious operations it leaves almost no room for acknowledgment of the crimes committed by Croats. It is a fact that in the course of the conflict, war crimes were committed by both sides. War crimes against Croatian Serbs are being ignored by the Croatian judiciary system. Numerous crimes against Serbs during the 1991-95 war still have not been brought to court, more than 30 years after the beginning of the war. Many of the cases that have been processed have failed to result in convictions.

The Serbian National Council's research points out that no indictment has yet been raised for crimes committed against Serbs in Vukovar in 1991. The Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Vukovar, November 18, became a public holiday in 2020.

In the twenty-seven years since Operation "Storm", the Croatian judiciary brought three indictments for war crimes against Krajina Serbs against a total of seven members of the Croatian military and police units. The trials resulted in two final convictions.

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In addition, Croatian state attorneys' offices registered 6,390 criminal charges for crimes committed during and after Operation "Storm", of which 439 related to members of the armed forces. According to these statistics, 2,380 people were convicted, but the public was never informed of their names and the deeds for which they were convicted. There is no state data on the exact number of Serbian civilians who were killed in the operation. A disputed report from the Croatian Helsinki Committee names 677 victims.

An acknowledgment of these and other war crimes against Croatian Serbs is missing from the public narrative about the war and also from the school curriculum in Croatia. At the same time, funds and efforts are allocated for the school visits to Vukovar.

This myth of the strict division of roles in the Croatian war of independence to Croatian victims and Serbian perpetrators is still relevant today and influences young people in Croatia who have grown up listening to a one-sided narrative often resorting to hate speech and nationalism. As demonstrated in the survey on Croatian youth by the Zagreb Office of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, the idea that Croats and Serbs could now live together in what used to be war-torn areas is espoused by less than a third of respondents (30 percent), with less than one-fourth (23 percent) supporting national minority rights to use their own alphabet and language on official institutional premises.

Relevant sources for further research:

- <https://www.fes.de/en/youth-studies/>
- <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/31/three-decades-on-wars-legacy-still-overshadows-croatia/>
- <https://www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts>
- <https://snv.hr/publikacije/>

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- **Working methods**

Using the educational video “Dealing with popular myths: Holocaust denial and distortion”

The following methods can be implemented in formal and non-formal educational activities:

- Introductory activity

The students are shown a photograph (Source 1) and asked to answer the following questions:

- Who is shown in the photo, what is he doing?
 - What does his sign mean?
 - Do you have any idea what might be happening in the photo?
- Please explain your answer.



Source 1

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- "Stumbling stones" activity

A "stumbling stone", or a Stolperstein, is a concrete cube bearing a brass plate inscribed with the name and life dates of victims of Nazi extermination or persecution.

Pupils are shown photographs (Sources 2, 3) and asked to answer the following 2 questions:

- How are the people whose names you see connected?
- Do you have any idea what is shown in the photo? Please explain your answer



Source 2



Source 3

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- Group activity

The teacher divides the students into 2 groups. Students test their knowledge of history with the guidance of their teacher. Their task is to answer several questions with the help of the educational video:

Questions / Group 1:

- What is Holocaust denial?
- How do you explain the claims that the Holocaust did not happen?
- What are the consequences of Holocaust denial?
- Have you come across any information about the Jasenovac camp that you suspect is not true?

Questions / Group 2:

- What is Holocaust distortion?
- Can you give an example of Holocaust distortion?
- Who was Egon Berger?
- Have you come across any information about the Jasenovac camp that you suspect is not true?

After watching the video, each group has 15 minutes to answer the questions.

When the students are ready with their task, each group presents its answers to the other students.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- Discussion

Based on the collected information and the educational video, the students discuss on the following questions:

- What did you learn about the Jasenovac camp?
- Are Holocaust denial and distortion dangerous? Please explain your answer.
- What do you think is the best way to deal with Holocaust denial and distortion? Please give an example.

The teacher acts as a moderator of the discussion.

At the end, the teacher gives the students suggestions on how to critically examine historical sources:

Before using a source, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who produced this source?
- Was the author biased or dishonest?
- Did he or she have an agenda?
- When was this source created? Where?
- Is it representative of other sources created at the same time?
- In what ways is it a product of its particular time, place, or context?
- Why did the author produce this source?
- Does it privilege a particular point of view?

Pro tips for students:

- Treat the conventional wisdom on your topic with a dose of skepticism.
- Question your own basic assumptions :)

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- Homework

The teacher can give the students an additional task for homework:

Think of your own question about the Holocaust in Croatia and ask 3 students to answer your question. Write down the answers to present them to the class.

The jigsaw puzzle classroom method

When working with youth on the topics presented in this toolkit we suggest to use the jigsaw puzzle classroom method. It is a research-based cooperative learning technique which guarantees that all students are included in the work on a certain topic. We consider this method better than the usual work in groups as it often leads to contributions only from the most active students while the others are not actively participating in the group's tasks.

Here's an example of the jigsaw puzzle method in 10 concrete steps:

STEP ONE

Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments.

For example, if you want history students to learn about the Bleiburg massacre, you might divide a short historical text about it into segments on: (1) The independent state of Croatia, (2) The partisan movement, (3) The end of WWII, (4) "The way of the cross" (5) the Bleiburg commemoration today.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

STEP TWO

Divide students into 5- or 6-person groups.

The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability.

STEP THREE

Assign each student to learn one of the five segments of the lesson.

Make sure students have direct access only to their own segment.

STEP FOUR

Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.

STEP FIVE

Form temporary “expert groups” by having one student from each group join other students assigned to the same segment.

Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their original group.

STEP SIX

Bring the students back into their original groups.

STEP SEVEN

Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group.

Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.

STEP EIGHT

Float from group to group, observing the process.

If any group is having trouble (e.g., a member is dominating or disruptive), make an appropriate intervention.

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STEP NINE

At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material.

Students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but really count.

STEP TEN

Evaluation of the method.

Give students an anonymous questionnaire so that they feel free to share their honest opinion about the jigsaw puzzle method.

Digital working methods and tools

When working online on the topics of the toolkit we suggest incorporating the following digital methods as they ensure that all students are involved in the online lesson:

- Real-time interaction with live polls, Q&A, and word clouds – This method can break the monotonous process of online teaching when students are often muted and have turned off cameras, meaning their attention may be somewhere completely different. Slido (<https://www.sli.do/>) is a user-friendly platform that enables live interactions with students. The teacher can create a poll or a word cloud and the students can send their answers using their mobile phones and the password for the specific interaction. Slido can be used with Microsoft Teams, PowerPoint, Google Slides, etc.

2. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: CROATIA

- Real-time online quiz – A real time online quiz will engage students to listen carefully and participate more actively in the first part of the lesson as they will need to answer to related questions in real time shortly after. Kahoot! (<https://kahoot.it/>) is a popular platform for real time online quizzes. Its learning games, "kahoots", are user-generated multiple-choice quizzes that can be accessed via a web browser or the Kahoot! app. Kahoot! can be used to review students' knowledge, for formative assessment or as a break from traditional online learning activities.

Here is a list of other digital tools that can be incorporated in learning activities to engage the students and make the topic more attractive to them. Depending on the learning outcomes you want to have, you might consider using the following free digital tools:

- ThingLink - <https://www.thinglink.com/> ThingLink is a user-friendly platform with which students can create their own interactive maps, infographics, presentations, etc. The platform has a variety of animations that can be used and because of that both the process and the final result are engaging students to learn more about the topic.
- Tripline - <https://www.tripline.net/> Tripline is another easy way to present information in a more engaging way. It allows the students to make their own interactive maps by uploading photos and information. The maps can be also embedded so the information can be easily shared.

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Canva - <https://www.canva.com/> Canva is a great digital tool for presenting what students have learned during the class / learning activity. It allows young people to design their animated presentations or a poster on a certain topic, making the learning process fun as students can select their own graphics, stickers, and animations and customize the template they choose for their task.

Photographs:

Pixsell/Autor: Jurica Galoic/PIXSELL; Twitter/Andrej Plenkovic, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; AP Photo; Wikimedia Commons, author: Christian Michelides;

3. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: GREECE

- **Introduction and context**

Radicalization, populism, and historical distortions are problems affecting the worldview and political attitude of youth in Greece. The neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn is targeting youth to secure their votes and its members are distorting historical facts in order to (re)shape the views of young people on political and social issues. At the same time, youth are also subject to the polarization of the Greek society regarding the migration and relations between Greece and North Macedonia.

In this chapter we will present the context of these issues and focus on the deconstruction of two myths, dominating the public discourse:

1. "Cultural differences hinder refugees' integration"
2. "The use of the word "Macedonia", in the name of "North Macedonia" is a threat to Greece."

Radicalisation in Greece: The Golden Dawn

The rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party in Greece is a consequence of disenchantment with politics, the economic crisis, and the inability of the mainstream political parties to articulate a progressive position on the issue of "outsider" immigration to Greece. [1] The Golden Dawn played a key role both in concentrating and expressing the widespread extremist attitude towards immigrants and in spreading it in the context of a racist nationalism based on National Socialist ideas.

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Although the political party does not formally adopt or admit to using violent methods, its local affiliates and individual official and unofficial groups have done so. Their participation in violent incidents is carried out with the knowledge of the party leadership, even with the participation of the party MPs themselves. Another example is the 2013 murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas by a self-identified member of GD.[2] In this context, Golden Dawn had its origins in the movement that worked towards a return to right-wing military dictatorship in Greece.

The youth of the Golden Dawn

Research shows that youth are more prone to extremism and radicalization on the far-right.[3] Historically, the desire of the far-right is to influence the youth, in their attempt to bring new members to the movement and promote the *rebirth*[4] of the nation. The most desirable target groups for the far-right movements are often young people from the lower socio-economic strata, and areas most affected by the economic crisis. The Golden Dawn, has members with different backgrounds, mainly students and young people, and focuses on their proselytism in the organization.[5]

During the parliamentary elections in 2012, the Golden Dawn was the second most voted party between the ages 18-24.[6]

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Golden Dawn's Electoral Performance, 1994–2012

Election	Date	Votes	Percentage	Seats
European	12 June 1994	7,242	0.11	0
National	22 September 1996	4,487	0.07	0
European	13 June 1999	48,532	0.75	0
European	13 June 2004	10,618	0.17	0
European	7 June 2009	23,609	0.46	0
National	4 October 2009	19,624	0.29	0
Local	14 November 2010	10,222	5.29	1
National	6 May 2012	440,996	6.97	21
National	17 June 2012	426,025	6.92	18

Source: Greek Ministry of Interior: <http://www.ypes.gr/el/Elections/>

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Historical distortion

In this atmosphere, Golden Dawn campaigned hard to position itself as the “defender of the nation”. Its activists staged “Greeks-only” food banks and blood-donation drives and forced their way into hospitals to check the residence permits of immigrant nurses. The party staged spectacular rallies, with hundreds of members marching with torches and Greek flags at night, to boost its prominence in the media, with some media outlets giving the party an easy ride. One talk show host, for instance, told his viewers he believed a Golden Dawn MP’s claim that what appeared to be a swastika tattoo was, in fact, a “Trojan symbol”. [7]

Golden Dawn may be placed within a fascist and most specifically within a neo-Nazi framework, by focusing on its core ideological principles, including statism, paramilitarism, transcendence, and cleansing. The key justification is the myth of social decadence or in other words, the fascist premise, that society is in decline and may only be reborn through a statist movement from below, which will transcend social cleavages and cleanse the nation internally and externally.[8]

Conclusion

Fascism, more than any other political current, is a battle over memory as much as it is about the present. The extreme nationalists who populate the far right know this, and they know that to succeed they must make us forget what their ideas have led us to in the past. Fascism seeks to colonize our myths of identity and belonging, to turn them to their own destructive ends. It starts by promising to

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clean up your neighbourhood, your city, or your country. It says the nation is for you, and people like you alone – and that its violence will only ever be directed against those who don't matter: the misfits, outsiders, inferiors. It never stops there.

