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Project
EU4Dialogue: Improving exchanges across
the divide through education and culture (Component 3)
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FINAL REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW, TEAM EXPERIENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Author: Zinta Miezaine

Co-authors: Katrīna Kukaine, Anna Pakere, Kristina Papule, Viktorija Piščikova, Ilze Strazdiņa, Madara Vīlipa, Evija Vjatere

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ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
NLL	National Library of Latvia
LAPAS	Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdiens

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INTRODUCTION

The National Library of Latvia (NLL) together with consortium partners from other European Union (EU) countries implemented the project "EU4Dialogue: Improving exchanges across the divide through education and culture" from 7 May 2021 to 6 May 2025, encouraging a supportive environment for dialogue and cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova.

The project was funded by the EU4Dialogue programme, which is an instrument for the implementation of EU policy under the auspices of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). The mission of the DG NEAR is to take forward the European Union's Neighbourhood and Enlargement policies. By implementing assistance activities in the neighbouring countries to the east and south of Europe, DG NEAR supports reform and democratic consolidation, and strengthens prosperity, stability and security across Europe. DG NEAR helps to promote the EU values, policies and interests in this region and contributes to the development of the special EU relationship with its neighbouring countries.

In the area of enlargement, DG NEAR assists those countries with a perspective to join the EU in meeting the criteria defined by the Treaty of European Union and the European Council. DG NEAR closely monitors the progress of the enlargement countries towards the EU and supports accession negotiations as requested by the Council. The DG manages the bilateral relations of the EU with candidate and potential candidate countries on their path to the EU, frontloading reforms on rule of law, economic governance and public administration reform. As of 1 February 2025, its functions were taken over by the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf and the Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood.

With a total of seven consortium partners from Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland and Poland (henceforth – the consortium partners), a series of measures were implemented in a total of four work packages. The activities carried out in the fields of schools, higher education and culture included study trips for pupils and students to EU countries, online language courses for teachers, summer schools, guest lectureships, artist residencies and training courses in the areas of cultural management, pedagogy, cultural heritage, theatre and film.

Within the framework of this project, the National Library of Latvia developed and implemented cooperation with the EU neighbouring countries – Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (henceforth – the partner countries), offering training, internship and mentoring opportunities for library and museum staff, involving, where possible, participants from conflict regions – Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and Ossetia (henceforth – the project partners).

In 2022, the project team gained experience in implementing development cooperation projects within the framework of the project "Librarians as Promoters of Local Democracy, Development and Resilience". It was implemented by the association "Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation" (LAPAS) in cooperation with the Association of Librarians of Moldova, the NLL and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. The project objective was to promote the development of local democracy and community resilience by improving the knowledge and skills of librarians in Moldova and Latvia.

The NLL started the project "EU4Dialogue: Improving exchanges across the divide through education and culture" in cooperation with the association LAPAS, conducting a situational analysis on working in conflict regions, as well as organizing appropriate capacity-building activities for the project team. In the next stage, the NLL organized the summer schools "Library as a Community Cultural Space" (20–30 August 2023 and 19–23 August 2024), professional internships in Latvian libraries and museums, a mentoring programme for library and museum staff, multiplying events in partner countries, as well as developed experience-based guidelines for the implementation of future projects.

Project implementation has allowed its the team to gain unique experience which can be useful both for the team itself and for those who are interested in developing projects by promoting democratic development in the neighbouring countries of the EU, including conflict regions.

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of project implementation, results achieved, including a summary of experience gained during the project for the successful implementation of future projects. The report has been prepared using the following methods: data collection, the observations, analysis of available information, two structured seminars with the project team, project team stories and their analysis.

