



THE LABYRINTH

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Project description and description of the game in connection with project goals

The main goal of the project GameIT is to improve the quality of didactic methods and tools in higher education by designing and implementing innovative cooperative games for developing a selection of competencies valuable in the 21st-century labor market.

The main idea of the project is to develop a hex board game and a set of four culture-specific role-playing games to be used in the classroom environment at a higher education level. Through games and gamification, the students will have an opportunity to practice and develop 21st-century skills, such as communication and cooperation skills, creative and logical thinking, awareness, and openness towards intercultural differences.

As a result, we developed a game called The Labyrinth, a roleplaying game inspired by different geographical, economic, cultural, and historical characteristics of Romania. The team of players must work together to perform a series of tasks and move forward through a labyrinth that crosses the Romanian territory with the ultimate goal of exiting the labyrinth.

The main learning goals we are trying to achieve with the game are:

Goal 1: students increase their general knowledge about Romania and Romanian culture

We achieve this learning goal by using a map of Romania, puzzles with different sights in Romania, characters are based on famous Romanian fairy-tale characters and the story of the game is a rewriting of the Romanian fairy tale called *Youth without Age and Life without Death*.

Goal 2: students practice and develop communication skills in English

We will achieve this goal by having the whole communication in the game and all materials in English. Also, students' stories should be written and told in English.

Goal 3: students practice and develop soft skills: *leadership skills*: e.g., decision making, team communication, negotiation; *management skills*: e.g., time prioritization, interpersonal skills, communication, financial management

We will achieve this goal by putting students in different problem situations. They will need decision-making skills and the ability to take practical and effective actions if they want to perform the tasks successfully. Students will work in teams and will have to communicate and negotiate on information and time resources to move to the next level in the game.

Goal 4: students practice and develop intercultural awareness related skills: perspective switching, observation, empathy, decision making, taking practical and effective actions

We will achieve this goal by having students play different characters. Each character has some predefined characteristics and a set of actions to perform. Students will have to put themselves in the role of different characters and act based on the character features as well as their personality.

Goal 5: students practice and develop collaboration skills in English

We will achieve this goal by having students play a game in competing teams. Students in teams will have to collaborate in English to perform the tasks as well as create several short stories or find hidden clues in a text on the back of a puzzle.

The goal of the game is:

- the goal is to perform a series of tasks and, based on correct answers, to move forward through a labyrinth towards the final exit point;
- each team has to save resources, collect pieces of information, find clues on the map and solve puzzles across three levels of difficulty;
- on their way they are faced with various obstacles;

- the winner is the team that exits the labyrinth first.

Setting and story of the game

The Labyrinth is a roleplaying game inspired by a Romanian fairy tale, *Youth without Age and Life without Death* (Rom.: *Tinerete fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte*), by Petre Ispirescu¹, in which a much wanted and long-expected prince asks from his father, as a condition for his birth, youth without age and life without death; the emperor promises him that he would give him whatever he wants; the prince is born and grows into a handsome, intelligent young man; on the day of his 15th anniversary, finding out that his father cannot give him what he had promised, he sets on a quest to find youth without age and life without death. In the game, the Hero sets on a quest to find the Chalice of Youth without Age and Life without Death, a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. This quest involves passing through a cultural labyrinth. The labyrinth is a cultural itinerary that comprises 6 houses connected by a route. Each house is embodied by a Romanian traditional house that is specific to a certain Romanian cultural and historical region: Moldavia, Maramureș, Dobrudja, Transylvania, Wallachia, Banat. To find the way out of the labyrinth, the Hero must pass successfully through all the Houses and Gates by answering correctly to 1 Task associated with each House; the Gate tasks are just for fun. The House Tasks are questions related to Romania, Romanian culture, and history.

Semiotics of the game: knowledge is power; lifelong learning as a lifestyle and constantly striving to improve oneself and create a better version of oneself (traveling, interacting with different cultures; being at work in different settings); desire and action for personal and professional growth; intercultural competence; main skills: time and resource management, work planning, teamwork.

¹https://www.worldoftales.com/European_folktales/Romanian_folktale_4.html , accessed 12 December 2018.