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3. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: GREECE

Myth 1: "Cultural differences hinder refugees' integration"

Context

For decades, immigration has been an issue that returns in various forms, occupying a central place in the public debate in Greece. In this discussion, distorted perceptions are often prevalent and the facts are distorted, as immigration is a policy issue and is often exploited by media. The influence of the mainstream media and the systematic intervention of the far right build up contemporary myths as the one that cultural differences hinder refugee integration. This myth can generate fear and panic, which makes it difficult to understand the complexity of immigration and interpret the subject soberly.

How are facts distorted?

According to this myth, refugees from the Middle East cannot integrate in Europe because of their cultural differences. The most common argument in that sense is that the predominantly Muslim refugee population has unfree, even dangerous cultural values, which will lead to an increase in crime rates and a threat of terrorism and sexual violence in Greece. As a result, racism, aggressive xenophobia, and hatred are masked under *"justified concerns of the people"*, and violence becomes a legitimate form of social order. Also, in Greece there is micro-partisanship, always ready to embrace these *"concerns"*, consistently avoiding even half a word of disapproval, in order to win more votes at elections, starting their sentences with *"I am not far right, but ..."*.

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Deconstruction

Most individuals reach Greece from Turkey, risking their lives in dangerous sea crossings to Greek islands in the northern Aegean Sea. In 2015, Greece was the main entry point for more than one million people (Clayton, Holland, 2015) who sought safety in the European Union. Although the number of arrivals has fallen significantly since Europe's so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015, thousands of people continue to arrive in Greece. From 2015 till today, a wave of hostile attitudes against refugees and asylum seekers is on the rise in the media, the Internet, and social media, which are perfect places for such views to flourish (Alexandros Sakellariou, 2015).

This myth creates extremist behavior exploited by the right wing parties. UNHCR has recorded extremely worrying attacks carried out by organized groups influenced by far-right ideas. The phenomenon escalated in 2020, mainly in terms of the frequency of organized attacks against target groups, such as refugees or migrants and human rights advocates.

Relevant sources for further research:

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- Nikos Megrelis, 2017 Media's Double Vision as Migrant Crisis Catches the World's Imagination, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/sites/default/files/2017-08/GREECE_Media_Migration.pdf



"Greek authorities must move towards a policy on migration that puts human rights and support for human rights defenders at its core", a UN expert stated on June 22, 2022.

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Myth 2: "The use of word "Macedonia", in the name of "North Macedonia" is a threat to Greece."

Context

Based on this myth, some in Greece would prefer the dissolution of North Macedonia. They do not care what a dissolution of North Macedonia would mean for peace in the Balkans as a whole. Indeed, such a thing does not worry the modern "Macedonian warriors", represented by the far right wing, since their vocabulary lacks the concepts of peace, international solidarity, and inter-Balkan cooperation. The truth is that in no case is the neighboring country a threat to Greece.

The name issue arose in 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia seceded from federal Yugoslavia and declared its independence under the name "Republic of Macedonia", basing its existence as an independent state on the "Macedonian nation". Greece reacted strongly to the interception of its historical and cultural heritage and the matter came to the United Nations Security Council, which made recommendations to find a speedy settlement of the name dispute and the remaining issues, for the benefit of peaceful relations and good neighborliness in the region. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

In Greece in 2018, in the tenth year of the economic crisis and in the midst of denials for improvement of everyday life, the SYRIZA government tried to resolve the name issue with the Prespa Agreement. This resulted in mass rallies, mainly from January 2018 to January 2019, in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other cities, with a basic request not to include the name "Macedonia" in the name of the neighboring state.

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How are historical facts distorted?

From 1992 onwards, the controversy over the name "Macedonia" and the "Macedonian" identity between Greece and North Macedonia came to shake governments, provoke nationalist outbursts, bring internal conflicts, draw countermeasures and was a source of pressure from international actors: Germany, USA, France, etc. In 2018 Greece witnessed a resurgence of national sentiments and a fear that North Macedonia will claim the Greek historical and cultural heritage and land as well. This narrative derived mainly from extremist circles and was manifested by the right-wing opposition in order to gain votes in the elections.

Deconstruction

In the Macedonian question, we see the culmination of the iceberg of systemic institutional racism and nationalism, which constructs Greek male citizens as the glorious heroes-slaughtered civilizations, because *"it is nationalism which leads to nations rather than the other way around"* as Gelner states (1983). It is this *"sacred"* Greek land, permanently degraded and *"under threat"* that the Greeks are called to protect.

According to a survey by KAPA Research (2018) at the rally in Athens against the Prespa agreement on February 4, 2018, 77% of the participants were men and mainly aged 45 to 65 years. 54% of the participants stated that they are politically positioned to the right, while 21% and 15% stated that they are positioned in the center and the left respectively.

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At the societal level, there are models of affirmed masculine behavior, praised by the church, circulated through the media, or glorified by the state (R.W. Connell & J. W. Messerschmidt 2005). With the encouragement of nationalism and with the support of nationalist rallies, with a constant war of attrition, aimed at preventing the Prespa agreement, even if it required the fall of the government to stay out of the memoranda, right-wing parties instrumentalized the Prespa agreement, cultivating a sense of fear in students and youth. Young people were targeted to convince them that North Macedonia is a threat to Greece and the right-wing propaganda eventually persuaded them to occupy their school buildings in 2020, shouting slogans against North Macedonia.



In February 2019, the official name of the country was changed to "Republic of North Macedonia"

3. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: GREECE

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3. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: GREECE

- **Working methods**

Entertainment and Education (E-E) Strategy

Entertainment-education: “the process of purposively designing and implementing a mediating communication form with the potential of entertaining and educating people, in order to enhance and facilitate different stages of pro-social (behavior) change” (Bouman, 1999: 25). Using this method when working with youth the following results can be achieved:

- Draw the viewer’s attention
- Highlight the main points
- Develop cognitive processing of information
- Develop Incidental Learning

Incidental learning can be realized through narratives and role models, that can build empathy and understanding, increase critical thinking, and encourages curiosity and learning. This strategy can be applied in non-formal learning as an interdisciplinary approach to educational practice.

Youth workers, scholars, educators, and practitioners can use the educational videos made in the scope of this project to present in an interactive way the deconstruction of historical or contemporary myths, by highlighting their historical and national aspects. Educators can also proceed with a graphic narrative based on the video’s content where they will assign the students to design a person and/or personalized items that will give life to the narrative in an artistic way. This activity will follow the narrative of the video by creating recognizable, believable “role models” and plots that will visualize the story and engage students in the process.

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By incorporating the Entertainment and Education Strategy into the education system, learning can be a fun and enjoyable experience. By using storytelling/narratives we can engage viewers in the learning process. Stories that provide a powerful metaphor, framework, and set of practical processes for resolving issues, and educating ourselves, can humanize learning. They offer students the opportunity to communicate as characters. Stories touch students' emotions and their feelings of curiosity and excitement.

Socratic Seminar Strategy

The Socratic Seminar, also known as Socratic Dialogue, is rooted in the conversations the Greek philosopher Socrates (470–399 BC) had with his pupils. The Socratic method is considered a touchstone in conversations about classroom pedagogy, from the early grades to graduate school. A pedagogy of rigorous questioning passed down from ancient Athens across continents and millennia has been widely accepted by teachers, administrators, and scholars as a legitimate approach to instruction. And among its supporters, the method is strongly believed to increase student engagement and promote critical thinking (Schneider, 2013).

During Socratic questioning, the teacher is a model of critical thinking who respects students' viewpoints. His role is to plan probing questions that provide structure and direction to the subject and sustains an environment of active learning. He keeps the discussion focused, follows up on students' responses, and invites elaboration. Students will be challenged, yet comfortable in answering questions honestly and fully in front of their peers, and will ask questions as well, both to the teacher and to each other.

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The questions help students to evaluate their options and to make decisions upon those opinions and promote collaborative and cooperative learning. Students are encouraged to not just find the correct ‘interpretation’ of the content, but to explore, view, and analyze the material from different angles and perspectives.

Digital methods and tools

“The best way to create value in the 21st century is to connect creativity with technology”.

Steve Jobs

Game-Based Learning in Education(GBL) / Badging Gamification

Game-Based Learning (GBL) originated from game research in the middle of the 1950s, and from the 1980s on scholars started the research and practice of integrating games into instruction and education. With the popularization of electronic games and the transformation of education concepts, people gradually started accepting games as learning tools (Seaborn and Fels, 2015).

Digital games remain an option for enhancing educational curricula in the interest of attracting and maintaining attention and increasing retained knowledge. In particular, badging and gamification is a motivational tool that rewards the learner through the use of digital badges. The badges are obtained as a reward for achieving a certain level of difficulty. The collection of badges turns the learning process into a gamification process that helps to motivate a learner to attempt to “conquer” new learning material.

3. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: GREECE

In a classroom, with GBL, students could engage in learning by using quality game badges via digital or virtual reality devices with broadband Internet access, hence enhancing the digital GBL experience.

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Photographs:

unsplash.com / humberto chavez ; AP Photo/Boris Grdanoski

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

- **Introduction and context**

The first part of this chapter provides information about Serbian youth's values and their statements on gender issues, abortion, homophobia, nationalism, Roma minority, as well as on the past and the 1990s wars on ex-Yugoslav territory. Having provided context, the text continues on to the deconstruction of two historical myths:

- The myth of Cursed Jerina
- The myth of Vuk Brankovic being a traitor in the Kosovo Battle

The second part of the chapter suggests methods and digital tools that can be used when working with youth on the topics covered in the toolkit.



"Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia"
(M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.)

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

The publication *“Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia”* (M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.) analyzes Serbia’s secondary school students’ statements and value orientations. Interviewees participating in this survey were 17-18 years of age, coming from generations born after October 5, 2000, the change of the regime in Serbia. The purpose was to spot possible changes in statements in comparison with the findings of the survey conducted in 2011. The compared findings of the two surveys result in an analysis of the values of this age group. The survey was conducted on a sample of 866 interviewees in five towns in Serbia: Belgrade, Novi Pazar, Nis, Kragujevac, and Novi Sad.

Gender issues

What is shown in a longitudinal perspective is that young people’s statements are now less traditional on the scales of patriarchy, and it can be concluded that they point to the decline of traditionalist values.