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[1]https://www.undp.org/georgia/projects/eu4dialogue, last accessed on 24.03.2024.
[2]The website of the European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/european-neighbourhood-and-enlargement-negotiations_en#leadership-and-organisation, last accessed on 10.12.2024.
[3]https://lapas.lv/resources/metodikas-un-rokasgramatas/07_as_moldova_2022/assets/metodikaLV.pdf

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Overview of the situation and its development in partner countries

Starting the project and forming its team, situation analyses in the project partner countries were carried out. Each region – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh – has a different history of conflicts. However, the common aspect of all these regions is disputes over their territorial belonging to Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan or Moldova – within the borders of the former USSR republics, or autonomy at different levels. The above regions are largely under the informational and military influence of Russia, and are largely influenced by its legal system and the structure of public administration. These regions are also marked by armed conflicts in the recent past. The understanding of history and the interpretation of the events of the recent past differ in these regions compared to the rest of the territory of the former republics, which are more focused on the European values and legal system. The Russian language and the policy of Russification play a decisive role, especially in Transnistria, where the written language is in Cyrillic script, and people of Romanian origin identify themselves as a nation distinct from the Moldovans. In the above territories, people still largely live in the Russian information space.

The gap between the conflict regions in several situations is also intensified by different religious orientations. There is a strong influence of Muslim faith in Azerbaijan, as well as in Abkhazia, which determines both different hierarchical structures of society and organizations, and also creates tension between Muslim and Christian communities. The different wings of Orthodoxy and their different ideological centres in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia also play their role in the division of society and the possibility of conflicts.

During project implementation, these differences were further intensified by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, reinforcing the different interpretations of history and understandings of the ongoing events in Ukraine. The war also deepened the gap between Russia and Western countries – including the former USS republics, which have focused their development on the European values. The Republic of Moldova has expressed its intention to join the European Union. As it is known, in Latvia, an attitude towards the use of the Russian language in public space has become more intolerant in recent years. Consequently, the use of the Russian language in the project implementation also decreased, for example, its final documents were not translated into Russian.

All project partner countries were also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in the first years of the project (2020–2022). During this time, the opportunities to travel and meet in person were limited. However, by carrying out appropriate planning and using opportunities provided by technology, the pandemic did not have a significant impact on the progress and results of the project, and its overall impact on project implementation was minimal.

In the autumn of 2023, Azerbaijan carried out measures to regain the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, and 100,000 refugees (displaced persons) of Armenian origin left this the territory. Therefore, there was no more an opportunity and need to invite project participants from Nagorno-Karabakh, where the libraries were in a difficult situation. As a result, a new target group emerged – displaced persons and their access to library services already in Armenia. However, by the time the project activities started, the potential participants had not yet become citizens of Armenia, so it was not possible for them to obtain visas to enter Latvia.

In October 2024, the party "Georgian Dream" won the Georgian parliamentary elections, and, despite widespread protests, negotiations on joining the EU were suspended. These circumstances jeopardized multiplying activities in Georgia at the final stage of the project.

Political changes in the project partner countries caused challenges and obstacles for the project that had to be overcome.

Project implementation principles

The political context in the project countries made it necessary to carefully develop the programme of professional activities in order to maximise the focus on things that were and common among the participants of each event, to carefully form groups that participate in the events at the same time, and to focus on the transfer of professional knowledge. For example, taking into account the current conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, participants from these countries were not included in joint activities. The conflict between Moldova and Transnistria has been frozen for a long time, and therefore representatives of these countries can cooperate, while maintaining different views on politics. During the project, internal political disagreements in Georgia intensified, and this was also reflected in different interpretations about the ongoing situation by the representatives of this country. However, the project focus on professional growth, a friendly atmosphere in the group and diplomatic organisation of activities by the project team did not allow these disagreements to develop into conflict.

Special attention was paid to creating a favourable microclimate in the groups; each participant was valued as a professional and a person, regardless of their views and the political context in the territories represented by them.

The selection of professional knowledge topics and experience transfer methods allowed to transfer the knowledge indirectly in the best possible ways, and to experience a working and living environment based on equality, democratic decision-making, respect for human rights, respect for an individual, and other European values. The fact that Latvia was also occupied and part of the USSR created an additional bridge of mutual trust between the participants from the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova, and gave the guest participants greater assurance of the possibility to have successful democratic development also in their countries. A period of common history of the EU neighbouring countries and Latvia, and the development of Latvia after regaining independence, also helped to dispel possible myths about the EU, which are actively spread in the Russian information space, including the EU neighbouring countries.