The story of the game

Once upon a time, there was a royal child, called Hero, who left his father's castle to find Youth without Age and Life without Death that had been promised to him upon his birth. Finding out that his father, the Emperor, had made the promise just to trick him into accepting to be born, Hero decided to embark upon a quest and find what was so much desired by everybody but, as most people would say, impossible to achieve especially at such a young age: Youth without Age and Life without Death. Thus, as predicted by the fairy godmother, on the special day when the rainbow had only three colors, blue, yellow, and red, Hero went out the gates of the castle and headed northwards. He traveled for several days and, suddenly, one morning, as the mist rose, he found himself surrounded by some strange looking monuments that looked like tombstones, but were too colorful to be regarded as such. As he approached one of these monuments to take a closer look, a clocklike creature with long arms and legs, appeared from behind one of the monuments, stood in front of Hero, blocking his way, and said in a ding-dong voice:

- Who is this stranger that has just trespassed the borders of my realm and set me running again after years and years of rusting away in my sleep?

Hero, pretending not to be afraid, answered quickly:

- I am sorry to have disturbed your sleep, sir ...!
- I am the Guardian, replied the clocklike creature authoritatively, and this is Săpânța, my country. Who are you and what are you doing here all by yourself?
- I am Hero, son of the ruler of the stronghold of Bacău. I am traveling for pleasure and business: I must find Youth without Age and Life without Death.
- Hahaha!, laughed the Guardian. There is no such thing, at least not for you, child, everybody knows it ... But, once you are here, you must obey the rules of my country, that is, if you want to be free again, because, for now, you are my

prisoner. So, whoever steps into my territory without a visa sets me running and has to bear the consequences.

- Well then, what are the consequences?
- If you want to be free again and have your chance of finding what you're searching for, you must take this route that takes you into a labyrinth. There will be obstacles, but I cannot tell you of what kind and how to overcome them. I will accompany you, just to remind you that the clock is ticking and to make sure that there is no cheating going around ... Also, I hold the keys to the truth that you shall need and I will help you when you will ask for my help. But remember, everything has a price!

At that point, two more creatures appeared out of nowhere behind Hero's back: one of them looked like an old ragged book and the other one like an antiquated pencil.

Drawing closer, the book-like creature said to Hero:

- I am your father's Advisor, Hero. The Emperor has sent me to take care of you. And this is the imperial Storyteller, said the Advisor introducing the pencil-like creature. So far, we have kept ourselves at a distance, unseen. But now, looking at this creature here, I believe that you and we should travel together. We may help you with the guidance and recording of your travel. What do you say, my child?

Hero looked around in amazement and stood silent for several moments; however, time was already ticking away and, as he now wanted to be free again, agreed to be accompanied by the Advisor, the Storyteller, and the Guardian. They took the Route indicated by the Guardian and crossed several countries. Upon entering each new realm, Hero had to figure out passwords to be allowed to move forward and the Advisor would help when necessary; from time to time, when having a rest, the Storyteller would tell a story about their whereabouts.

Eventually, upon exiting the labyrinth Route, Hero found himself standing in front of the gates of his father's castle. Entering the castle, Hero found the Emperor ill and unable to rule the country anymore. Approaching humbly the throne where his father barely kept himself straight, Hero said:

- Dear father, I have crossed many countries and seen and learned many things. I will rule the country from now on, together with the team standing here today with me: the Advisor, the Storyteller, and the Guardian; they will be my councilors. Traveling together with them has made me realize that Youth without Age and Life without Death means making wise decisions to benefit oneself and others and only by working as a team will we be able to do this.

The Emperor agreed, happy to see Hero back, older but stronger and wiser. There were elections organized, and Hero, together with the team of councilors, were elected to rule the country.

Target audience

The game is intended for higher education students; students do not need any pre-knowledge.

Short instructions

The Hero and his/her team travel across Romania. On their journey through the labyrinth, they have to overcome a series of obstacles to move forward. Helping each other, they succeed in covering all the three levels of the game and exiting the labyrinth. The goal of the players is to exit the labyrinth by traveling across Romania within a fixed time limit. All the team members join forces to help the Hero reach the country exit point, namely the Western border. They have 45 minutes to overcome all obstacles.

At the beginning of the game, each player draws a role/character card under the Gamemaster's supervision; then they form teams as follows:

Team 1. Green Team: Green Hero + Green Advisor + Green Storyteller + Blue Guardian

Team 2. Blue Team: Blue Hero + Blue Advisor + Blue Storyteller + Green Guardian
Before the game starts, each player presents his/her character by reading what is written on the role card.

Each team receives a map board of Romania on which they will draw, with a marker, the team's path as they move forward through the labyrinth.

There are 3 Levels in the Labyrinth, designed with growing task difficulty. At the end of each Level, at the Exit point, the Storyteller and his team have to make a story and tell it to the Guardian. The story should be approximately 150-200 words. After hearing the story, the Guardian allows them to exit the respective level and start the next level of the labyrinth.

