

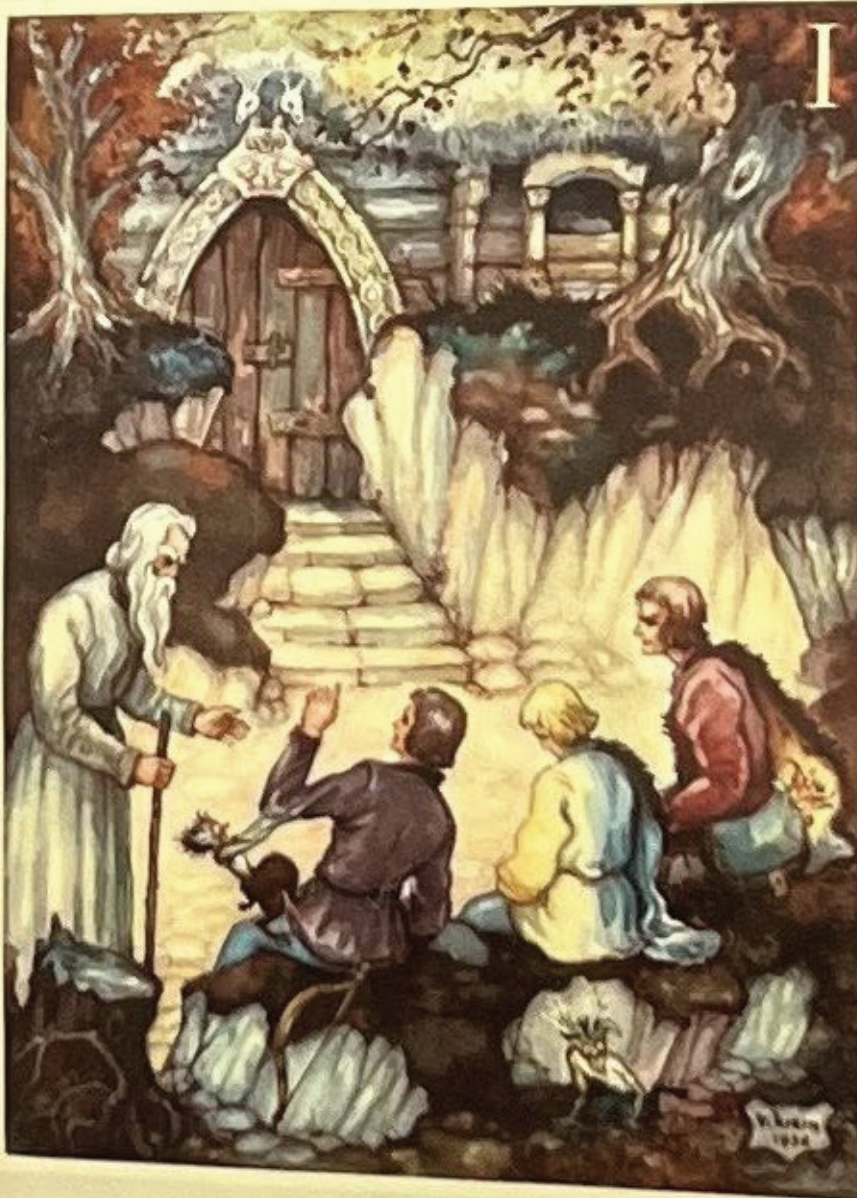


STORYTELLING

as a living intangible heritage

Ogulin, 2026.

IVANA BRLIĆ - MAŽURANIĆ
PRIČE IZ DAVNINE



NAKLADA «NAŠA DJECA» • ILUSTRIRAO VLADIMIR KIRIN

1. OGULIN - THE HOMELAND OF FAIRY TALES

“Ogulin is my birthplace, and April 18, 1874 is the day of my birth. (...) The strange and striking shapes of Klek and the romantic character of the Dobra provided my imagination with so much nourishment that late into the night I would turn over in my thoughts the most unusual images and fantastic possibilities: what might be happening in the deep night around Klek.”
— Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Autobiografija

With these words, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić described the strong and lasting influence of the Ogulin region on her imagination and literary творчество. Even decades after leaving Ogulin, the landscape, nature, and traditions of her native region remained an inexhaustible source of inspiration for her literary world. Ogulin and its surroundings have been shaped for centuries by a rich oral tradition—legends of dragons, fairies, mythical beings, and heroes, passed down from generation to generation. Mount Klek, the rivers Dobra and Mrežnica, and the karst landscapes created a distinctive setting in which folk tales and fairy tales developed, deeply rooted in local identity. This intangible heritage forms the basis of the concept Ogulin – Homeland of Fairy Tales, which today represents a cultural initiative and a recognizable identity brand of the town. The aim of the initiative is to affirm Ogulin as a space of living stories, fairy tales, and storytelling, connecting literary heritage, oral tradition, and contemporary cultural practices. The central event within this initiative is the Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival, which for more than two decades has brought together storytellers and fairy tale enthusiasts from Croatia and abroad. The festival includes storytelling competitions, workshops, exhibitions, and performances, with storytelling as its core program element. Fairy tales, legends, and folk narratives are interpreted at various locations throughout the town, turning the entire city into a stage of living intangible heritage. The long-standing practice of the festival clearly demonstrates the importance of trained storytellers, as high-quality storytelling directly contributes to the preservation of heritage, the development of language and communication skills, the encouragement of creativity, and the quality of interaction with audiences. Regular performers at the festival include storytellers such as Jasna Held, Marina Đorđević, Margareta Perišić, Densi Radovan, Nevena Zuber, Ana Bilić, and others.