Defining common values and goals was one of the most important steps in planning a cooperation project, especially when the project involved representatives of conflicting parties. This process helped build mutual understanding, strengthen cooperation and move the project towards a common result.

When creating a common understanding, the participation of all parties involved, and the opportunity for everyone to express their opinion, concerns and suggestions were of particular importance. It was essential to use various methods that created not only a sense of security, but also developed creativity; for example, lectures, group work, LEGO Serious Play, practical classes, joint leisure activities. The activities were held in different places in Latvia, in different institutions, and professionals from different fields shared their experience, allowing each participant to listen to experiences that could be transferred and implemented in their professional situation.

When identifying common interests, it was necessary to actively seek those things that united all participants, focusing on differences as little as possible. In cases where people with very different experiences worked together, it was necessary to agree to focus purposefully only on the technical side of the exchange of common experience, without bringing value issues into the discussion. At the same time, participants also had to accept that all experiences are unique and all answers in the joint learning process are correct. It would be preferable to agree on jointly developed and documented rules already in the first introductory seminar, drawing up these rules in a participatory process and making sure that all participants have the same understanding of the content of the jointly developed rules.

Focusing on the things that unite rather than divide the parties and finding common interests served as the basis for cooperation within each group. For example, since the unifying goal was the exchange of experience between librarians and museum workers, the common interest was the creation of professional collections, restoration, storage, use of technology, engagement of readers, and working with the local community and its various groups. Common goals not directly related to the project can also be defined, for example, mutual concern for each project participant to retain the best possible memories and impressions of the time spent together.

Project implementation description

During the first stage of the project (2021–2022), an analysis of various aspects of resilience in conflict regions was carried out, and the possible role of libraries in promoting resilience was defined. The situation analysis was carried out by the LAPAS association. Their report recommended paying attention to the following aspects of library operations:

• Library services and activities in the community as a bridge to strengthen the security of various groups;
• The wide range of library services in promoting democracy, reducing dependence on local governments and financial dependence, strengthening the autonomy of libraries;
• Working with various target groups, which can be agents of change in their communities;
• The role of libraries in activating communities;
• Considering the fact that individuals play a significant role in resilience, the project can include a perspective of the library as an institution and the librarian as an individual;
• Perspectives of premises, people and ideas, as well as a dimension of internal and external security can be used;
• Librarians as the determining enablers of change processes are at the centre of everything.

It was also necessary to take into account the factor that in conflict regions the library will not always be the physically safest gathering place, because places where residents are concentrated can become targets for strikes. In authoritarian regimes, libraries and museums are also weapons of propaganda, where the political conjuncture determines the content of purchases, things that should be preserved and brought to the forefront of readers' attention, the collection developing policy, items that are available only in special collections or even items to be written off or destroyed.

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[4]Needs analysis for defining and developing the content of activities for the project "EU4 Dialogue: Improving exchanges across the divide through education and culture", unpublished report.

During the project preparation period, a concept of a library as a (physically) safe place was initially put forward. As the situation changed, this concept was enlarged, thinking about a place where a diversity of ideas and opinions can safely exist.

Taking into account the influence of Russian propaganda, it was particularly important to convey to the project participants not only an insight into library operations, but also the experience of decision-making and mutual relations in a democratic country and the EU as a whole. Such an approach could more effectively stimulate changes in the participants' thinking, including by promoting a change in perception of different regimes. Professional needs of participants made known through online interviews and questionnaires prior to participating in the summer school, internship, and mentoring programme played an important role in the programme development.

Activities and their thematic content

To achieve the project goals, the NLL team organized the following activities:
• two summer schools – an average of ten days of experience exchange events in Latvia;
• mentoring (consulting) for participants to implement projects in their libraries;
• three professional internships – up to a month of in-depth knowledge acquisition events in Latvia;
• four multiplying events in partner countries;
• development of guidelines for further development cooperation projects.

Summer schools

The NLL project team organized two summer schools in Latvia "Library as a Community Cultural Space" (20–30 August 2023 and 19–23 August 2024). Their goal was to promote mutual communication, joint learning and cohesion by sharing the best practices of Latvia, Moldova (including Transnistria), Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.