Analysis has shown that the inclination of secondary school students toward patriarchy has mildly declined in comparison with their statements in 2011 and that in 2019 young people are more inclined towards a “non-patriarchal” value orientation or, better said, equality in relationships between men and women (44% of secondary school students support the statements towards gender equality).

What is worrisome, however, is the statement that women should be beaten from time to time. Such a statement is supported by 8% of secondary school students and is similar to the 2011 survey findings.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Table 5. Average values of the statements on patriarchy (1–5)*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>2011 Girls/students</i>	<i>2018 General population</i>	<i>2019 Boys/students</i>
In Serbia society women are subdued by their families	/	/	2.80
A woman has a life of contentment only once she becomes a mother	2.88	/	2.46
More sexual freedoms for a man are only natural and understandable	3.34	/	2.18
A man still has to have a final say in his family	/	/	2.72
Mother is the one who should take care of children, and only then a father	2.64	/	2.37
It is crucial that a man should also be actively involved in parenthood	/	/	4.75
Women should bear more children so that we could survive as a nation	3.26	/	3.05
Men are generally better political leaders than women	/	2.44	2.73
University degrees are more important to boys than to girls	/	1.70	1.78
When a woman earns more than her husband, marriage problems are inevitable	/	2.51	2.14

* 1 – total disagreement; 5 – full agreement

“Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia”
(M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.)

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Nationalism

As for their statements on nationalism, secondary school students are mildly inclined to nationalism when organic nationalism is in question, whereby we can say that 32% of them have pronounced nationalist beliefs. As for the scale of ethnocentric nationalism, which measures more specific international relations, we can state that their statements are “moderate”. All statements show that girls have less pronounced nationalist beliefs than boys.

As for religion, the findings show that secondary school students in Novi Pazar are more conservative, patriarchal, and homophobic, which is attributed to a high percentage of those belonging to the Muslim confession of faith in this town. The least traditional secondary school students on all scales are those who declare themselves as “atheists”.

The social distance scale confirms that secondary school students manifest the greatest distance towards gay and lesbian people, and then towards ethnic minorities, Albanians and Roma, as well as migrants, which points to the existence of ethnic stereotypes among young people.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Tabela 5. Average values of of all statements used to measure nationalism (1–5)*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>2018 General population</i>	<i>2019 Students</i>
<i>Organic nationalism</i>		
Survival of one's nation is a main duty of every individual.	3.98	3.43
A nation that respects not its tradition is doomed.	3.86	3.05
The past of our people must be sanctity.	4.08	3.38
Every inch of this land has to be sacred to each of us.	4.12	3.23
<i>Ethnocentric nationalism</i>		
Ethnically-mixed marriages are less stable than other marriages.	2.04	1.96
A person can only feel safe in the environment where the members of his nation are in majority.	2.70	2.72
It is possible for nations to cooperate but not to fully trust one another.	3.03	3.11
Ethnicity has to be a major criterion of choosing a spouse.	2.34	2.44
Ethnic diversity undermines the unity of our society.	2.26	2.50
Having all members of a nation in one nation-state is the best solution.	2.88	2.94
High exposure to foreign movies, music and books impairs national culture.	2.72	2.20
Serbia should look after its own interests, even at expense of conflicts with other nations.	2.93	2.69

* 1 = total disagreement; 5 = full agreement;

"Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia"
(M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.)

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

1990s wars

The questionnaire also measured attitudes towards the past and the 1990s wars, especially focusing on Serbia's responsibility. Findings of the scale of attitude towards the past show that secondary school students' stances are muddled.

The highest percentage of interviewees (53) think that Kosovo should remain a part of Serbia, while almost 12% see it as an independent state. Such statements correspond to findings of public opinion surveys, the most of interviewees would oppose the government's possible decision to recognize Kosovo in return for membership in the European Union.

In this context, ideas that are construed about the "times past," especially about the Battle of Kosovo and its mythical significance, are becoming a major aspect of the manner in which young people see their society, themselves, and others. Nationalist ideology and denial of responsibility for the wars of the 1990s are still actual.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Table 6. Statements on the 1990s wars

<i>Statements</i>	<i>I totally disagree/I disagree</i>	<i>I neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>I fully agree/I agree</i>
As a nation, Serbs are responsible for the crimes committed in Croatia in the 1990s.	49.8%	36.2%	14.0%
As a nation, Serbs are responsible for the crimes committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s.	46.1%	35.5%	18.4%
As a nation, Serbs are responsible for the crimes committed in Kosovo in the 1990s.	51.3%	33.7%	15.0%
All nations are equally responsible for the war, rather than Serbs alone	13.6%	19.9%	66.4%
Political elites are to blame, not the people.	6.3%	30.1%	63.6%
Genocide against Bosniak population was committed in Srebrenica.	15.7%	46.1%	38.2%
Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić are war criminals.	22.2%	46.6%	31.2%
I do not have enough information about the wars waged in the 1990s.	27.4%	24.7%	47.9%
Reconciliation between Serbs and Croats is possible.	30.1%	26.7%	43.2%
Reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks is possible.	21.1%	25.1%	53.8%
Reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians is possible.	54.3%	22.2%	23.5%

“Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia”
(M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.)

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Roma minority

By comparing the average values of all the above-mentioned arguments with statements presented in the 2011 survey, we can see that interviewees are more tolerant now and less biased about Roma.

In 2019, 71% of interviewees approve of the argument that Roma should be totally equal in society. The values indicating racism (Roma are mentally less capable of learning; Roma are dirty by nature) are lower at both scales, while the values indicative of "ethnic" stereotypes (Roma would not learn, they would rather street-beg) are higher, and hint at "biological racism."

"News from the past"

The publication *"News from the past: knowledge, ignorance, use and abuse of history"* (Belgrade Centre for Human rights, Dubravka Stojanović ... [et al.]; prepared by Vojin Dimitrijević, Belgrade, 2010) is a product of research conducted by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights.

Extensive public opinion polls were conducted on how citizens see the past (national and general history), themselves and others in it, as well as how prejudices and misinformation affect their judgment and decision-making today. The book contains texts that point to the results of research, people's misconceptions about certain historical events, the role of the media and the elite in the learning of history, and the creation of delusions or dilemmas among citizens.


4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

The results of the research can be considered devastating, and the reason for the conflicts in the 1990s and the intensified fascism and right-wing activities in Serbia created on the mythologizing of history can still be found in them.

What is most worrying is the fact that the youngest respondents, those between 18 and 29, showed the greatest prejudices.

According to the findings of the publication, there are several historical myths that are widespread in the public discourse in Serbia:

- „The chosen Nation“ (strong awareness of one's own greatness)
- „The oldest nation“ (awareness of its own antiquity showed as the strongest component of historical consciousness and national arrogance)
- The Middle Ages as a „Golden Age“ (Kosovo myth)

Da li je Srbija uvek vodila samo oslobodilačke ratove?	Da		70
	Ne		21
	Ne zna		9
Šta je, po Vašem mišljenju, najznačajniji događaj u istoriji Srbije?	Spontano dati odgovori:		
	Kosovski boj		22
	Ustanci protiv Turaka		11
	Oslobođenje od Turaka/Ropstvo pod Turcima		10
	5. oktobar/pad Miloševića/demokratske promene		6

“News from the past: knowledge, ignorance, use and abuse of history / Dubravka Stojanović ... [et al.]; prepared by Vojin Dimitrijević, Belgrade 2010.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Conclusion

High unemployment and unsteady jobs mar the inclinations and views of Serbia's youth. Young people's level of "political and civic participation" is low, which points to their insufficient integration into the society's political system. The conclusion of another study is that young people are not "interested" in politics and "don't discuss politics", nor do they try to be politically informed.

Generally speaking, young people are rather doubtful about their future, considering the opinion shared by many that *"academic titles and high qualifications can less and less guarantee stable and safe careers"*. Based on research, we can conclude that young people are most susceptible to stereotypes, prejudices, historical myths, and history distortion.

The school system should be the most powerful weapon in the fight against the distortion of history and against historical myths. But, unfortunately, the school system does not have enough capacity to win in the fight against strong populist media, social networks, and "official" public speech that is transmitted through the media.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Myth 1: The myth of Cursed Jerina

Context

Despotess Jerina Brankovic has been unfairly described as evil. She suffers this injustice for centuries and is certainly one of the most tragic characters of Serbian medieval history. Even today the term Cursed Jerina is used although she was a powerful ruler, a good wife, and a caring mother. It can be said that Jerina was a tragic character, to whom folklore did a great injustice. The myth targets beautiful, beloved, educated, and wealthy women (especially if they are of foreign origin) who influence their husbands, women who are determined and brave, ready to make important decisions and reach their goals at any cost. It is not known how the bad perception of Jerina spread through Serbia, who, like her father-in-law Vuk Brankovic, is seen as a traitor.

The figure of Jerina evokes memories of difficult times, so she was called "Cursed Jerina". Her name is indelibly linked to the construction of Smederevo, the new Serbian capital, which was built in a very short time with enormous sacrifices made by the population of Despotovina. Many people did not understand the purpose of building this huge fortress, so they attributed it to Jerina's whim, especially since her brother Đorđe Kantakuzin managed the works. The people were obliged to kuluk, forced and unpaid work, for a full 11 years (1428-1439) with the Greek army, which additionally created dissatisfaction. Constantinople and its ramparts were taken as a model for this lowland fortress which is one of the largest fortresses of its type in Europe.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Eggs were used for binding material during the construction, which caused long-term hunger for an already poor population. All this led to the fact that she was forever remembered as a cruel despotess of foreign origin.

How are historical facts distorted?

The people blamed Jerina because, in 1435, her daughter Mara (it is not certain whether this was her daughter or Đurađ's from his first marriage) married sultan Murat II. The people did not like that the Serbian princess was given to the Ottoman harem, and attributed Đurađ's and the Sultan's agreements to the Cursed Jerina. It is a common saying, "Jerina even gave her own daughter into the hands of the enemy in order to strengthen state relations." After five centuries of listening to this in gusle accompaniment, the people got the impression that she made Serbia and her family unhappy, but in fact, at one point, Jerina sacrificed the most precious thing she had for her country - her children.

Despot Đurađ and despotess Jerina were very rich and they were considered one of the richest rulers in Europe. Throughout the centuries, the legend about the buried treasure of Cursed Jerina circulated, and throughout the years, treasure hunters came to Smederevo Fortress in the hope of finding buried treasure.

The final fall of the Despotovina occurred in 1459. The people believed that Jerina was to blame for all these misfortunes and the downfall of Serbia. They believed that a curse fell on Jerina because of her alleged cruelty in ruling, kuluk, giving her daughter to the harem, blinding her sons, etc. In fact, Jerina, like Đurađ, was only concerned with the salvation of Serbia. At that time, the position of the Serbian state was extremely unfavorable and all measures needed to be taken to preserve the state.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

As the people were dissatisfied with Jerina's firm hand, reflected in her determination in building the city - they characterized her as cursed and all further events in the downfall of the Serbian state were attributed to her.

