

1. International Library Week in Valmiera 10.-13. of October, 2023

From October 10 to 13, 2023, a meeting of international project partners took place in the Valmiera Library. 22 participants from Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Latvia gathered at the "International Library Week in Valmiera" organized by Valmiera Library.

The goal of the ERASMUS+ partnership for adult education "FORWARD TOGETHER, 2023-2024" project is to acquire and improve knowledge, skills and activities on how to work with vulnerable groups.

In four days, various meetings, classes and readings in Valmiera library, Valmiera museum, Skaņkalnes Jēru club, Mazsalac library and museum, Zilākalns cultural history and tourism center, Latvian National Library. The project participants studied the aspects that make up the foundations of a democratic library, looked at examples of the involvement of various societies and the development of services, discussed diversity and inclusion, as well as participated in Dialogue Circles organized by the DOTS Open Society Foundation.

An intensive program, a lot of valuable experience and inspiration, but the main thing is that there is a feeling of support and community, which we have chosen - a democratic and inclusive library - these are the insights from the project participants at the end of the meeting.

This international event fosters collaboration, cultural exchange, and dialogue between partners, blending professional growth with rich cultural experiences.

2. The final seminar in Valmiera in October 2024 (21.-24.10.2024)

the participants of the ERASMUS+ project "Forward Together" from Latvia, Finland, Estonia and Denmark met to discuss the results of the project and share their experiences. The seminar highlighted poetry therapy in Ukraine, promoting the mental health of young people, as well as the role of libraries in the process of integration and cultural preservation.

The participants visited the Valmiera library, the Veidenbaum museum in Kalači, the Rūjiena library and new cultural places, as well as learned about the history of the region, the development of democracy and cultural projects, including Rūjiena's title "Cultural Pearl of the Baltic Sea Region 2024".

The seminar ended on Thursday with an emotional exhibition about the artist Niklavs Strunke in the Valmiera museum and a master class.

On the first evening of the seminar, guests gathered in the Valmiera library's Nakotnes reading room to have a video call with Anna Shevchuk (Thermopil, Ukraine) about Poetry Therapy in Ukraine. Anna presented the book and the new method – therapy through writing poetry. It is planned that one hundred copies of this book will be donated to Latvia and will also be available in Latvian libraries.

On the second day, the participants of the seminar, together with representatives of the Valmiera library, visited the Eduards Veidenbaums museum in "Kalaci", where Inga Surgunte, head of the cultural sector of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, shared her experience of the project "More light!" in formation. On the other hand, the

museum teacher Baiba Roze talked about the work with youth groups and the implemented projects. The museum guests were particularly impressed by the activities and experience of "Kalaci" in helping young people in their struggle with mental health problems.

The afternoon was spent in the spirit of Ukraine - the participants of the seminar met remotely with Ukrainians living in Finland, who told about their experiences and how the services of the local library helped them get used to another country, a new environment, learn the language, and find a job after emigration. The meeting was made emotional by the presence of the executive director of the Association of Small Towns of Ukraine, Oksana Kirilyuk. Oksana greeted her compatriots in Ukrainian, and also told the participants of the seminar about the possibilities and services of the Association of Small Towns of Ukraine. It should be noted that Valmiera is the only representative office of the Association of Small Towns of Ukraine in the Republic of Latvia.

Next was Valmiera library's deputy director in methodological work and IFLA training specialist Olga Kronberga presented the importance of measuring, evaluating and demonstrating the impact of library services.

At the end of the evening, the participants of the seminar went on a small tour of the city under the guidance of the head of the Children's Service Department of the Valmiera library, Richard Edijs Stibe, and visited the renovated Valmiera theater to familiarize themselves with the integration of the "Kroder's library" into the interior of the theater, which was helped to see by Marta Cekule, the public relations and advertising specialist of the theater.

The third day of the seminar was started on a historical note. After the participants of the seminar discussed the main conclusions and impressions of the project activities, the lecturer Dr. history Gatis Krumins, Vidzeme University Associate Professor and leading researcher.

In the afternoon, the participants of the seminar visited Rūjiena, where they visited the Rūjiena library, as well as met with Madara Seile, head of cultural projects of the Valmiera County Culture Board, and active local residents Anna Paula Gruzina and Andis Bosh. The participants learned more about Rujiena's title "Pearl of Culture of the Baltic Sea Region 2024" and the newly created cultural place of Anna and Anda in Rūjiena. The evening ended with a tour of the Koni mill.

The final day began at the Valmiera Museum with the exhibition "Hello, Niklav Strunke!" visit led by Ingūnas Dukure, head of the Strenči City Library. The exhibition "Hello, Niklav Strunke!" celebrating the 130th birthday of the world-renowned artist Niklavs Strunke at the Valmiera Museum was an emotionally powerful conclusion to the project. It was the story of an artist who confidently and vividly asserted himself in the circle of the European artistic avant-garde. Eccentric, temperamental - bright both in life and in art. An artist whose name is included in the list of Latvian Cultural Canon. At the end of the seminar, a master class - "HELLO!" was printed on cloth bags with the responsiveness and help of Valmiera Museum colleagues Arta Rozīte, Anda Boluza and Kristīne Markus.

The project promoted cooperation and mutual understanding among participants, while paying attention to social and cultural challenges.