In the first summer school, cooperation was promoted by studying the following topics:

• Library information systems and resources, their management;
• Digitization and preservation of cultural heritage;
• The work of libraries and cultural institutions in planning and developing services;
• Library cooperation in the field of culture with various organizations, institutions and local communities.

The following topics were included in the programme of the second summer school:

• The library as a promoter of reading: working with children and families;
• The library as a cornerstone of local history research for the community;
• The library as a bridge builder for democracy: working with young people;
• The library as a space for the community: cooperation and public involvement.

After each summer school, participants were invited to apply for a mentoring programme and internship in Latvia. In cooperation with the mentoring participants, extensive internship programmes were developed, as well as partner organizations in Latvia were found which undertook to provide internships.

Mentoring programme

After each summer school, the NLL team provided individual consultations for the implementation of pilot projects in the participant libraries. During the first mentoring period (01.09.2023 –31.08.2024), five participants developed and implemented the following:

• Library digitization guidelines;
• Design concepts for library premises;
• An educational event programme;
• Publication;
• Development of new services for various target groups.

Two participants from Moldova and one participant from each of these places – Transnistria, Azerbaijan and Georgia – took part in the mentoring programme. The results of the mentoring programme were presented at two final ZOOM meetings, which were attended by all participants of the mentoring programme and mentors from the Latvian libraries.

Likewise, five participants applied for the second mentoring period (01.09.2024 –31.01.2025) – three from Armenia and two from Georgia. The mentoring programme topics chosen by the participants were as follows:

• Digital library development plan;
• Guidelines for archiving, managing and distributing digitized files;
• Exploring possibilities of creating electronic databases;
• Improving cultural heritage: developing museum funding and library operations through a strategic vision for the future;
• Recommendations for adapted literature formats.

Internships

In the first internship, the NLL offered an exchange of experiences on the following topics:

• Library/museum cooperation with the community, collecting local traditions and local history materials, community involvement in these processes and building a sense of belonging;
• Working with various target groups / building an inclusive society, including working with Russian-speaking audiences, minorities, working with people with special needs;
• Cooperation in projects and activities.

The internship took place from 30 October 2022 to 25 November 2022 and was attended by two trainees from Moldova.

The second internship was dedicated to acquiring more specific knowledge in a small group and individually, and it covered public policy in the fields of libraries and museums, including a meeting at the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, detailed knowledge of library and museum policy issues, collection creation and preservation, restoration, and also working with visitors. An individual programme was developed for a museum representative from Transnistria in cooperation with specialists from the Latvian museum sector.

The internship took place from 05 November 2023 to 03 December 2023 and was attended by three trainees from Transnistria and one from Moldova.

In the third internship, participants received in-depth information about library organization, media literacy, the latest professional literature, research on local cultural history, the role of libraries in the implementation of sustainable development goals, working with the audience, as well as other topics requested by the participants.

The internship took place from 06 May 2024 to 25 May 2024 and was attended by four trainees: two from Georgia and two refugees from South Ossetia living in Georgia.

Multiplying events

There were four multiplying events within the project – participants of previous activities organized them in their countries to share the knowledge gained in the above-mentioned activities and their implementation.

The first event took place from 01 October to 05 October 2024 in Moldova, and it was a seminar on what was learned during the EU4D events. Representatives from Transnistria also participated in the seminar. Latvian experts participated in the seminar in Chisinau, providing knowledge to a wider circle of professionals, while project participants reflected on what they had learned in Latvia and also showed how their libraries operate.

The second multiplying event was also held in Moldova from 11 November to 15 November 2024, at the request of Moldovan colleagues; it covered a far more specific topic and was addressed to data creation specialists of the National Library of Moldova and Moldovan university libraries and was about the creation of bibliographic and authoritative data.

From 16 February to 21 February 2025, a multiplying event was held in Armenia. The Latvian project team and experts got acquainted with the specifics and contrasts of the Armenian libraries.