Both Đurađ and Jerina spoke several languages. Despotess Jerina, being very beautiful, educated, and literate, often influenced her husband's state affairs. In the Middle Ages, it was generally accepted that a woman is a tool of the devil if she manages the matter of her husband and influences him. The people often did not hold anything against their master but attributed all difficulties they had to his wife. Thus, due to the construction of the Smederevo Fortress, the despotess Jerina became popularly known as Cursed Jerina.



An illustration of Irina Branković (Kantakouzenos) in Esphigmenou charter from 1429

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Deconstruction

The myth is historical, it originates from the Middle Ages and it marks the last years of the Serbian medieval state before its fall under the Ottomans. It symbolizes the various reasons that justify the difficult life under the rule of Jerina Brankovic, as well as the causes of the downfall of the state that was once an empire. As such, this myth is still popular today, although historians have never been entirely clear about this hatred of the despotess.

Đurađ Branković was the cousin of despot Stefan Lazarević, son of prince Lazar, whose sister Mara was married to Vuk Branković and to whom despot Stefan left the despotate to manage after his death. Irina or Jerina Kantakouzin, later nicknamed Cursed Jerina was the great-granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor John Kantakouzin, the granddaughter of the emperor and despot Matthias Kantakouzin, and the daughter of Sevastokrator and despot Morea Demetrius I Kantakouzin, who ruled in Thessaloniki. Irina was much younger than Đurađ, who was an exceptionally bright, educated, wise statesman. Jerina appears in documents for the first time in 1419. This date is considered the beginning of her participation in the political life of Serbia.

Jerina had five children. After the death of despot Đurađ, she ruled for one year as a despotess-regent. She died as a nun in Rudnik in 1457. It is assumed that her death was the result of poisoning by her son Lazar, but this has not been historically proven and confirmed. It is not known where she was buried. The death of despotess Jerina is also shrouded in legend. Old towns throughout the area inhabited by Serbs were named Jerina's Town after her (Smederevo, Golubac, Zvornik...).

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Even in the 19th century, Jerina was portrayed as a self-willed, cruel woman who hurts, tortures, and even wants the death of her children, in order to preserve power and wealth. This myth especially targets women loved by their husbands whose love protects them and gives them the possibility of haughty behavior. A beautiful woman, especially if she is much younger than her husband who adores her, who is educated, rich, and accomplished in many fields has great power. Nowadays, this could be the wife of a politician or the owner of a successful business. As such, this figure can be an ideal for young girls who desire fame, wealth, and power.

Various folk songs (Đurđeva Jerina), as well as legends, talk about Cursed Jerina. She is portrayed as an arrogant and cruel ruler who is aware of her power and shows that her evil knows no boundaries. Almost everywhere she is depicted as a wicked wife, an evil mother, a harsh and merciless ruler, and even an adulteress. Vidan Nikolić's novel, "The Shadow of a Despotess", which in later editions was called "Cursed Jerina" was named after her.

But there are also positive portrayals, in the oral poetry (The Marriage of Đurđa Smederevac) she is portrayed as a faithful woman who, although she does not care about the lives of others, has never done anything bad to her husband. She solves important state problems and makes the most difficult decisions instead of her husband.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Relevant sources for further research:

- https://sr.m.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/%D0%88%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%91%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%9B
- <https://wannabemagazine.com/prokleta-jerina-i-legenda-o-zakopanom-blagu/>
- <https://www.logicno.com/zivotni-stil/kultura/grad-gradila-prokleta-jerina.html>
- <https://www.espreso.co.rs/vesti/drustvo/999155/prokleta-jerina>
- <https://www.zvono.media/sr/stara-tvrđava-i-prokleta-jerina>
- <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/kule-svedoci-vekova-srednjevekovna-tvrđava-djurdev-grad-istorijsko-bлаго-zvornika/5vx9wkv>
- <http://zvornikturizam.org/v2/bs/rooms/legende-o-prokletoj-jerini/>
- https://sr.m.wikipedia.org/sr-ec/%D0%97%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0_%D1%82%D0%B2%D1%80%D1%92%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0
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- <https://www.rokselana.com/pomogla-srbiji-ostala-prokleta-tragicna-sudbina-jos-tragicnije-secanje-na-despoticu-irinu-kantakuzin/>
- <https://lepotesrbije.alo.rs/turizam/vesti/11763/srednjovekovno-istorijsko-naslede-prokleta-jerina-je-sa-ovog-zamka-bacala-mladice-u-drinu/vest>

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Myth 2: The myth of Vuk Branković being a traitor in the Kosovo Battle

Context

Vuk Branković (around 1345 - 1397) was a Serbian nobleman who, along with Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, was one of the most significant figures in Serbian history in the last decades of the 14th century. In folklore, he was remembered as a traitor in the Kosovo Battle, although almost until his death he was the only Serbian lord who resisted the Ottomans. The name of Vuk Branković has become synonymous with the greatest traitor of the Serbian people and the Serbian state. This is how folklore created in the centuries after the battle portrays him. In the historical sources written immediately after the battle in Kosovo, there is no information about the treachery of Vuk Branković, so the question arises, why did folklore accuse a historical figure of treachery so viciously?

Vuk Branković comes from the Branković family, he was the son of Sevastokrator Branko Mladenović, who ruled Ohrid during the reign of Tsar Stefan Dušan in the middle of the 14th century. Branković was the son-in-law of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, married to his daughter Mara. Vuk Branković and Prince Lazar worked closely together. Branković created a vast area known as the Land of Branković around the family estates in Drenica in Kosovo. Within that area were Skopje, Peć, Prizren, Vučitrn, Zvečan, then the Trepča and Brskovo mines, as well as Pristina, where its capital was located.

The episode that marked his life and determined his historical destiny is the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottomans on June 28, 1389, which was fought on his territory and in which he commanded the right wing of the Serbian army.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

According to medieval understandings, the battle finished undecided, as both rulers were killed and both armies retreated from the battlefield. The heirs of Prince Lazar recognized the supreme power of the Ottomans, and Vuk Branković tried to preserve the independence of his area. At the beginning of 1392, he lost Skopje and became an Ottoman vassal. In the following years, Brankovic did not fulfill his vassal obligations to the sultan and tried to continue the fight against the Ottomans, so that during 1396, most of his state was occupied, including Pristina. In 1396, the Ottomans conquered the remains of his state. Vuk Branković was captured and taken into captivity, where he died in 1397. He was a great benefactor and founder, he built and restored a large number of monasteries. Today it is not known where he is buried. According to some sources, his grave is in the monastery of Saint Paul in Svetogorje or in Hilandar.

How are historical facts distorted?

In popular folklore, Vuk Branković was remembered as a traitor in the Kosovo Battle, although the fact is that almost until his death, Vuk was one of the few lords who resisted the Ottomans. Why did folklore unfairly condemn Vuk Branković as a traitor? It is difficult to answer that question, although the answers should be sought in the years after the battle when after the death of Prince Lazar, Vuk Branković became one of the most powerful magnates leading the "fallen and decapitated state". Many historians believe that the conflict between the heirs of Prince Lazar, i.e. Princess Milica and Vuk Branković marked his future historical fate as a traitor.

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Deconstruction

In historical sources, the motif of betrayal appears for the first time in 1601 in Mavro Orbini's work "The Kingdom of the Slavs", more than two centuries after the battle. The work was obviously influenced by folklore. Mavro Orbin records *"...Vuk Branković escaped with almost all his men, since (as some say) he had secret negotiations with Murat to betray (as he did) his father-in-law in order to get hold of his state."*

In the 19th century, Serbian historiography unequivocally established that there was no evidence that Vuk Branković betrayed Kosovo, nor were the claims of betrayal substantiated in history textbooks. However, according to one of the public opinion surveys conducted in Serbia in 2010, to the question: "Is the claim that Vuk Branković betrayed Kosovo in 1389 true?" 50% of the adult citizens of Serbia answered "yes"; 39% "no"; 11% "don't know". Belief in the betrayal of Vuk Branković persists for centuries, although scientific historiography has proven that this is not true.

Relevant sources for further research:

- Šuica, Marko (2018). Vuk Branković - slavni i velmožni gospodin, Beograd
- Mihaljčić, Rade (1975). Junaci kosovske legende, Beograd.
- Srpski junaci srednjeg veka: Vuk Branković
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAWaBg6elhA>
- Dealing with popular myths: the Kosovo myth
<https://youtu.be/Aw2I543kPYk>

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

- **Working methods**

Discussion in the classroom

Discussion in the classroom makes learning more interactive and helps students develop skills that cannot be taught in a traditional lecture format. The discussion method is suitable for working with video material. At the beginning of the class, we play a short video based on which we will develop the discussion later.

Classroom discussions are a common pedagogical approach that involves verbal exchanges of information between teachers and students. When students are encouraged to ask thoughtful questions, give reflective responses, and challenge each other using reasoned arguments within classroom discussions, they are more likely to become builders and owners of their knowledge.

Facilitating effective discussions:

- Preparing for a discussion
- Starting a discussion
- Encouraging student participation
- Guiding the discussion
- Evaluating the discussion

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Flipped classroom

A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aims to increase student engagement and learning by having pupils complete readings at home and work on live problem-solving during class time. This pedagogical style moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom. With a flipped classroom, students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, or carry out research at home, while actively engaging in work in the classroom, with a mentor's guidance.

Some of the benefits of a flipped classroom are:

- it's flexible
- students can learn at their own pace
- students take responsibility for their learning
- students learn rather than encounter material in class
- there are more opportunities for higher-level learning
- it does not waste time transferring information to students when that information is available to them in books or online (Mazur 2009)
- instructors and TFs work more closely with students, getting to know students better and providing better assistance
- increased collaboration between students

4. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SERBIA

Digital tools

Sutori

Sutori is an interactive teaching tool that lets users create story timelines that can include photos and documents. Sutori gives users full control over how they present their topic with a variety of different options available for use. These different sections are then compiled into one page, essentially creating a full teaching module.

<https://www.sutori.com/en/>

Photographs:

"Value orientations of secondary school students in Serbia" (M. Radoman, Helsinki files, vol. 38, Belgrade 2019.); News from the past: knowledge, ignorance, use and abuse of history / Dubravka Stojanović ... [et al.]; prepared by Vojin Dimitrijević, Belgrade 2010.; Public domain.

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

- **Introduction and context**

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the myths and historical distortions connected with Spanish history that were deconstructed in the scope of the "Dealing with popular myths" project. Later on, the text focusses on the deconstruction of two historical myths:

- The myth of the Valley of the Fallen – Valle de los caídos
- The myth of Catalonia's independence

The second part of the chapter suggests methods and digital tools that can be used when working with youth on the topics covered in the toolkit.



Valley of the Fallen

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

The "13 roses" myth

13 women, between 18 and 29 years old, who in 1939 were tortured and shot for being accused of a crime they never committed because when it was committed, they were in prison for being part of the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU) or the Partido Spanish Communist (PCE). Many people and political parties in Spain deny that this happened and blame this group of women and their involvement in activities that were not allowed during the Franco regime.

This myth was deconstructed and explained by the young people that participated in the second workshop for youth organized in the scope of the project on April 12-16, 2021.



