

**The project »The Minority Stories: European Perspectives and Learning Opportunities« was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"**

**Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.1 "Town-Twinning"**

**Participation:** The project enabled the direct meeting of at least 245 citizens, 57 of them from Slovenia, 188 from partners' and associated organizations from five more different countries: Croatia 54, Serbia 38, Bosnia and Herzegovina 86, Kosovo 4 and Germany 6.

**Location / Dates:** The meeting took place in Rimske Toplice, Laško and Celje (Slovenia) from 23.05.2019 until 26.05.2019.

**Short description of the project "The Minority Stories: European Perspectives and Learning Opportunities":**

In cooperation with the municipality of Laško and together with the partners from five different countries, the Institute Burja from Rimske Toplice has implemented a project activities supported by the European Commission under the programme Europe for Citizens, Measure 2.1 Town – Twinning, with the organization of an International Conference on the topic of minorities and immigrants in the European Union and the various forms of non-formal education of people with fewer opportunities for their better integration in society.

The International Conference "The Minority Stories: European Perspectives and Learning Opportunities" was intended to promote a greater role of citizens in shaping key development decisions at EU level. The conference was held in cooperation with various municipalities, non-governmental organizations, immigrant communities, minority members, experts and representatives of local and national authorities who discussed minority issues both in Slovenia and at EU level.

The conference program included the exchange of experiences and good practices on the integration of minorities into social, cultural and political life in different European countries. In workshops and lectures, the participants discussed innovative and integrated approaches in formal and non-formal education with the aim of achieving greater social inclusion and equality of people with fewer opportunities.

Participating organizations and their participants discussed how to develop practically oriented educational projects and programs tailored to the needs and wishes of minority members and in what way to preserve and develop a minority culture that provides minority members various cultural, economic and educational opportunities in the labor market as well as in everyday life.

The participants also discussed the future role of minorities in the EU and their European perspective, the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life, and looking for proposals on how minority organizations, in cooperation with local communities, can help reduce discrimination and prejudice.

The conference brought together representatives of municipalities and minority communities from 6 different countries, representatives of European, national and local authorities, experts, artists and representatives of minority associations in Slovenia. All of them tried to contribute to promoting debates and finding solutions for the successful integration of minorities into cultural and social life.

## PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE

**The program of the first day** (23.05.2019 at the Aqua Roma Congress Center - Rimske Toplice, Toplice 2) started with the arrival of representatives of partners' organizations. Delegates brought various culinary delights from their countries, which we exhibited and organized an 'international welcome fair'. At the introductory event, we started to gather new acquaintances. This was followed by an informal dinner and socializing.

**The program of the second day** (24.05.2019 at the Aqua Roma congress center in Rimske Toplice, Toplice 2) started with the opening greeting from the organizers - Damir Hauptman addressed the participants on behalf of the Institute Burja, and Mr. Franc Zdolšek, the mayor of the Municipality Laško, on behalf of Municipality Laško.

The first part of the formal part of the conference began with the presentation of partners' organizations in the project, their local communities and countries. At the working meeting, delegates of partners compared experiences and practices in the field of inclusion of minorities in social, cultural and political life in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Germany.

In addition to partners' organizations, representatives of various cross-sectoral organizations - People's universities Umag, NGO Otaharin from Bijeljina, City of Zagreb, Ministry of Culture of RS, Youth centers in Slovenia (Youth Center Celje and CEZAM Ruše) and others presented themselves.

At the workshop of the Europe café, the video messages of Mrs. Tanja Fajon and Mr. Igor Soltes, two MEPs of Slovenia were initiated at the opening ceremony. Participants were then addressed by an international expert for minority protection, prof. dr. Petra Roter and the Member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Željko Cigler. With this introduction we opened a round table where we touched on various themes of influence on legislative practices, preparation of strategic plans for the importance of formal and non-formal education from different European perspectives.

After the workshop, participants of the conference, under the guided program, learned about the cultural and natural sights of the local environment. The participants visited the Rimske terme complex and learned about the historical and cultural tourism potential of the city, and then they swim in the thermal water pools. In parallel with this program, the other participants of the conference, representatives of partners' and cultural organizations from abroad, could socialize with the local culinary in the presentation pavilion outdoors.

The first day of the conference ended with a cultural program, a traditional handicraft festival and a folklore program, as well with the dinner where the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other, informally socialize and exchange their views, ideas and contacts.

**The program of the third day** (May 25, 2019 at the Aqua Roma Congress Center and at Rimske Toplice, Toplice 2) began with reading the message to the participants from dr. Zoran Stančič, Head of the European Commission Representation in the Republic of Slovenia. Tina Kenk from the Center for Mobility and European Education and Training Programs (CMEPIUS), contact point for the Europe for Citizens programme, prepared a programme presentation, and Maja Milas also presented other funding opportunities and programmes by the European Union: Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Social Fund, European Solidarity Corps and other smaller programs that offer various forms of participation to both, individuals and organizations, in particular the possibilities that they have in the context of the Erasmus+ programme.

During the break, the participants were able to refresh themselves with original local delicacies.

At the Europe café workshop we were able to exchange views, experiences and good practices, and above all, we focused on the future and various possibilities of upgrading cooperation.

After completing the formal schedule, the participants took a guided tour of the town of Laško, Brewery Laško and the Tabor Castle, where they had a beer tasting and could get acquainted with the cuisine of one of the most prestigious restaurants in Slovenia.

In parallel with the planned program, the other participants of the conference, representatives of partners' organizations and cultural organizations from abroad, could socialize with local culinary experts in the outdoor pavilion, took a bath in the thermal spas and prepare for the evening program and the main cultural event - the performance of the Bisernica Ensemble from Bijeljina in Celje House.

Participants were addressed by dr. Stevan Djordjević, and Ivana Jakšić Matović, on behalf of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Slovenia. In the full hall of the Celje House, the participants could enjoy the next 90 minutes with the traditional sounds of the music of Balkans, and at the end of the event, they spontaneously danced the 'kolo', traditional social gathering dance, demonstrating the importance of intercultural dialogue and coexistence. The participants were afterwards informally socializing at various locations in Rimske Toplice and Celje.

**The program of the fourth day** (26.05.2019 at the Aqua Roma convention center in Rimske Toplice, Toplice 2) began with the final phase of the conference - the final thoughts of the participants and with the signing of The Joint Twinning Statement on the importance of non-formal education in developing intercultural dialogue and engaging local communities in promotion and promoting and fostering the social inclusion.

Many delegates then took advantage of the day for additional, informal research of the Municipality of Laško and its surroundings.

The International Conference was organized by the Institute Burja Rimske Toplice in cooperation with the Municipality of Laško and partners:

- ❖ Municipality of Umag, Croatia
- ❖ Municipality of Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ❖ Nevo concepts of Prizren, Kosovo
- ❖ The Institute of deaf and hard of hearing Nova Gradiška, Croatia
- ❖ Croatian Cultural and Educational Association Matija Gubec Tavankut, Serbia
- ❖ Südost Europa Kultur e.V. Berlin, Germany

**Maja Milas, Project Manager**

**Damir Hauptman, Director of the Institute Burja Rimske Toplice**