The fourth multiplying event was planned in Georgia, however, due to the fact that the government of this country chose to suspend negotiations on joining the EU, the on-site implementation of the programme was not advisable. Therefore, an online seminar for Georgian librarians was organized on 20 March 2025. In accordance with the wishes expressed by the Georgian colleagues, Latvian experts shared the latest advances on library buildings, premises, their design, the

latest current events in Latvian libraries, discussed the ethical use of artificial intelligence tools in library operations and educational activities, and also encouraged to think about the role of public libraries in divided communities. Furthermore, participants of summer schools, mentoring programmes and professional internships shared their experience in the aforementioned areas. They talked about the pilot projects implemented, their ideas and future plans.

Results and impact

During the project, participants acquired knowledge and shared their experiences about on many aspects of library and museum operations. At the end of each summer school and internship, participants filled out evaluation questionnaires about the benefits. On average, depending on the relevance of the topic, the above events were rated between 9 and 10 on a scale from 1 to 10. Participants also positively assessed the project content and its technical organization.

> **Aurica Vrabie,** City Public Library Ștefan Vodă, Moldova
>
> The summer school was my most delightful experience in a library. I wanted to move to a different field for many years, but now I know exactly how I want to work and what I want to accomplish as a city library director. Thank you for the opportunity to look at things differently, for confidence in my abilities, and for the opportunity to implement everything I learned from you in my daily work. Katrīna, Viktorija, Jūlija, Madara, Anna, may God bless you with health and strength to develop and pass on your experience to other librarians in developing countries. We really need it. I admire you!

Satisfaction with participation in the project is mentioned in almost in every questionnaire. Apart from professional benefits, participants also emphasize the work culture of Latvian libraries, interest in the needs of readers and clients, allocation of premises for visitors, welcoming attitude towards children and people with special needs, use of technology, implementation of creative projects in libraries involving clients, achievements in digitalization, and the enthusiasm and interest of employees.

A special emphasis should be placed on building relationships between colleagues from conflict regions. Within the framework of the project, during one of the summer schools, specialists from Moldova and Transnistria as well as participants from Azerbaijan gained experience. During the second summer school, participants from Armenia and Georgia studied together. According to the project team observations, organizers had managed to create conditions and circumstances that helped participants open up and promoted their mutual trust. When working together, for example, in LEGO Serious Play (see description below), participants cooperated well also in mixed groups. In various everyday situations, participants helped and supported each other. In some cases, shared experience gained in Latvia also encouraged further cooperation between representatives of different countries. Participants from Transnistria were also invited to the multiplying event in Moldova, while participants from Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan also participated in the Zoom conference in Georgia. The National Library of Moldova carried out specific support measures for libraries in Transnistria.

> **Aliona Tostogan,** National Library of Moldova, Moldova
>
> During my professional internship within the framework of the EU4D project, which took place from 5 November 2023 to 3 December 2023, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the topicalities of Latvian cultural policy, innovative practical methods in library management, library collection creation and organization, library services, work organization of the collection preservation centre, library educational activities, etc. The most significant achievement was getting to know professionals of my field – librarians from Latvian libraries and librarians and museum workers from Transnistria. This professional internship served as a friendship bridge and provided an opportunity for the Republic of Moldova to cooperate with Transnistria, which in itself is a strategic partnership based on long-standing friendship and good neighbourly relations, equality, respect for mutual interests, common history and culture, and intertwining of thousands of people's destinies. Such a solid foundation promotes trustful contacts between cultural institutions. The further development of relationship between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria will be of particular importance for maintaining regional stability and security, peace and mutual understanding. The EU4D project aims to create a permanent platform to strengthen the bonds of friendship and partnership between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, which will be reflected in the following activities:
> 1. Exchange and replenishment of the collections of the National Library of Moldova and the Museum of History and Local History of the city of Bender with digitized resources and periodicals of the past;
> 2. Supplementing the collection of the Central Public Library of Tiraspol named after Alexander Pushkin with publications in Russian (a proposal in place that can be implemented by the end of 2023);