Before starting the next level, the players change roles by drawing different role cards under the Gamemaster's supervision, making sure that they have now drawn a different role. However, swapping roles before a new level is not compulsory as the members are allowed to negotiate roles inside the team. The Guardian keeps the same role throughout the entire game.

The game begins with the Hero and his team entering the country at the North-Eastern border and following the labyrinth route, crossing all the regions of Romania; they have to reach the point where they can exit the labyrinth, which is at the Western border.

The Hero follows the *Labyrinth Map (Entrance + Houses + Gates + Exit)* and, according to each task specifications, he/she may do one of the following actions:

1. Answers/performs the task all by himself/herself;
2. Asks for Resources from the Advisor;
3. Finds the answer by solving a puzzle from the Guardian;
4. Finds the answer on the map;
5. Searches for clues on the Internet to be able to perform the task.

The tasks are not always connected to the region with which they have been associated in the game. The Hero enters the Labyrinth with 1 LEU (the banknote/Romanian currency). Throughout the game, the Hero can buy only 1 answer. Some tasks require the Hero to find a strict answer by solving a puzzle, tasks that require the Hero to perform, or describe an action and tasks that require the Hero to search the map for clues.

The Hero is rewarded by the Guardian with 1 LEU for each task that he/she solves all by himself/herself (namely, without any resources from the Advisor, puzzles, or map). There is no monetary reward for the Gates and puzzle tasks.

The Advisor holds the *Book of Resources* and provides help to the Hero. The Advisor is not allowed to provide the Hero with the answer but helps the Hero to achieve all tasks by providing the Hero with resources upon the Hero's request, helping the Hero solve puzzles, finding clues on the map, searching for clues on the Internet, searching for and playing songs on the Internet for certain tasks.

The Guardian holds the *Treasure chest* and the puzzles and can sell only 1 answer to the Hero throughout the entire game. The Guardian also holds 15 LEI, to be able to reward the Hero (with 1 Leu per right answer). The Guardian also keeps track of the total amount of time for finishing the game by exiting all the 3 Levels of the labyrinth: 45 minutes. As the team moves forward through the labyrinth, the Guardian also draws the path on the board map with a (whiteboard/washable) marker.

The use of information technology devices to find the answers to the tasks is allowed only for those tasks where this is mentioned. For the rest of the tasks, this is forbidden.

The game ends when one of the teams exits the labyrinth first after having overcome all the obstacles from the 3 Levels.

The game also ends when the 45-minute time limit for playing the game has expired, irrespective of whether the teams have completed all the 3 levels and exited the

labyrinth. The game also ends if the Hero and his team cannot find the answer to a task, thus losing the game.

In the least likely situation when the 2 teams exit the labyrinth at the same time, or if the 2 teams fail to exit the labyrinth in the 45 minutes, the winning team will be settled by counting the used resources. The team that has used the fewest resources wins the game

Versions of the game

There are two versions of the game:

Version 1: a game for 2-4 players, with no competitive team and no competition element; the game ends either when the 45-minute time limit is up, or when the players exit the labyrinth;

Version 2: a game for 6-8 players, forming two teams that will be competing to exit the labyrinth first.

Section 2: WHAT DO WE NEED TO PLAY?

Inventory of cards

Role cards for players:

1 Blue Hero, 1 Blue Advisor, 1 Blue Storyteller, 1 Blue Guardian

1 Green Hero, 1 Green Advisor, 1 Green Storyteller, 1 Green Guardian

The role cards contain a description of the character and the actions the character may perform during the game.

Cards for Heroes:

1 Blue Labyrinth Route with 1 Entrance, 6 Houses, 5 Gates and 1 Exit cards with tasks for the Blue Hero and his team and 1 LEU, Romanian banknote

1 Green Labyrinth Route with 1 Entrance, 6 Houses, 5 Gates and 1 Exit cards with tasks for the Green Hero and his team and 1 LEU, Romanian banknote

The Labyrinth Routes contain the tasks that the Hero and his/her team must perform to progress in the game.

Cards for Advisors:

1 *Book of Resources* for the Blue Advisor, with additional resources for each task

1 *Book of Resources* for the Green Advisor, with additional resources for each task

The Books of Resources contain additional resources that the Advisor may give to the Hero to help solve the task, or indications on how the Advisor can help the Hero for certain tasks: search for clues on the map, make a puzzle and find the answer, play a song.

