

UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration

Episode 59: Annie's Utopia: Weaving Dreams and Creating Change in New Lanark (18/10/2023)

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

هه آل ووس هه آل - أه، benvenuti, fàilte, titambire, welcome to the podcase series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow. We bring you sounds about integration, languages, culture, society and identity with us.

[JINGLE]

Hsiao-Chang Hope Wang

Hi, I'm Hope, a PhD researcher at UNESCO (RILA). My research is 'Co-creating the Values of World Heritage Sites with Refugees: A World View Perspective.' I'm doing the 'We are Living Heritage and We Share World Heritage' project with refugees, asylum seekers, heritage professionals, and museums.

The primary aim of this project is to transform World Heritage Sites into places that truly belong to all of us. They should represent multiple truths and diverse worldviews, decentralize, and redistribute power, and be inclusive, allowing everyone to find a sense of belonging as a human being.

One sentence I often express is: 'The Values of World Heritage Sites are outstanding, but it is humanity that makes them universal.'

That's why I write stories. As the author of 'The Science of Storytelling,' Storr, aptly said: 'Good stories are explorations of the human condition; thrilling voyages into foreign minds (Storr, 2020, p. 42).' Stories let us wonder and wow. They encourage us to reflect on what we already know and prompt us to explore the unknown.

So today, I will share with you a story about dreams, utopia, and friendship. The inspiration comes from the famous philanthropist and Utopian idealist, Robert Owen. He once said, 'I love New Lanark and make my dream come true.'

I visited New Lanark, one of the six World Heritage Sites in Scotland, renowned for its industrial communities created by David Dale and Robert Owen. It embodies Owen's humanism and utopia. However, I wonder if it is a utopian place for others—both humans and animals, for people living here and those who were not living here.

I wonder because we perceive and experience the world differently because we have diverse worldviews. 'One man's heaven might be another man's hell.' Even utopia might hold different meanings for different people.

Therefore, I wrote a story and shared it on the Fairies and Folktales Day in New Lanark this October. It was a sunny Saturday when Tawona, Andy, and I shared our stories, and many

families joined to enjoy Storytime. After storytelling, we also made origami and danced together. I enjoyed and appreciated Iris, Yi-Ting, and Lupin for their help. The wonderful day cannot be replicated, but the story can be shared again and again. So, now I am going to share it with you: 'Annie's Utopia: Weaving Dreams and Creating Change in New Lanark.'

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Annie. She is curious and energetic; she has a deep love for nature and has a dream to explore the world. However, she never completed her assignments at the Cotton Mill in New Lanark because the noise of the machines and the repetitive routine of producing cotton yarn didn't resonate with her. Instead, Annie likes to sneak out of the mill and lie on the grass, spending her time pondering about the origin of cotton and the destinations of the yarns and clothing, playing with her animal friends, she listened to birds sing, playing with squirrels and saying how are you to highland cows. Day by day, her mother grew worried about her lack of focus and discipline at work. 'Annie, you must work hard. Mr. Owen created a wonderful place for us, and if you don't work, you won't be able to stay,' her mother emphasized.

'But this isn't my utopia. I want to see the world,' Annie replied defiantly, resisting the pressure to conform.

Determined to change Annie, her mother hatched a plan. One morning, Annie found a poster on her table about a scarf-making competition. The person crafting the most beautiful scarf would win a sponsored year of travel around the world, a prize offered by Mr. Owen.

'Oh, one year vacation plus Mr Owen's sponsorship! My dream is going to come true. I must win it.

Annie was excited but also worried because she had little knowledge of spinning and weaving, let alone designing and sewing beautiful patterns. She pondered day and night, losing sleep over it. Just when she was about to give up, her animal friends—a curious squirrel, a witty bird, and a gentle highland cow—appeared.

Annie poured out her worries to her animal friends, and surprisingly, the three animals agreed to help her.

'Annie, we are more than happy to help you because friends should help each other to achieve their dreams. But if you win, can you also fulfil our wishes in return?' Excitedly, Annie agreed, 'Yes, of course! It is wanted friend should do'.

That night, the highland cow gathered long hair from its family, the smart squirrel collected colours and seeds from nature, and the witty bird flew back and forth, then wove beautiful patterns, with Annie actively participating this time. She also improved and learned a lot from her animal friends.

Through teamwork and collaboration, they produced a gorgeous scarf.

The next day, they put it on Mr Owen's table. Mr Owen was astonished by their creations. 'How did you make this beautiful scarf? Why did you make it?' he asked, bewildered.

'Mr. Owen, you mentioned that the winner of the scarf-making combination could travel the world,' Annie explained.

At that moment, Annie's mother confessed that she had created the poster to encourage her daughter to mature and become more responsible. It was just a white lie.

Surprisingly, Mr. Owen did not get angry because of this lie. Instead, he was impressed by this determined young girl and decided to sponsor her dream of travelling the world.

To everyone's surprise, Annie announced that she had decided to stay in New Lanark to be with her mother and her animal friends.

'Mr Owen, this scarf wasn't actually made by me but by our animal friends. Can you help them fulfil their wishes?' Annie humbly requested, sharing their desires. The highland cow longed for more spacious living spaces, the squirrel wished for more trees, and the bird yearned for clean air and a clear sky.

Touched by their selflessness, Mr Owen agreed to do his best to fulfil their wishes.

'Annie, I promise you that I will try my best to fulfil their dreams. However, it won't be an easy task. Will you help me?' he asked.

Annie made a decision. Although her dream of world travel still burned in her heart, she realized she had a more important mission in New Lanark. After helping her friends achieve their dreams, she would embark on her journey across the world.

So, she said 'Yes, I will stay in New Lanark, and I want to learn, so I will have more ability to make it become a better place.'

Therefore, the world now has one more utopian little girl with the motto: 'I love the world, and I want to make our dreams come true!'

I hope you love this story. Think about this question: What is your utopia? If you want to hear more and know more about us, please stay tuned with UNESCO RILA: The Sounds of Integration. And visit our website.

I hope you have a wonderful day and all your dreams come true!

[JINGLE]

Dr Esa Aldegheri

شكراً, grazie, tapadh leibh, totenda, thank you for listening to this episode. For the full show notes and for شكراً, more information about our work, please visit bit.ly/UNESCO_RILA.

[JINGLE]