3. Supplementing the collection of the Central Public Library of Tiraspol named after Alexander Pushkin with books in English (a monthly replenishment proposal from 2024);
4. The opportunity for the Central Public Library of Tiraspol named after Alexander Pushkin and the Library of the Transnistrian State University named after Taras Shevchenko to enter into an agreement on joining the SIBIMOL – electronic library catalogue of the Republic of Moldova;
5. The opportunity for partnership in projects.
I express my sincere gratitude to the organizers and participants of the professional internship for high professionalism, individual approach, sensitivity and attention paid to the trainees, the intense professional programme enriched with practical materials, invaluable exchange of experience, motivation and emotional uplift, the ability to create a warm and friendly environment that promotes maximum knowledge acquisition. You were patient and supportive throughout the internship. We gained extremely valuable experience that will help us in our future work. Thank you very much for YOUR WORK!

At the end of each stage, the project team analysed the feedback expressed in the questionnaires in order to successfully plan further project activities.

Evija Vjatere, Project Coordinator

Upon analysing the participant feedback questionnaires, we came to a conclusion that the project participants emphasized the following summer school and professional internship benefits:

Strategic planning and development
International cooperation: some participants plan to use the knowledge acquired to strengthen partnerships with other organizations using more effective communication methods. Development of new projects: ideas about the library as a centre for cooperation with local communities and cultural institutions will be implemented.

The library as a multifunctional and public space
The role of public space: participants admitted being surprised by the level of modernization of Latvian libraries – libraries operate as a multifunctional place.
Use of public space: the knowledge acquired about the library as a public space will be used to create more accessible and multifunctional libraries at the local level.
Zone planning: interest was shown in the library zoning to create comfortable and adapted places for the needs of different users.
Open environment: participants learned that a library is not just a place for storing books, but a community centre where educational, cultural and social events take place.

Organization of library collections
Library information systems: participants plan to use automated book issuance and new edition ordering systems to improve their library operations.
Electronic catalogue development: participants plan to start developing an electronic catalogue in the near future to improve access to library resources.
Electronic resources: experience in database management will be used to improve online availability of resources.
Digitisation experience: participants appreciated experience in digitising local history resources.

Cultural heritage preservation and cooperation
Cooperation with organisations: new methods of cooperation with local communities and organisations will be used to promote cultural projects and library development.

Community and public engagement
Cooperation with schools and kindergartens: opportunities will be sought to cooperate with educational institutions to promote reading literacy among children and young people.
Working with children and families: awareness of how libraries can engage in promoting children's reading competence through international projects and creating modern, attractive reading environments.

Sustainable development and green thinking
Environmentally friendly approach: experience of the implementation of sustainable practices such as energy-efficient technologies and environmentally friendly materials.

Participant quotes on a modern library
• "Libraries are modern, accessible and create an inspiring environment for both children and adults";
• "Automated systems and digital resource management make the library more efficient";
• "The library becomes the heart of the community, where different people with common interests meet".

Particular results in the partner countries were achieved due to the mentoring programme.

In the first programme, participants achieved the following practical results:

• Library digitization guidelines;
• Concept for library space design;
• Educational event programme;
• Publication;
• Development of new services for different target groups.

Victoria Vasilica, National Library of Moldova, Moldova

The mentoring programme was an extremely valuable experience that gave me a deep understanding of library services for people with disabilities in Latvia. I greatly appreciated the practical approach and the resources offered, which helped me improve my skills as an instructor and train other librarians to create an inclusive and accessible environment in their libraries. During the programme, my mentor Zane was very dedicated and provided constant support which contributed to my professional development. I also learned how to adapt library activities and resources to better meet the diverse needs of users with disabilities. This programme reinforced my belief in libraries as an important player in promoting inclusion and diversity. Thank you for this training and development opportunity!

Topics chosen by participants in the second programme:

• A development plan for a digital library;
• Guidelines for archiving, managing and distributing digitized files;
• Exploring possibilities of creating electronic databases;
• Improving cultural heritage: developing museum funding and library operations through a strategic vision for the future;
• Recommendations for adapted literature formats.

The multiplying events best revealed the impact of the project; they were held after the summer schools and professional internships in Latvia.