Plaque in the cemetery wall commemorating the 13 women

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

The myth of Cristóbal Colón and the colonization

Spain's role in colonization is seen as generally positive. Within the ideological context of the Spanish being chosen and the colonization sanctioned by God, colonization is perceived as bringing civilization to native barbarians. In its most extreme form, indigenous inferiority was expressed in terms that denied Native Americans their humanity.

Even by his own contemporary standards, Columbus was a uniquely cruel person. Aside from the active killings by the colonizers, they also brought with them diseases that were invasive and deadly to the indigenous population. The violence unleashed by Columbus and his followers, coupled with the diseases they transmitted resulted in the virtual annihilation of Native Americans in the Caribbean within 100 years. In Spain, October 12 is celebrated as Spanish national day, commemorating the Spanish legacy to the world, especially in America.

This myth was deconstructed and presented by youth workers during the first workshop organized on March 2-6, 2021.



5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

Valle de los caídos

The Valley of the Fallen consists of a monumental memorial and a Catholic basilica, surrounded by the woods near the Spanish capital Madrid. The Valley was built by order of the dictator Francisco Franco who declared the complex “a national act of atonement and reconciliation”, in the same time being a memorial of his victory in the Civil War (1936-1939). It is also the place where Franco’s remains were buried after his death in 1975 until his exhumation on 24 October 2019.

A lot of controversies are connected with the people who were or are still buried in the Valley. Starting with the infamous Franco, who was buried there after his death. Allegedly, he was the only person buried in the Valley who died of natural death, versus 33,847 killed in the Civil War.

This myth was deconstructed and explained by the young people that participated during the second workshop with youth organized April 12-16, 2021.



Presentation from the workshop for youth, April 12-16, 2021

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

From Guernica's ruins, a lesson in fake news

On the 26th of April, 1937, Italian planes targeted a bridge, while the German Kondor legion hit the town of Guernica with conventional and incendiary bombs while men, women, and children ran from the burning town. The Nazis and fascists were fighting for the forces of General Francisco Franco, in revolt against the elected republican government of Spain.

They ensured that telltale German and Italian shell and bullet cases were removed and that empty oil drums were placed about the town. When journalists friendly to Franco were brought in, they were told that the Basques had destroyed their own town by setting it alight – hence the empty oil drums.

This example of fake news was presented by youth workers during the second workshop with youth organized on April 12-16, 2021.

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

Myth 1: Valley of the fallen - a place of a national act of atonement and reconciliation of the Spanish Civil War victims

Context

The Valley of the Fallen consists of a monumental memorial and a Catholic basilica, immersed in the woods near the Spanish capital - Madrid. It was built by order of the dictator Francisco Franco who declared the complex “a national act of atonement” and reconciliation, at the same time being a memorial of his victory in the Civil War (1936-1939). Franco’s corpse was also buried in the Valley from after his death in 1975 until his exhumation on 24 October 2019. The site is immense and it is easy to feel humiliated and small while walking around - just like the dictator intended it to be.

How are historical facts distorted?

Myths arise around the real cost of building the monument. It took almost two decades to finish and thousands of political prisoners that fought against the dictatorship were among the workforce utilized in its construction. Some workers died during the construction, but there is a big disagreement on the number of deaths. Some sources claim there was a tremendous number of 27,000 deaths due to hunger and physical abuse. At the same time, other sources strongly deny this figure, trying to prove that only 15 people lost their lives due to work accidents. Moreover, the Valley of the Fallen proves to be dangerous even nowadays. Lack of proper maintenance resulted in an arm falling off a huge statue and nearly hitting a tourist, which would have been lethal. The memorial needs regular care and money invested in it, but the concern of many is: does a place built to commemorate a victory of a fascist dictator deserve the investment?

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

Another myth connected to the Valley is it being a place of reconciliation and atonement. It is hard for the families of the Civil War victims to perceive the Valley this way since their relatives' bodies were exhumed from the original graves and moved to the complex without their consent nor even identification of the particular bodies.

Deconstruction

There have been pledges to create a museum of the Civil War in the Valley and possibly offer guided tours in order to explain its historical context and clarify the historical myths that emerged around it. It is said that without any explanation the complex is just a tragic mausoleum. The government plans to move the remains of the other Fascist leader, Primo de Rivera, to a cemetery of the site - a more discreet place where it wouldn't attract fascist supporters. The Benedictine monks are also meant to leave the abbey and stop taking care of the complex due to controversies around their values and ways of managing the place. However, to this day all of this remains a plan. The country has been divided because of the different views on how to commemorate the Civil War victims and the question what should happen to the Valley. For various people, the site represents colossal loss and horrid suffering; for others - the far-right defenders who gather on the site every year to honor Franco's birthday - it is a proper recognition of Spain's most influential leader, and a headstone to a relentless trace of Spanish nationalism. All in all, the Valley remains a place surrounded by a sad and disquieting atmosphere. Although it attracts a few hundred thousand visitors every year, most of them leave the place with a heavy heart and no intention to return.

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As for the unidentified bodies, that were exhumed from their original graves without the families' consent, thanks to the persistent work of lawyers and some politicians, as well as relatives of the victims of the war, in March 2021 the Spanish government approved a special fund of €665,000. It allowed the exhuming of the remains of 60 people, both Republicans, and Nationalists, whose relatives demanded it. Teams of up to 15 professionals carried out tremendous work of opening the graves and identifying as well as separating the parts of the skeletons, without disturbing the remains of the other victims.

Relevant sources for further research:

- Moreno Garrido, Belen (2 July 2010). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276384960_El_Valle_de_los_Caidos_una_nueva_aproximacion Revista de Historia Actual (in Spanish). 8 (8): 32. ISSN 1697-3305. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276384960_El_Valle_de_los_Caidos_una_nueva_aproximacion, Retrieved 13 May 2022
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- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/battle-memory-spanish-civil-war-180969338/>, Retrieved 13 May 2022.
- Fate of Franco's Valley of Fallen reopens Spain wounds - BBC News Spain. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14189534>

5. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: SPAIN

Myth 2: Catalonia is so historically, culturally, and economically different from the rest of Spain that it should become an independent country

Context

One of the most popular myths in Spain is the myth of Catalonia's independence. It's focused on the independence of Catalonia's region from the rest of Spain - at the moment an autonomous community, together with 16 other Spanish communities. A lot of people claim Catalonia should gain independence due to its past. It's considered a historical nationality - a term that is normally used specifically in the context of Spain. It's a recurrent term used in Spanish politics to describe those autonomous communities that declare themselves as having a collective linguistic and/or cultural identity different from the rest of Spain.

The historical myths arise from the fact that the history of Catalonia and the whole of Spain is complex and goes back to the times before Christ, which are often difficult to track. Moreover, there are voices that the Catalan government and parliament twisted reality to create their independence myth. As a result, Spanish society is divided, with the division being clearly visible among youth.

How are historical facts distorted?

When the times of colonization began, the kingdom of Castile set off for America, while the kingdom of Aragón focused on the Mediterranean territories - Sardinia, Sicily, and Naples. In the 17th century, several countries were involved in the Thirty Years' war and in order to gain power and money, the kingdom of Castile decided to centralize everything, which resulted in all the kingdoms of the peninsula having same government and paying the same taxes.

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Although the Catalan nobles accepted the idea, the ordinary people protested against it as it meant losing their autonomy and rights. It resulted in the 12-years-War of Reapers and in the end, Aragón and Catalonia not being assimilated into Castile. A remnant from those times is the Catalan anthem "The Reapers". After all those centuries of developing and conserving their customs and law, they were about to lose everything in the War of Succession on 11.09.1714, through the fall of Barcelona. The new monarch repressed their institutions and laws as well as prohibited using their language and the whole kingdom became dependent on Madrid. The national day of Catalonia is celebrated in memory of that day. In the 19th century as Europe industrialized, Catalonia developed commerce, industry, and agriculture, improving its economy. The working class felt empowered and revived, regaining their Catalan self-esteem and sensing the national consciousness that led to political Catalanism. The new chapter in Spain's history - becoming a Republic, further ignited the self-affirmation of Catalans. During those times, Catalonia succeeded in reclaiming her institutions and in 1932 the Statute of Autonomy was approved - officially providing self-government to the region again after over 200 years. Because of Franco's regime though it didn't last long. Catalan institutions and the use of the language once again were forbidden until Franco's death and the end of the dictatorship. People gladly began the process of reactivating the order in their politics and lives.

Catalan identity and consciousness have been gradually growing stronger in the 21st century due to cases of political corruption, economic crisis, and the perception that Catalonians give more money to the rest of Spain than the benefits that they receive - among other causes - their urge to become an independent country has been rising alongside. One of the key dates in history is 1.10.2017 when the Catalan government organized a referendum amongst its people on the region's independence.

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The Spanish government deemed it illegal and tried to stop it with police force. Despite that, over 2,2 million votes were counted, out of which - 90% were pro-independence. One week later, the former Catalan president Puigdemont announced the community's independence, which was immediately and firmly declined by the Spanish representatives of the country, and the organizers of the referendum were punished.

A big number of people use the Catalan language whenever possible and refuse to speak Spanish. Among Catalans, the figure of the Catalan donkey has been popular in the last few years - a symbol of sturdiness and abuse through hard work in agriculture and transport. It's compared to the Catalan community - almost extinct and abused by the rest of Spain. This symbol can be now found imprinted on clothes, on car stickers, or even on beach towels.

Deconstruction

Many historians and politicians argue that Catalans have never been a nation and that Catalonia is only a region of Spain and that its people are Spanish. Some claim that giving Catalans the right to self-determination and separation from the rest of the country, would be taking away from Spanish people a right - the right to decide on whether the country should stay united or split. Another contra-argument is that the Catalan institutions (parliament and the regional government) belong to the Spanish state and therefore all their powers and rights. It's said that all the 17 autonomous communities in Spain enjoy some of the highest levels of self-government in Europe, therefore they have no real need to get independent. The acts of disobeying the Spanish law and among others, organizing an illegal (in the eyes of the Spanish government) referendum, are also controversial and according to many, it shouldn't be given any importance, as it stands against the Spanish constitution.

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Relevant sources for further research:

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- Catalonia crisis in 300 words - BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41584864>
- Natalie J. Cestone; Catalonia: Independence in History, Rhetoric, and Symbolism
- El Parlament de Catalunya aprueba resolución para declarar la independencia https://elpais.com/ccaa/2017/10/27/catalunya/1509105810_557081.html
- de Juanjo Albacete, 2001, El castellano, ¿un idioma impuesto? https://web.archive.org/web/20090103042903/http://www.uce.es/DEVERDAD/ARCHIVO_2001/11_01/30_castella.html , Retrieved 14 May 2022.
- Etimología de CATALÁN , Retrieved 14 May 2022.
- HISTORIA DE CATALUÑA EN 10 MINUTOS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5IDYDPg2IA&ab_channel=CARKIPRODUCTIONS , Retrieved 14 May 2022.
- Donald J. Kagay, THE LIBRARY OF IBERIAN RESOURCES ONLINE, The Usatges of Barcelona: The Fundamental Law of Catalonia, Usatges, <https://libro.uca.edu/usatges/usatges.htm> , Retrieved 14 May 2022.