Alongside the Ogulin Tourist Board, which continuously engages storytellers beyond festival programs, other local institutions also play an important role, such as Ivana’s House of Fairy Tales and the Ogulin Public Library and Reading Room, which occasionally implement programs focused on storytelling and fairy tales.

Links: <https://visitogulin.hr/>, <https://www.facebook.com/OgulinskiFestivalBajke>
<https://www.ivaninakucabajke.hr/hr/>, <https://www.ogulin.hr/>



2. THE ROLE OF THE PUČKO OTVORENO UČILIŠTE OGULIN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STORYTELLING

Within this cultural and symbolic framework, the POU Ogulin has taken on the role of providing systematic education, developing competencies, and professionalizing storytelling as an educational and social practice. Storytelling in Ogulin is developing as a living practice that connects literary heritage, oral tradition, and contemporary education. Based on the life and work of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and Ema Božičević, as well as numerous folk traditions of the Ogulin region, the POU Ogulin systematically develops storytelling as an educational, cultural, and inclusive tool. Since 2020, through a series of programs and projects aimed at children, youth, and adults, storytelling has been shaped as a means of preserving intangible cultural heritage, strengthening the community, and transferring knowledge between generations.

2.1. The “Priča kolo” Program

The Priča kolo program was launched in 2020 as part of the Karlovac County Original Folklore Festival Igra kolo, and developed on the foundations of the rich oral tradition of the Ogulin region and the literary heritage of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and Ema Božičević. It is a non-formal education program aimed at developing storytelling skills and preserving and revitalizing oral folk tradition as an important segment of intangible cultural heritage. The program is intended for children, youth, and adults and has been continuously implemented from 2020 to 2025. Through professionally guided workshops, participants acquire knowledge and skills in interpreting fairy tales, legends, and folk narratives, with particular emphasis on the intergenerational transmission of identity, knowledge, and values. Although it began as an accompanying program to the folklore festival, Priča kolo quickly developed into an independent, recognizable, and sustainable cultural-educational program implemented at the premises of the POU Ogulin and in cooperation with local communities and institutions. Years of implementation resulted in the development of a proposal for the occupational standard storyteller in 2024. In 2025, the program continues through workshops, public performances, and adult education, confirming Priča kolo as a permanent platform for the contemporary interpretation and transmission of intangible heritage.

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2.2. Strengthening Human Capacities for the Adult Education Program “Storyteller”

During 2024, the POU Ogulin implemented the Erasmus+ project Strengthening Human Capacities for the Adult Education Program Storyteller (KA1, adult education sector). Within the project, four international training programs were conducted in Florence and Amsterdam, focusing on curriculum development, integration of digital skills and cultural heritage, and the organization of teaching adapted to storytelling, including outdoor and experiential learning formats. The acquired knowledge and



experience, together with learning outcomes analysis and evaluation of lecturers and participants, served as the basis for developing the adult education program Storyteller and the proposal for the occupational standard and competency sets.

2.3. Proposal of Occupational Standard / Competency Sets “Storyteller”

The HKO form (HKO_SZ/SKOMP – Proposal of Occupational Standard/Competency Sets) was prepared in 2024 and submitted to the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, based on which approval was obtained. To assess employer needs, a survey on the occupational standard was designed, initiating standardized data collection across various professions. The survey and research instruments were developed by the Ministry and the Croatian Employment Service, and implementation began in October and November 2024. The project was not completed due to insufficient capacity; however, it continues in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

2.4. “STEM Fairy Tale”

The STEM Fairy Tale project aimed to popularize STEM fields through an innovative pedagogical approach that uses storytelling as a methodological bridge between scientific content and children’s experience. Children and youth acquired STEM knowledge through storytelling, interpretation, and creative adaptation of fairy tales, making technical and scientific concepts accessible, understandable, and engaging. The project was implemented in partnership with the Ogulin Society of Technical Culture Pedagogues and other institutions, including the POU Ogulin. Activities strengthened civil society capacities, developed permanent STEM exhibitions, equipped public spaces, and included workshops, educational performances, and local STEM festivals. The project originated within the institution’s own “CSO incubator” program and continues through a public-civil partnership. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/stembajka>.

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2.5. “Fairy Tale from Afar”

The Fairy Tale from Afar project focuses on intercultural connection among minority communities and foreign workers in Ogulin through storytelling of fairy tales from their countries of origin. Fairy tales serve as carriers of cultural values, identity, and experience, encouraging mutual understanding and dialogue. The project builds on earlier initiatives such as the Living Library and Croatian language programs for foreigners. It includes creative workshops, public storytelling sessions, and the recording of radio fairy tales for local and wider audiences.