Several participants of the multiplying events pointed out that it was the attitude, attention, and professionalism of the project team and experts as well as the atmosphere that inspired them to make changes in their own libraries, as well as made them want to develop further cooperation with the Latvian partners.

Multiplying events in many places demonstrated the real impact of the project on changes in the libraries of the partner countries. In addition to the practical outcomes developed during the mentoring programme, especially in the field of digitization, participants were inspired by the experience they gained in Latvia and showed, for example, transformed library premises; it was done by attracting funding from the local municipality (Batumi). At the same time, small but significant changes have been made in several libraries; for example, a photo album of events held in the library, a guest/review book, an idea for community storytelling evenings by the library fireplace, etc.

Project participants also prepared lectures and seminars for their colleagues about the experience gained in Latvia.

Iltifat Ibrahimov, Azerbaijan Technical University Library, Azerbaijan

Within the mentoring programme, I had a good opportunity to explore, learn, summarize my experience and prepare guidelines for a useful handbook for universities in Azerbaijan. While visiting the National Library of Latvia, I noticed that the library had extensive experience in digitization, so I collected information about digitization projects. After the summer school, I learned about a mentoring opportunity and applied for it at the National Library of Latvia.

Upon assessing the experience of multiplying activities, the project team recognized that specific peculiarities of each country, which the project team got to know on-site, helped to more accurately understand the situation and needs of the countries. It was concluded that a visit aimed at getting to know the local context before the project would have allowed for a more precise definition of the topics and more appropriate selection of participants and topics. However, it should be

noted that mutual relationships established during the project played a major role in understanding the real situation. It might be that by visiting participating countries before the project, Latvian representatives would only see the "surface" or the external "facade" of their colleagues' work.

Project team observations about the partner countries as cooperation partners

Moldova. It seems that this has been the most open and motivated party in terms of multiplying. Participants have actively observed, learned and gained practical benefits from the mentors and seminars. There is a visible desire to continue cooperation and implement changes related to the move towards the EU. The renovation of the youth room and involvement in various activities indicate a positive impact.

Transnistria. The cooperation has promoted dialogue which is a positive aspect. However, there are certain barriers and caution on the part of the representatives of this region. There are also systemic problems and the political context that can hinder changes. There is an example where a participant has taken part in this and other projects without due professional interest and commitment.

Georgia. Participants have gained tangible benefits such as digitization recommendations and a development strategy document. The summer school has helped to strengthen self-confidence and the professional prestige of participants from small libraries. Personal contacts have been established that facilitate further cooperation. The impact of the project in Georgia was the most structured, as the group leader was from the Parliamentary Library, which is also the methodological centre for the development of all public libraries. Consequently, the resonance of the experience gained in Latvia was the widest. Further cooperation, unfortunately, is affected by Georgia's political alienation from the EU.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Due to movement restrictions, participation of these regions in the activities was fragmented. In the case of Abkhazia, the transfer of Georgian library books across the border and private contacts which continue are mentioned. A participant from a South Ossetian refugee camp, where a library is set up in a barrack, gained both professional knowledge and contacts (also in Georgia), as well as much-needed respite.

Armenia. Participants have appreciated the *multiplying event* format. There are certain barriers to multiplying in certain aspects, as it is believed that much has already been achieved. There is a strong community of women, professionals, a high education level, and sufficient funding for many areas which were supported by sponsors, including the Armenian diaspora. There is an interest in the development of inclusive library services. In several cases, it was observed that public premises where most libraries are located are not maintained with due care.

Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh. This region was not represented in the project because potential participants were denied entry visas. From the Azerbaijani point of view, a lot of help is needed to renew libraries and create collections in this region. Armenian libraries operate by including displaced Armenians from this region. Armenian and Azerbaijani colleagues were not included in the same group, communication was indirect – during the multiplying event in Georgia (ZOOM).

Azerbaijan. A tangible product has been created – guidelines for digitization. However, the language barrier has been an obstacle and there is a feeling that the Azerbaijani party has not always fully understood what the Latvian experts have tried to provide. There is an interest in the library structure reorganization. There is a visible focus on high standards and directness in communication.