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- **Working methods**

Method 1

One method that can be implemented in order to share our videos, is to create a short session (around 2 hours) as a part of any E+ activity no matter the topic. It's a good way to debate among participants from other European countries. For example a Youth Exchange about gender equality.

Videos are showing a reality that sometimes is forgotten or sometimes, young people are not aware of it.

- Watch the videos
- Debate in smaller groups (5 max) about how the importance of these myths. Then, share reflections in the big group.
- Reflection on our own reality, how these myths affected us, and detection of other myths.

Method 2

It could be a good method to create a session at the high school during history class. Also, at the University. During one hour, the class can be divided into groups according to the number of deconstructed myths we have. Each group can read the myth they got and then reflect on:

- Did you know this part of history?
- Is there something else you knew about this myth that you would like to share?
- How do you think this part of history affected the people involved, families, and local communities?

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- How do you think we can avoid this situation from happening again?
- Do you think we are on the way to repeating this part of history? Why?
- Do you think this information is reliable? In the affirmative case, why do you think that? If the answer is no, what sources do you think we might use in order to find the most reliable information possible?

We will finish this session by sharing our thoughts and in case we have more time, we could research in smaller groups about the myth they got or about related situations that already had happened in history.

Digital methods

TEDx/TED Talk: it is a showcase for speakers presenting great, well-formed ideas in under 18 minutes. TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks, often called "TED talks."

TED talks are made available on the TED website under a Creative Commons free license. They are also frequently featured via social media and multimedia sites like YouTube, Netflix, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

According to the topic of this project, there are different talks already available on the TED website that can be used to explain how fake news works and how to detect them. It's a good format as it's not a long speech and it's really well explained by professionals.

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Here is a list of TED talks related to the topics of the "Dealing with popular myths" project:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/christina_nicholson_fake_news_it_s_your_fault
- https://www.ted.com/talks/hannah_logue_how_to_spot_fake_news
- https://www.ted.com/talks/lisa_cutter_media_literacy_the_power_and_responsibility_of_information
- https://www.ted.com/talks/ekene_odigwe_to_fact_check_or_not_the_importance_of_media_and_information_literacy_ekene_odigwe_tedxasata
- https://www.ted.com/talks/lucian_mindru_a_media_literacy
- <https://youtu.be/D9lhs241zeg>

Photographs:

Wikimedia Commons, author Godot 13; Wikimedia Commons, author Álvaro Ibáñez;

6. HISTORICAL MYTHS AND DISTORTIONS: ROMANIA

- **Introduction and context**

This chapter focusses on the deconstruction of two historical myths:

- John Hunyadi – the Romanian Voivode of Transylvania or a Hungarian Leader?
- The Romanian Army and the Holocaust

Anti-Roma racism, the relationship between Hungary and Romania, connected with the strong Hungarian national minority in Romania, and the Holocaust, have been three of the most challenging topics rooted in history and present in the public and political discourse in Romania after 1989.

Anti-Roma racism

Despite a series of violent interethnic conflicts and proven strong racist discourse in the media during the 1990s[1], there was a widely consensual denial of the existence of anti-Roma racism in Romania until 2002-2003, when the EU antidiscrimination directives were incorporated in the Romanian legislation and the first strategy for the integration of Roma was adopted by the Government. Since then, the discrimination against Roma and anti-Roma racism were acknowledged, not only by civil society but also by public institutions and politicians and were quantified by various surveys. Such surveys were conducted every few years over the last two decades, showing generally a slow improvement but also the maintenance of strong and widespread negative perceptions and attitudes towards Roma.

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Thus, a study[2] conducted in 2020 on a representative national sample shows that 70% of the respondents do not trust Roma, a score similar to the one obtained in previous studies (e.g. 72% in 2018), while 30% would not accept a Roma as friend or relative.

Young people have very limited opportunities in school to learn about the history of Roma and to develop a critical understanding of the current situation of Roma and its historical roots.

This is why we chose the video produced in the context of the project to focus on deconstructing some of the most common prejudices regarding the current situation and the history of Roma.

Romanian-Hungarian perceptions and relations

The 1990s also revealed tensions and opposition between the claims for rights of the representatives of the Hungarian minority of Romania[3] and nationalist Romanian organizations and political parties that emerged during that period. The tensions exist not only among politicians but also at a local level in different regions and are reflected as well in the media. Significant improvements were generated through political dialogue, with the organization representing the Hungarian minority involved in the national Government almost continuously since 1996.

However, during the last few years, interethnic relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania seem to have reached a new low. Studies done in 2020 on the mutual perceptions of Hungarians and Romanians in Romania[4] reveal a worrying image.

Thus, on one side, 60% of Romanians do not trust Hungarians and 30% would not accept them as friends or relatives. Only 13% agree with the idea that Hungarian communities should have more autonomy.

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On the other side, 60% of Hungarians consider the relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania as conflictual, 13% appreciated that there is a cooperation between the two communities and 20% perceive a mutual lack of interest in this relationship.

Many Hungarian children and young people study in schools in the Hungarian language and have few opportunities to interact with their Romanian peers. While in Hungarian language classes and schools there is also a subject called History and Traditions of the Hungarian minority, in Romanian language textbooks aspects about the Hungarian minority are disproportionally limited, sometimes distorted, and generally presented as part of a Romanian nation-building discourse, with an ethnocentric perspective. There is no official opportunity for young people in schools to develop a critical understanding of the issues behind the problematic Romanian-Hungarian interethnic relations.

In this context, we chose to analyze a historical figure, John Hunyadi, that is very important from both perspectives and that can provide opportunities for a critical reflection on culture and identity and provide a common positive reference for both Romanians and Hungarians.

The responsibility of Romanian authorities in the Holocaust

The 1990s were also a time when open antisemitism was strong in the media, together with the presentation as heroes of political and military leaders of Romania during the Second World War, who had an active role in the adoption and implementation of anti-Jewish policies and in the Holocaust.

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A radical shift took place in the early 2000s, with the establishment of an International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania led by Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust born in Romania and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. The report produced by this commission, published in 2004, was the basis for an official acknowledgment that Romania as a state and Romanian authorities had direct participation in the Holocaust and are responsible for mass crimes and persecutions, especially against Jews and Roma. The Holocaust was included in the history school curriculum and laws prohibiting the denial of the Holocaust and the celebration of war criminals involved in it were adopted.

However, a significant level of antisemitism remained at the level of the population and the emergence of social media made it possible to promote widely, without the restrictions imposed on classical media, various types of anti-Semitic ideas. Thus, in 2020 the social distance toward Jews is almost identical to the one towards the Roma, with 30% of the population not accepting Jews as friends or relatives. Another report specifically dedicated to monitoring antisemitism[5] shows examples of trivializing the memory of the Holocaust in relation to the COVID19 pandemic, controversial or openly anti-Semitic statements and initiatives of politicians at all levels, and of some well-known journalists, as well as anti-Semitic posts or comments on social media.

In this context, several voices, including politicians, journalists, and former military, reiterated messages denying the responsibility of Romanian authorities and especially of the Romanian Army in the Holocaust, denying the Holocaust altogether, or questioning the fairness of the convictions as war criminals of the leaders of Romania during the Second World War. Moreover, teaching about the Holocaust in school was labeled as “brainwashing”.

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For this reasons, we chose to propose a reflection confronting the official acknowledgment of the Holocaust by the main national institutions and the historical research backing that, on one side, with the public positions of the Romanian Army, on the other side, showing the lack of acknowledgment by the Army of its role and responsibility in the Holocaust.

Sources:

[1] Tolcea, M. & Rus, C. (1998) The image of Roma in Romanian press. Intercultural Institute of Timisoara

[2] https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires_agentia-impreuna_perceptia-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-covid-19_2020.pdf

[3] Hungarians represent 6.5% of the overall population of Romania but around 18% in the areas that were before 1918 part of the Hungarian side of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and over 80% in two counties located in the East of Transylvania, in the center of Romania.

[4] Some data on the perceptions of Hungarians by Romanians appear in the study on the perception of Roma, quoted above. The perceptions of Hungarians have been outlined in a separate study, available in Hungarian at

https://sodiso.ro/eredmenyek/EOM_20200629_jelentes.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0aJVaZZK2hWgT1K3rAkW2A6-qNCshFingEXLQWBvLF22e4EBbm5xlwWrQ

[5] Antisemitism in pandemic times, Monitoring Report May 2020 – April 2022, National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania “Ellie Wiesel”

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Myth 1: John Hunyadi – the Romanian Voivode of Transylvania or a Hungarian Leader?

Context

Beyond the agreement that John Hunyadi was very important for the European history of the 15th century, famous mostly for his victories as army leader against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, there is a striking contrast between the way he is portrayed in the historic discourse, in history textbooks and generally as a key historical figure in society in Hungary, on one side, and in Romania, on the other side.

In the controversial spin-offs of the 100 Greatest Britons, he appears in the top 10 among the most important personalities of Hungarian history and in the top 100 of the greatest Romanians. The commemoration of 565 years from his death, in August 2021, was the occasion of events and publications in both countries, with some similar but also many different words and messages.

How are historical facts distorted?

In Romania, John Hunyadi, called *lancu* or *Ioan de Hunedoara* (*lancu* is an equivalent of John in Romanian, mostly used in Walachia, but there is no reason to think that John Hunyadi ever used it), is generally considered one of the representative figures of the medieval history of Romanians. He is presented as Voivode of Transylvania, often as part of a triad, including Stephan the Great of Moldova and Mircea the Elder of Walachia. Their portraits are often displayed in schools together, accompanied by a misleading map showing Walachia, Moldova, and Transylvania during the time of Mircea the Elder, suggesting that these are the three medieval Romanian states. The Romanian ethnicity of *lancu de Hunedoara*

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is underlined, implying that he was a successful and powerful Romanian, with a lot of influence on Hungary and Europe in general.

A lot of importance is given in Romania to the fact that John Hunyadi was Voivode of Transylvania, which seems similar to the titles of the rulers of Walachia and Moldavia. In reality, John Hunyadi was Voivode of Transylvania only between 1441 and 1446 and his position was not as important as it is perceived in the Romanian context. The position was indeed that of the highest-ranking official in Transylvania, but within the Kingdom of Hungary and it was appointed by the King. Also, although the Voivodes of Transylvania had wide-ranging administrative, military and judicial powers, their jurisdiction did not cover important parts of the province, such as the South of Transylvania, governed by the Saxon community, and the Szeklerland, which was also not under the rule of the Voivode.

In Hungary, John Hunyadi, called Hunyadi János, is described as a Hungarian army and political leader, Governor of Hungary, and father of King Hunyadi Mátyás.

The appreciation he enjoys as a major historical figure is proven also by the fact that his name is used for the program of the Government of Hungary delivering university scholarships to “Hungarian young intellectuals abroad”.

Deconstruction

Moreover, his actual Romanian ethnic origin is generally discounted as irrelevant or openly contested in Hungary, based on unverified historical accounts, claiming that he was in fact the illegitimate son of the King of Hungary, Sigismund of Luxembourg. Thus, the fact that his father Vojk got from Sigismund the Hunyadi domain (now Hunedoara, in Romania), is seen as a reward for marrying the mother of John Hunyadi and raising him as his son.

