StoryMachine

Exploring Implications of Recommender-based Spatial Hypertext Systems for Folklore and the Humanities

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Abstract

This project aims to preserve, explore and provide greater access to folklore traditions in Germany and the UK, through the development of a digital infrastructure called StoryMachine. Folklore is a crucial element in identity construction and cultural understanding, but it faces archival and cultural challenges, particularly in an era of 'alternative truths' and populist separatism.

Traditional digital interventions have focused on archiving and digitising rather than on exploration and analysis. Consequently, they are often concerned with discrete collections rather than wider folkloric traditions, lack interactivity and are not designed to capture emerging folklore and folk experience. StoryMachine addresses these issues, combining spatial hypertext and recommender systems to create a dynamic platform for deep-linking folkloristic narratives. Familiar from commercial contexts like Amazon or Netflix, this use of recommender systems creates exciting, dynamic opportunities for information studies and our approach to archives in general, while spatial hypertext allows this emerging context to be visually and dynamically represented.

The proposed research will generate new insights into the relationships between folklore and identity construction by investigating joint motifs, key differences, and commonalities in storytelling among participants from different geographic regions and age groups. The integration of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (a catalogue of folktale types widely used in folklore studies) with StoryMachine will enable new approaches to the exploration of folklore.

Project Website

https://storymachine.iisys.de

Consortium Partners in the United Kingdom

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Prof. Dr. Jane Winters
Prof. Dr. Christopher Ohge

ual: london college of communication
Prof. Dr. Sam Brooker

University of Hertfordshire UH
Prof. Dr. Owen Davies
Prof. Dr. Ceri Houlbrook

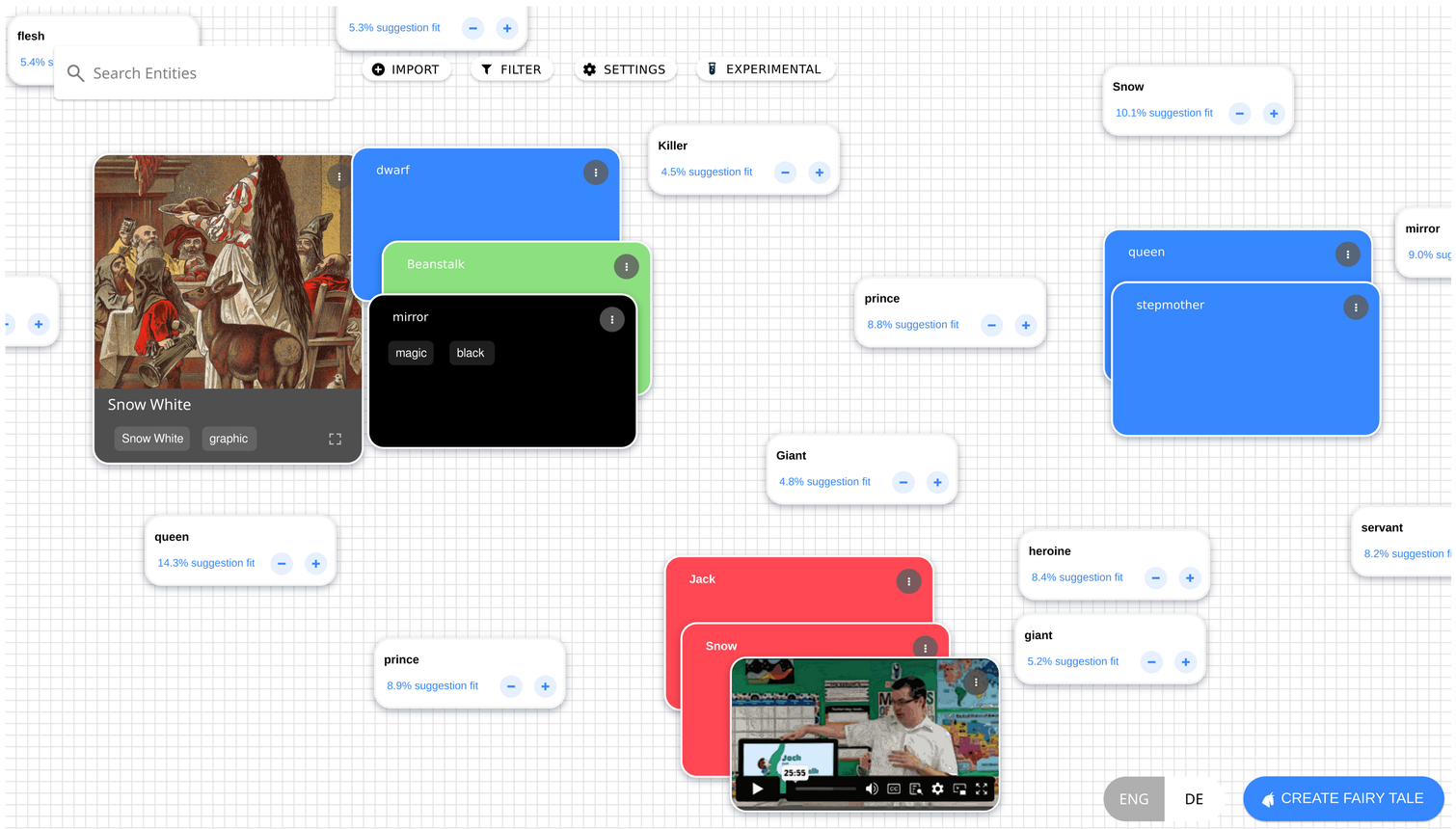
Consortium Partners in Germany

Hof University
Prof. Dr. Claus Atzenbeck
Dr. Peter Nürnberg
Lisa Eidloth
Saeid Khoobdel

Universität Regensburg
Prof. Dr. Astrid Ensslin
Sabine Slowik

LMU LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT MÜNCHEN
Prof. Dr. Sarah Diefenbach
Marie Veihelmann

Spatial Hypertext-Oriented Recommender System (SPORE)



Early prototype of the user interface on which StoryMachine will be based, with nine user nodes (coloured items) and context-matching suggestions (white items)—screenshot taken from Roßner, Atzenbeck and Brooker [4].

Approach

Project StoryMachine employs a multifaceted approach combining methods of folklore studies, digital humanities, narrative studies, psychology and computer science:

Motif Exploration: Integration with the ATU Index enables users to interact with existing motifs while generating new ones through hybrid storytelling.

Folklore Analysis: Drawing on folkloristic indices, the project analyses commonalities and differences in storytelling across distinct cultural and geographic contexts [2].

Focus Groups: Engagement of diverse participant groups to evaluate how the platform supports participatory digital storytelling and creates new, transcultural knowledge cultures.

Psychology: Investigating how users engage with and interpret the system's output, and how the interaction and display need to be designed to respond to users' needs and expectations.

Cognitive Map-Based UI: A spatial hypertext interface allows users to visualize relationships between narratives and motifs, fostering intuitive exploration and creative knowledge-building.

Artificial Intelligence: Developing an interface that fosters co-creation between human and machine, empowering users to build, reinterpret, and reshape narratives collaboratively [3].

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UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft German Research Foundation

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