2.6. “Imperfect Fairy Tale”

Imperfect Fairy Tale is an interdisciplinary cultural-art project that addresses and destigmatizes dementia through storytelling and digital technologies. It brings together elderly persons, children, and youth in joint storytelling and creative workshops.



Participants with dementia learn to narrate a selected fairy tale, but ultimately tell a story they remember, resulting in a collective collection of fragmented, “imperfect” narratives. Digitized content is preserved as contemporary memory archives. The project begins in April 2026.

2.7. Storytelling Workshop for Grandparents

As part of the 18th and 19th Lifelong Learning Weeks, a storytelling workshop for grandparents was held, aimed at empowering older adults as bearers of oral heritage. Participants developed skills in structuring stories, oral interpretation, and audience communication, with emphasis on transmitting experiences and memories to younger generations. From 2026 onward, the program will be implemented by the Ogulin Pensioners’ Association with support from the POU Ogulin.

2.8. “Fairy Tale on the Wall”

In 2021, the POU Ogulin implemented the Fairy Tale on the Wall project, combining visual art and storytelling through murals in public space. Murals depicting fairy tales and legends of the Ogulin region were created in Bolnička Street. The project opening featured storytelling as the central element, enhanced by lighting effects. Depicted motifs include Lijerka, The Witch, Divljan, How Potjeh Sought the Truth, Stribor’s Forest, Zulejka, Sunce Djever and Neva Nevičica, The Legend of St. George, and Regoč. The murals remain well preserved.

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2.9. “Vila Bistrica and the Yuck Story”

Developed during the COVID-19 pandemic in cooperation with the Ogulin kindergarten “Bistrac,” this project conveys the importance of hygiene through a child-friendly storytelling approach. It combines narrative and educational content to encourage healthy habits through imagination and emotional engagement. The project was part of the 15th Lifelong Learning Week. The story was written by Ana Marija Novačić Cindrić, narrated by Noa Salopek, with visual design by Chiara Cindrić. It is available on the institution’s official YouTube channel.

2.10. Local Storytellers as Bearers of Intangible Heritage

Local storytellers significantly contribute to the visibility and development of storytelling as living intangible heritage. Among them, Sabina Gvozdić stands out. She operates through the “Živa-riječ” craft (tour guiding, storytelling, translation) and collaborates extensively with cultural and educational institutions. Her work includes artistic storytelling, workshops, and public performances, grounded in local fairy tales and traditions. Her professional engagement confirms the importance of local storytellers as key carriers of intangible heritage. Additionally, storytelling at the Ogulin Fairy Tale Festival in 2021 was enriched by a child performer—Noa Salopek, then six years old—who has since become a regular participant.



2.13. Hats from Ancient Times

A young author, Ante Polić, in collaboration with members of the Ogulin Women's Association and Anita Štimac, presented the performative exhibition "Hats from Ancient Times." Inspired by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's *Tales of Long Ago*, eight hats were created through a non-formal adult education workshop, each conveying messages for contemporary society. The interactive performance engaged visitors and reinterpreted literary heritage through a contemporary artistic approach. The exhibition was organised by POU Ogulin as part of the 150th anniversary of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's birth.

2.12. Projects in Preparation

The project "Connected by Legends: Safikada and Đula – Heritage Without Borders through EU Projects" is planned within the Croatia–Bosnia and Herzegovina cross-border cooperation program. It focuses on preserving and promoting intangible heritage through parallel legends from Ogulin and Banja Luka, with storytelling workshops aimed at preserving the Croatian language in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another project, "Fairy Tale of Culture and Inclusion," aims to strengthen inclusive cultural programs and increase participation of vulnerable groups. Activities include staff training and development of various artistic and educational workshops. The project is currently on a waiting list for funding.

2.13. Infrastructure of the POU Ogulin

The institution's developed infrastructure enables continuous and professional implementation of storytelling and other programs. It includes six classrooms, three halls of varying capacities, and additional spaces equipped with technical resources and adapted for persons with disabilities. A children's changing room even features an excerpt from *Sunce Djever* and *Neva Nevičica*, encouraging parents to tell stories to their children.

Conclusion: Through its storytelling programs, the POU Ogulin has established an operational model that integrates adult education, youth engagement, inclusive cultural programming, and cross-sector collaboration. Storytelling is applied as a methodological tool in education, culture, social inclusion, and public space, supported by institutional infrastructure and expertise. The continuity of implementation, diversity of programs, and development of new projects indicate that storytelling has become embedded in the institution's regular activities rather than remaining a sporadic initiative. This provides a stable framework for the continued development of storytelling as an element of intangible cultural heritage.



POU Ogulin



Srebrna dvorana



Crvena dvorana



Učionica 1



Učionica 2



Učionica 3



Učionica 4



Učionica 5



POU Ogulin





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