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There is no clear evidence for this account and most historians, both in Hungary and in Romania, agree to consider the Hunyadi family of Romanian origin. This is based not just on the first names they had, but also on the fact that during his life John Hunyadi was also called “Oláh” (meaning “the Romanian”), while in documents praising his military victories issued during his lifetime in different countries, he was referred to as the “White Knight of Walachia”.

One of the most influential Romanian historians, Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), had an important role in promoting the myth of John Hunyadi as a Romanian leader. He called John Hunyadi ‘the Romanian which had the greatest future among strangers’. The myth was further promoted by both historians and the school system during the communist period, as a key element of the myth that there have been three Romanian states during the Middle Ages and they united to create Romania, first in 1859 and then in 1918.

The impact of the myth of ‘lancu de Hunedoara’ is still strong today. It is a national figure, part of a nation-building narrative. It implies that a Romanian led Transylvania, but also Hungary, emphasizing the opposition between the two.

On the other side, it seems normal for Hungarians to consider John Hunyadi as a Hungarian general and political leader. After all, he lived in Hungarian society, spoke Hungarian, and exercised his leadership in the Kingdom of Hungary.

What both historical narratives are missing is the opportunity to use the figure of John Hunyadi as a shared identity reference and as a point of convergence, not divergence.

It would send a completely different message to young people and the general public from both Hungary and Romania, if, instead of claiming him as their own and combating the others, both historical narratives would present John Hunyadi as part of the shared history of Romanians and Hungarians, as a historical figure of which Hungarians and Romanians can be proud of, while also

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understanding the complexity of social relations during his time and the fact that our current view on ethnicity cannot be applied to that time period.

Relevant sources for further research:

- Nicolae Iorga: Istoria romanilor din Ardeal si Ungaria. Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1989
- Ioan Aurel Pop: Hunedorestii. O familie europeana. Editura SCOALA ARDELEANA, 2021
- Marius Diaconescu: Românul Iancu de Hunedoara: legendă, o enigmă și un miracol, Historia, <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/romanul-iancu-de-hunedoara-legenda-o-enigma-si-575327.html>
- András Kubinyi: King Matthias. Vince Publisher, 2001. Science - University Series



John Hunyadi

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Myth 2: The Romanian Army and the Holocaust

"We should not forget, we do not have the right to do that, this is why we must have the strength to separate the positive myths of the nation from mythologies that can push us again on wrong paths, toward dead ends of history."

(from the message of the Romanian Minister of Defence on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 2022)

Context

There are, among the general population but also in popular, educational, and even scientific history publications, two contradictory narratives regarding the participation of the Romanian Army in the Second World War (WWII). On one side, it is emphasized that the Romanian Army fought with bravery and patriotism alongside the Army of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union from 1941 on in order to recover the territories of Basarabia^[1] and North Bucovina, lost in 1940 as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. On the other side, turning against Germany and fighting aside the Red Army since August 1944 is also considered an act of bravery and heroism, as it shortened the war by several months and spared lives. In both instances, the way the Romanian Army acted is not only justified but appreciated. In this analysis, we focus on the first narrative and particularly on the actions of the Army and on the behavior of the military that contradict the image of heroism and sacrifice for a just cause that is commonly presented.

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How are historical facts distorted?

About the events of the summer of 1941 the website of the Ministry of Defence of Romania has a specially dedicated page: <https://www.defense.ro/1941> (under the section “Heroes”, with the content was published on 29-08-2018). It includes a chronology with the following milestones:

- 22 June, the Romanian Army, together with the German one, initiate the attack against the USSR with the aim of liberating Basarabia and the North of Bucovina. The entry of Romania in the Second World War.
- 5 July – the city of Cernauti is liberated
- 16 July – liberation of Chisinau
- 29 July – General Ion Antonescu decides, for political and military reasons, the continuation of the actions of the Romanian Army to the East of the Nistru river.
- 16 October – after two months of heavy fighting, the troops of the 4th Romanian Army conquer Odessa. Losses of the Romanian Army numbered 92545 people (deaths, wounded, and disappeared).

The chronology continues on the page for 1942, mentioning only that on the 1st of July the Romanian Army occupies Sevastopol and that on the 4th of July 1942 German and Romanian armies complete the conquering of Crimea.

Another official website, that of the National Office for the Cult of Heroes[2], also describes, with some more details, the actions of the Romanian Army on the Eastern front in 1941 and 1942 as heroic. Specific details are given about the fights for Odessa, emphasizing exclusively the large number of casualties among the Romanian Army: 18000.

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These accounts contradict one of the myths commonly promoted about Romanians, Romania, and its military: that it was always a fight of defense against aggressors or a fight for independence and that Romanians never attacked other countries or conquered territories of others.

But this analysis does not aim to counter the myth of Romanians always only defending themselves. It aims at uncovering the obscured connection of the Romanian Army with the Holocaust. To a very large extent, the worst atrocities committed by Romanian authorities as part of the Holocaust, targeting both Jews and Roma, happened during the same period and on the same territory as the ones described above and involved directly the Romanian Army.

Deconstruction

It must be acknowledged that over the last two decades Romanian society went through a process of significant change regarding the Holocaust. Until the early 2000s there was a complete denial of any involvement of Romanian authorities and of any responsibility of Romania as a state in the Holocaust. The subject was not mentioned as relevant to Romania and it was declared or implied that if some events happened on the territory of Romania, they were the responsibility of the Hungarian fascist government which administered a large part of Transylvania from 1940 to 1944, of the German Army, from 1941 to 1944, or of the paramilitary extremist units of the Iron Guard, not belonging to the Romanian official institutions. This changed when, under international pressure, the same President who made explicit statements denying the Holocaust in Romania decided in 2003 to establish the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania to research and create a report on the actual history of the Holocaust in Romania and make specific recommendations for educating the public on the issue. The

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Commission was led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust born in Romania[3]. It also included a Romanian Army general, who specialised in military history, Mihail E. Ionescu. The so-called Wiesel Report, published in 2004[4], became the basis for a number of policies including official commemorations, changes in the school curriculum, and the establishment of the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust.

The Wiesel report, as well as other scientifically validated publications, both preceding and succeeding the report, show that the Romanian Army had a direct and active role in crimes committed during the Holocaust, with over 60000 direct victims of the military, including:

- The Dorohoi Pogrom, from June 1940, before the entry of Romania into the war as ally of Germany, proving false the argument that it was Nazi Germany that pushed the Romanian authorities to kill Jews;
- The Iasi Pogrom from June-July 1941;
- Massacres of Jews in North Bucovina, Herta, and Basarabia in July-August 1941, followed by deportations to Transnistria;
- The Massacre of Odesa, in October 1941;
- Mass killings of Ukrainian Jews in the territories controlled by the Romanian Army between 1941 and 1943;
- Support and direct involvement in the deportation of Roma in Transnistria in 1942.

One of the massacres committed by the Romanian Army during the autumn of 1941 took place in Popricani, a village north of Iasi, and became in 2014 the first case that the Military Prosecutor recognized in a judicial decision as being the responsibility of an army unit, as part of the Holocaust.

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Despite this compelling evidence, also confirmed in scientific events and publications involving military historians, the analysis of the messages publicly displayed on the official websites of the Ministry of Defence, presented above, shows that the acknowledgment of the responsibility for the Holocaust did not completely reach the Romanian Army and that the army continues to propagate the myth of heroism related to the events on the Eastern Front during the period of the Second World War.

This myth is also promoted in many publications targeting the general public and, to some extent, also in school textbooks. Thus, in the History textbook for the 7th grade quoted above, the only mention of the Holocaust in Romania is that the commemoration of the Holocaust is done in Romania on 9 October, without explanation. The Holocaust is presented as the responsibility exclusively of Nazi Germany. Children of 7th grade are presented with the image in which those from the generation of their grand-grand-grand-parents enrolled in the Romanian Army were all war heroes, while some of them were war criminals and did not fight for freedom but killed many innocent people or witnessed silently these crimes.

On 21 January 2022, the day of commemoration of the 1941 Bucharest Pogrom, when Jews were killed by the Iron Guard, a message was posted on the Facebook page of the Ministry of Defence, in honor of a retired general who was one of the most fervent and active voices of Holocaust denial and antisemitism in Romania after 1989. After the Elie Wiesel Institute denounced the message, the PR Department of the Ministry of Defence deleted the post and apologized. Moreover, a few days later, for the first time, a Romanian Minister of Defence published a statement on behalf of the Army on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day.[5]

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This message refers to the importance of commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, explaining that the day has been chosen with reference to the “horrors committed by the Nazi regime”. It follows by mentioning the recently adopted national strategy for the prevention and combating antisemitism, the ongoing work by the Ministry of Education to improve the way the Holocaust is taught in schools, and the plans of the Government to establish a museum of the history of Jews and of the Holocaust. The Minister of Defence also calls for “the courage to take responsibility with dignity for the errors of the past and for those of the present because only in this way we can keep our humanity and we can save our national soul. If we are too soft with the assassins in our historic past, we will only awaken the monsters that can assassinate our future. But it is not enough to be ashamed of certain facts from the past, shame is a temporary emotion. Firm action, education, and attitude are needed. [...] *We should not forget, we do not have the right to do that, this is why we must have the strength to separate the positive myths of the nation from mythologies that can push us again on wrong paths, toward dead ends of history.*” However, the Minister, a civilian politician with a professional background in Sociology, stops short of mentioning explicitly any responsibility of the Romanian Army. He brings homage to the victims of the Holocaust but does not say a word about the part that the Army had in it.

Constantly during the last three decades, since surveys are done, until the most recent one from April 2022, the Army and the Church share the first two positions in terms of the trust by citizens, way ahead of the Presidency, Government, Parliament, or the political parties.

It can therefore be argued that the reason why the Army does not accept responsibility for its crimes is related to the wish to maintain the trust of the population, for the sake of the stability of society,

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especially in times of challenge like the ones we face now.

The other possible explanation is that there is strong resistance within the military. That even if civil and military historians have evidence, even if the Minister would like to do more, the power is held in the Army by the military who deny the Holocaust.

The resistance within the Army to recognize the truth about its past is in fact corresponding to a large extent to the resistance still manifested among the general population, as shown by various studies, including one published in December 2021 by the Ellie Wiesel Institute.

According to this study, only 32% of the respondents consider that the Holocaust happened also in Romania. The majority of the respondents associate the Holocaust with the deportation of Jews to Nazi camps and only a quarter of the respondents associate pogroms and mass killings with the Holocaust. The main responsibility for the Holocaust in Romania is placed outside of the country, in Nazi Germany. 39% of the respondents consider that the Romanian Army had a responsibility for the Holocaust, while 48% think that it was not responsible for the Holocaust.

The study also shows a lack of interest in the issue of the Holocaust, especially in rural areas. The main sources of information about this topic are the internet and TV, with school mentioned as a source by only 21%. The majority of respondents are unaware that in Romania there is a national day of commemoration of the Holocaust and a very large part of those who know, cannot indicate the date. Moreover, 20% somewhat agree and 14% totally agree with the statement "The Jews use the Holocaust in Romania for their own interests". 22% and 24% express agreement with the statements "The Jews use the Holocaust to denigrate Romania" and respectively "The Jews use the Holocaust to blackmail Romania". Among them, young people aged 18-29 are over-represented.