Cards and resources for Guardians:

1 *Treasure chest* with answers for the Blue Guardian and 31 LEI, Romanian banknotes and 1 Set of puzzles; also, a blue marker and a timer (watch, phone)

1 *Treasure chest* with answers for the Green Guardian and 31 LEI, Romanian banknotes and 1 Set of puzzles; also, a green marker and a timer (watch, phone)

The Treasure chests contain the correct answers for all the tasks and indications for the Guardian.

Resources for Storytellers:

Pen and pencil to take notes

Cards for teams:

- 1 Board map of Romania for the Blue team
- 1 Game instructions and rules for the Blue team

- 1 Board map of Romania for the Green team
- 1 Game instructions and rules for the Green team

Game setting

The Labyrinth Route for 1 level of the game looks like this:

ENTRANCE (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Moldavia-Bucovina (*1 task*) - - - Gate 1 (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Dobrudja (*1 task*) - - - Gate 2 (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Wallachia (*1 task*) - - - Gate 3 (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Banat-Crişana (*1 task*) - - - Gate 4 (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Transylvania (*1 task*) - - - Gate 5 (*1 task*) - - - The HOUSE of Maramureş (*1 task*) - - - EXIT (*1 task*).

There are two Labyrinth Routes, a Green one for the Green team, and a Blue one for the Blue team. Each Route contains an Entrance, 6 Romanian traditional Houses specific to and representing 6 Romanian regions, 5 Gates between houses and one Exit point. The houses, gates, entrance and exit are associated with tasks the Hero and his/her team have to overcome to exit the Labyrinth successfully. The Gates are represented by fun tasks meant to provide short breaks and a moment of celebration for having overcome a certain task. There is also one map of Romania for each team, on which the Guardian traces the path that each team covers as they move forward through the game. With the board map of Romania and Romanian regions we support the idea of a cultural component in the game. The idea of the board map is to help players visualize their labyrinth path as they perform tasks and progress in the game.

SECTION 3: PLAYING THE GAME

Roles of the players

The students form 2 teams by drawing role cards: Blue or Green Hero, Blue or Green Advisor, Blue or Green Storyteller, Blue or Green Guardian. The Guardian joins the team with a different color.

The 2 Heroes draw the Labyrinth Route according to their color (e.g., Green Hero draws the Green Labyrinth Map); the Labyrinth Route contains Entrance, Gate, and House tasks that the Hero must solve to be able to advance into the labyrinth and finally exit the labyrinth. After having answered the Entrance task, the Hero moves to the first House card, and solves the task written on the respective House card to be allowed to move forward to the 2nd House card, and so on. Between Houses, there are Gate cards; the Heroes must also complete the tasks on the Gate cards, but these are more like a moment of celebration, fun, and a break.

To solve the task from the House cards, the Hero has the following options:

1. Answers/performs the task all by himself/herself;
2. Asks for Resources from the Advisor;
3. Finds the answer by solving a puzzle from the Guardian;
4. Finds the answer on the map;
5. Searches for clues on the Internet to be able to perform the task.

The 2 Advisors (1 for each team) help the Heroes answer the questions by providing him/her with Resources (additional questions and/or clues) upon the Hero's request but do not provide the answer. Each Advisor receives a *Book of Resources* at the beginning of the game, according to the color of his/her team and the Labyrinth Route of the Hero. The Advisor supports the Hero to solve/perform all the types of tasks: searching for clues on the map, solving puzzles and finding the answer in the text on the back of the puzzle, advising the Hero on how to perform tasks that require dancing, singing, preparing a meal, making and telling a story, playing music on the phone.

The 2 Storytellers (1 for each team) accompany the team and take notes of what happens during the game to write a story. He/she holds a notebook and a pen (or a pen and paper) where he/she takes notes on what happens while the team crosses a certain level of the labyrinth so that he/she may write the story and tell it to the Guardian at that level's Exit point. After hearing the story, the Guardian allows the team to exit the respective Level.

The 2 Guardians (1 for each team) hold the Treasure chest with the correct answers and the puzzles available for certain tasks. The Guardian confirms when the Hero gives correct answers. The Guardian rewards the Hero with 1 LEU (Romanian banknote currency) for each task that the Hero solves all by himself/herself (namely, without any resources from the Advisor, puzzles, or map), except for the Gate tasks, where there is no reward. The Guardian evaluates how each task is solved/performed and, based on the result, allows the Hero and his/her team to move forward in the labyrinth. The Guardian listens to the story of the Storyteller and after that allows the team to exit the respective Level. After drawing the role cards, the Guardian joins the other team, for example, the Green Guardian joins the Blue team.