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This means that the myth of the heroism of the Romanian Army during the Second World War and the denial of the active involvement of the military in the Holocaust support the views of a significant number of Romanians, including many young people. Not only that the school education does not present a correct image of this dark period of recent history, but proves to be incapable of protecting many young people from antisemitism and conspiracy theories.

The Army, together with the highest authorities of the state, should follow the call made in January 2022 by the Minister of Defence and show “the courage to take responsibility with dignity” for the crimes committed as part of the Holocaust and the education system should change the narrative and enable young people to develop a critical understanding of that period. A positive national identity can be built better on truth and on the values that are shared at the European level, rather than on false historical accounts.

Sources:

[1] Some place names have been kept in Romanian in this text. Usually, in English, they are spelled differently, based mainly on the spelling in Russian, but there is no reason why the spelling in Russian would be more relevant than the one in Romanian with reference to that area.

[2] <https://once.mapn.ro/pages/view/167>

[3] Elie Wiesel also led the USA President's Commission on the Holocaust from 1978 to 1986, which proposed the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

[4] <https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/international-commission-on-romania-holocaust.html>

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[5] <https://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/17238-Mesajul-ministrului-apararii-nationale-cu-prilejul-Zilei-Internationale-de-Comemorare-a-Victimelor-Holocaustului.html>

Relevant sources for further reserach:

- The report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, <https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/international-commission-on-romania-holocaust.html>
- Alex. Mihai Stoenescu, Armata, maresalul si evreii. Cazurile Dorohoi, Bucuresti, Iasi, Odessa, RAO, International Publishing Company, Bucuresti, 1998
- Radu Ioanid, The Holocaust in Romania. The Distruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944, foreword by Elie Wiesel, Editura Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2000.
- INSHEW (2021) Percepția relațiilor interetnice și Holocaustul din România Sondaj de opinie. Noiembrie-Decembrie 2021

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- **Working methods**

A.Using the educational video “Dealing with popular myths: Roma Slavery”

The video “Dealing with popular myths: Roma Slavery” can be used in educational activities with secondary school or older students, in History classes, and also in social studies disciplines, especially if the learning objectives are connected with learning about diversity or discrimination. As a rule, the teacher always watches the video and studies the bibliography before the learners.

Here are some suggestions for using the video and the bibliography:

1. The teacher invites the students to watch the video together in class, then moderates a discussion among the students based on some of the following questions, depending on the learning objectives of the lesson:

- How did the video make you feel? Why?
- Did you know that Roma were slaves in Romania?
- Do you think that this is still relevant today? Why?
- What would you say that you learned from watching the video?
- After watching this video, how would you respond?
- What other stereotypes can you think of, regarding other groups in society (ethnic groups, religious groups, etc.)? Stereotypes are generalizing images that we have in our minds about people, based on the fact that they belong (or we think they belong) to a certain group. They are distorting our perception of reality. How can we deconstruct them?
- Can you think of any other historical myths?

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2. At this [link](#), there are a series of videos made by Roma parents from Romania regarding their most memorable experiences with the school system. The videos have subtitles in English. The students can work in groups to watch one video (a different video for each group) and answer the following questions, then share in the big group:

- Who was sharing the story in the video?
- What were the main ideas of the story?
- What did you learn from the video?
- How did you feel when watching the video?
- Did the video help you realize new things that you never thought about before? What were they?
- Is there something that you would change in your thoughts, attitude, or behavior after watching this video? What is it?

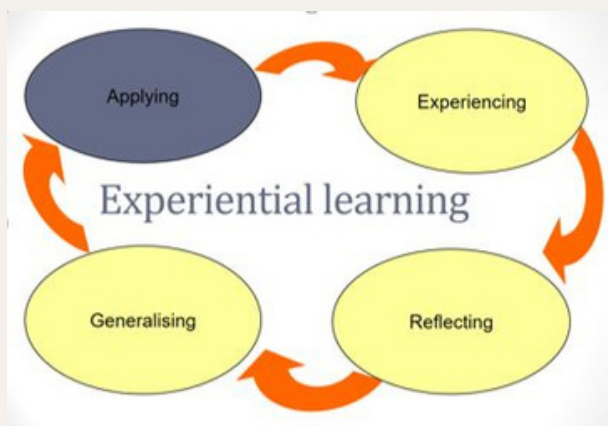
3. At this [link](#) there is a set of resources about Roma in Europe, in several languages. The students can work in groups to study one topic as homework and make presentations during the next lesson for the whole class.

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B. Working on the topics of the toolkit

Experiential learning and project-based learning are two pedagogical approaches that can be used successfully when working with young people on the topics of this toolkit.

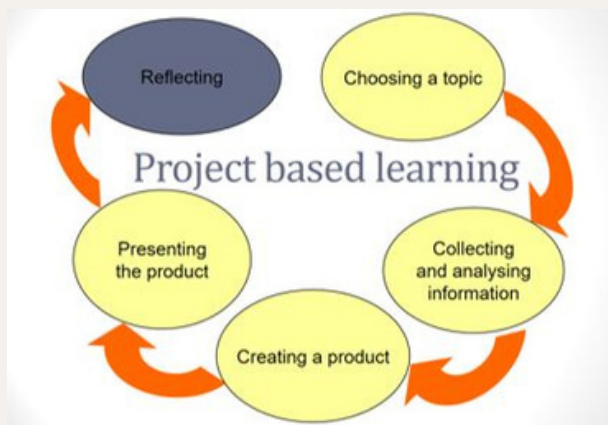
a. Experiential learning:



- 1.Experiencing: the students watch a video, read a text, and interact with a source or with one another.
- 2.They are guided in a reflection process in which they express what they learned from the experience.
- 3.The students are guided through a generalizing process in which they understand the abstract concepts related to their experience and how they are related to the world outside the classroom.
- 4.Students apply what they learned in a new situation.

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b. Project-based learning



1. Students choose a topic they want to study (alternatively the teacher assigns them a topic or the students select a topic from a list provided by the teacher)
2. They collect information from a variety of sources on the topic and analyze them critically
3. They create a product that condenses the results of the research they made (a presentation, poster, video, drawing, etc.)
4. They present the product to an audience outside of their group (they can even organize their own public event, as this develops important competencies beyond the studied topic)
5. They reflect on their experience with the teacher as facilitator (this is the step when they express what they learned from the whole experience and become aware of the competencies they developed).

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Of course, learners can follow up on the outcomes of the project-based learning process, by doing something on that topic or on other similar topics, by learning more on that topic, etc.

Using both these approaches in activities based on deconstructing popular myths and distortions of history, is also important for developing a wide range of competencies for democratic culture (www.coe.int/rfcdc, <https://rm.coe.int/a-model-of-the-competences-required-for-democratic-culture-and-intercu/16809940c3>).

More details on how such processes can develop competences that include but go beyond developing a critical understanding of a historical narrative, are available in the Council of Europe publication Quality history education in the 21st century - Principles and guidelines, available at <https://rm.coe.int/prems-108118-gbr-2507-quality-history-education-web-21x21/16808eace7>.

These two pedagogical approaches can, but don't have to be, used separately. For example, after reading about the myths "The Romanian Army and the Holocaust" or "John Hunyadi – the Romanian Voivode of Transylvania or a Hungarian Leader?" described in this toolkit, the students can be engaged in a discussion based on the following questions:

- What did you learn from this text?
- Was there anything surprising?
- What types of sources were used for the deconstruction of this myth? Can you find other valid sources for learning about these topics?
- Can you identify other personalities from history who are controversial? (Teacher and students together make a list, then students work in small groups to research one personality.)

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- (for students outside Romania) Can you identify valid sources of information for learning about your country's involvement in the Holocaust? What are the myths regarding your country's participation in WWII and how are the authorities relating to this topic?

The myth of John Hunyadi can also be a good way to emphasize or introduce the concept of multiperspectivity, showing how the same historical figure or event can be seen differently, from different perspectives. (For details about multiperspectivity see <http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680492f87>)

The design and implementation of educational activities based on deconstructing the myth regarding the role of the Romanian Army in the Holocaust can also be connected with some of the ideas expressed in the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on passing on remembrance of the Holocaust and preventing crimes against humanity, adopted in March 2022 https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680a5ddcd.

Learning about national myths, for example, can also be a great opportunity for collaboration among teachers and students from different countries across Europe. For example, two teachers from different countries can organize their History lessons so that they approach the topic of national myths regarding the Holocaust during the same period of the school year. The students can meet online to get to know each other before studying this topic, and they can meet online again to present to each other what they have learned about their own country, and in this way, they learn about the other country as well.

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C. Digital working methods and tools

There is a wide range of digital methods and tools that can be used in working online on the topics of the toolkit:

- for engaging students by asking quick questions and receiving real-time answers: <https://fast-poll.com>, <https://strawpoll.com> or, one with a nice visual display in wordclouds or similar visual effects: <https://www.mentimeter.com/>
- for collecting information on certain topics and sharing them with the whole class: <https://padlet.com>, Google suite
- for in-depth reflection questions, survey tools such as <https://www.surveymonkey.com> or Google Forms.
- Digital storytelling is a method in which the author creates a video based on a written script, which is then recorded audio, and a series of images that roll on the screen in connection with the audio.

Photographs:

Public domain

7. CONCLUSION

Historical myths and distortions shape our lives more than we know. The strong conviction that there are misleading interpretations of historical facts can be a sign of critical thinking, as well as the lack of it. The instrumentalization of the past is a convenient way for people to explain the world around them by positioning themselves on the good side of history or as members of the enlightened club that knows the real facts. For political elites, the instrumentalization of the past is an easy way to gain popularity and election votes.

What this toolkit demonstrates is that distortion of historical facts is not a phenomenon reserved for a certain country, no matter how complicated its history is. Each of the ten myths/distortions, deconstructed in this publication, reflects specifics of the culture of remembrance in Croatia, Greece, Serbia, Spain, and Romania. What all of the myths have in common is the mechanism they feed on – a chain of links (peers, politicians, media outlets, even academics) repeating a story without the slightest doubt that it's true. Reasonable questioning of the stories we are told can put this mechanism to a stop. To support that, we are suggesting concrete methods, activities, and tools, aiming to develop critical thinking.

Formal and non-formal education are among the strongest instruments we have to detect myths and distortions among young people and work with youth on these topics with the goal to unite, rather than divide. The inclusive and innovative methods and tools suggested in this toolkit are designed to spark curiosity among young people and motivate them to further research the topics. Separating facts from fiction and suggesting effective learning activities and tools, this toolkit provides teachers and youth workers with more possibilities to tackle historical myths and distortions.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of the project and this publication is to contribute to the processes of dealing with the past and the deconstruction of historical distortions in Europe. We hope you find this toolkit helpful and use it also as a reminder to question your own basic assumptions.

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You can find more information about the project on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/dealingwithmythsproject>

If you have any suggestions on how to improve this toolkit or want to share your comments with us, feel free to send an email at kontakt@documenta.hr