Re-playability of the game: players change roles; teams exchange labyrinth routes.

Time for playing the game: 45 minutes.

Gameplay

The teacher is the Game Master/Narrator in the game; he/she:

- narrates the story of the game;
- explains the rules of the game;
- presents the challenges of the game;
- is in charge of role distribution (players draw their role cards out of a box/bag held by the Game Master/teacher);

- distributes the other materials to each character (Labyrinth Routes to Heroes, Books of Resources to Advisors, Treasure chests to Guardians) and 1 board map to each team;
- monitors the progress of each team without interfering and makes sure that everybody plays by the rules.

The students draw the role cards, listen to the teacher's instructions, and play by the rules, as follows:

- the Heroes draw Labyrinth Route cards and complete the tasks (as described above);
- the Advisors (1 for each team) help the Hero answer the questions by providing him/her with Resources (additional questions and/or clues) upon the Hero's request, but do not provide the answer;
- the Guardians (1 for each team) hold the correct answers for the tasks of the adverse team and rewards the Hero's correct answers; the Guardian acts as a stress factor, monitoring the team and stressing the passing of time;
- the Storytellers (1 for each team) take notes and tell a story upon exiting each game level.

Rewards and punishments

The game rewards players who follow the rules and punishes those who do not. The game encourages quick decision-making; collaboration and initiation to collaborate; showing empathy and the desire to listen to others' perspectives and points of view.

The rewards consist of money, time, resources, knowledge puzzles.

The punishment consists of staying trapped in the labyrinth and losing the game.

Acquiring a new level is one of the biggest rewards a player can receive for his/her success in the game and with this his/her character improves in several ways every time the player goes up a level. A player reaches a new level by:

1. Completing the task from the House card;
2. Completing the Gate task.

Players who do not follow the rules, lose the game by being eliminated from it.

Player engagement, participation, and motivation

The game requires no prior knowledge, but it requires English language skills level B1.

The game is designed in such a way that it is simple and understandable for students.

The game starts by having the Gamemaster tell the story of the game, presenting the rules and instructions. As students advance in the game, they are guided by the instructions written on each role card.

Motivation elements:

- Graphic image;
- Obtaining and saving money, time and resources in the form of knowledge puzzles during the game;
- Learning while playing a game;
- Having fun while completing the tasks;
- Becoming a wise, learned Hero;
- The final reward: exiting the Labyrinth with a certain amount of knowledge, time, money and a team of trustworthy collaborators/friends;
- Winning the game means exiting the labyrinth first and winning the Chalice of Youth without Age and Life without Death.

Game mechanics

The game is, in fact, a **talk/conversation** among characters: the members of a team have to talk to each other and cooperate to play and win the game; usually, the Hero initiates the discussion with his/her Advisor, then with the Guardian and Storyteller; also, the Advisor and Guardian try to persuade the Hero to resort to their help; the Guardian should constantly warn the Hero about the time left to complete a task.

The game demands players to make **choices**: the resolution system allows players to choose outcomes based on some procedures or limitations. This involves spending certain resources (time, money, knowledge resources) to succeed.

The **language** of the game is English: players use the English language throughout the game.

The effect of the game on players

Students acquire:

- Knowledge
- Collaboration in a team
- Management of time, money, resources and knowledge
- Decision making

The game is about procedural knowledge and knowledge-based rules. To summarize, we noticed that the game is made mainly of building knowledge and collecting information.

Responsibilities of narration and credibility in the game

At the beginning of the game, each player draws a character card under the Gamemaster's supervision; then they form teams:

The Heroes, Advisors, and Storytellers act as close, supportive friends, inside the team.

The Guardians act as “rivals”, stress factors to the Heroes and their teams.

The Gamemaster explains the rules, provides the task cards and supervises the game.

SECTION 4: HOW TO USE THE GAME IN (HIGHER) EDUCATION

The game mechanics allow it to be adjusted and used for educational purposes at different disciplines.

The game setting, instructions, and rules remain the same; but the tasks may be replaced to refer to learning content from disciplines as varied as Mathematics, Economy, Philosophy, History, Biology, foreign languages, etc.

Also, the game is highly adjustable to the learner's age and needs by having tasks with varying degrees of difficulty.

For example, the game could be easily transformed into a game for teaching Mathematics at an academic level or the primary school level; or for teaching Biology at first-year students and Biology at third-year students.

Also, teachers can modify the tasks to adjust the game goals to their learners' learning styles – audio, visual, kinaesthetic – by connecting the tasks to visuals or auditory materials, or kinaesthetic experiments.