The project participants emphasized as a great benefit the excellent atmosphere and interpersonal relations that were established in Latvia which promoted trust and taking heed of professional messages. Participants of the multiplying events expressed their desire to continue cooperating with the NLL and other Latvian experts. Although participants were happy to cooperate and form informal connections during activities, future possible cooperation between participants from the mixed groups – between participants from Moldova and Transnistria, as well as Azerbaijan (the first summer school group), or participants from Armenia and Georgia (the second summer school group) – is less clear.

During the structured seminars, participants shared their experience of various situations.This allowed the project team to learn and draw conclusions for the implementation of future projects. Six areas were highlighted as very important for cooperation with representatives of other cultures, especially from conflict zones: project planning, participant selection, programme development, communication, peculiarities in the implementation of mentoring programmes, participant well-being, and creativity releasing. The following chapters will reflect the project team's experience stories and the lessons learned from these aspects of the project. The project team's experience also serves as the basis for the guidelines attached at the end of the Report.

The main benefits for participants from their participation in the project

• Professional knowledge and experience
    • Aspects of library operations: Participants acquired knowledge and shared experience of many aspects of library and museum operations, gaining a new vision for their work.

• Modern approaches: They became familiar with the level of modernization of Latvian libraries, multifunctionality, use of technological capabilities and implementation of creative projects.
• Good practice: Participants noted the work culture of Latvian libraries, their focus on the needs of readers and clients, adaptable premises, responsiveness to different groups of society, and employee enthusiasm.
• Digitization: Many participants gained experience and knowledge of digitization processes and electronic resource management, planning to implement similar systems in their libraries.
• Strategic planning and development: Participants got ideas about library development, introducing new services, and building cooperation.
• Mentoring programme: This programme provided a deeper understanding of specific areas such as library services for people with disabilities, and helped develop practical solutions and guidelines.

• Personal and professional growth
• New perspective: Participants had the opportunity to look at their work from a different perspective, which increased their confidence in their abilities and motivation to make changes.
• Inspiration and motivation: The attitude of the project team and experts inspired participants to make changes in their libraries and develop further cooperation.
• Networking: The project promoted relationship building among colleagues from different countries, including from conflict regions, creating trust and mutual support.
• International cooperation: Some participants plan to use the knowledge acquired to strengthen partnerships with organizations in other partner countries.

• Specific results in partner countries
• Practical benefits: Within the framework of the mentoring programme, library digitization guidelines, concepts for designing premises, educational event programmes, publications and new services were developed.
• Changes in libraries: Inspired by the experience gained in Latvia, library premises were transformed, new initiatives were introduced and services were improved.
• Promoting cooperation: The project encouraged further cooperation between participants from different countries, as well as between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria.

In general, participants assessed their participation in the project very positively, emphasizing the professional benefits and friendly and supportive environment of the project process. They feel inspired and motivated to implement the knowledge acquired in practice and promote changes in their workplaces.

From the participants' point of view, the project provided not only valuable professional knowledge and skills, but also an opportunity to get to know the experience of the EU country, to establish international contacts and to gain inspiration for new challenges in their work. The positive atmosphere and support provided by the project team and Latvian partners created a favourable environment for learning and cooperation. Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity to see the operation of modern libraries in practice and the ways they engage their communities. The experience gained will help them develop their institutions and promote positive changes in their regions.

The project team, in turn, gained experience in implementing a development cooperation project, which is summarized in the following sections of the report.

Statistics

A total of forty participants took part in the summer schools.
20.08.2023–30.08.2023, nine participants from Transnistria, five from Moldova, five from Azerbaijan and one from Georgia (a total of four men and 16 women) attended summer school.
17.08.2024–24.08.2024, ten participants from Georgia and ten from Armenia (a total of two men and eighteen women) attended summer school.

Ten participants applied for the mentoring programme.
01.09.2023–31.08.2024, one participant from Azerbaijan, one from Georgia, two from Moldova, and one from Transnistria (a total of one man and four women) took part in the programme.
01.09.2024–31.01.2025, three participants from Armenia and two from Georgia (a total of five women) took part in the programme.

Internships were attended by:

30.10.2022–25.11.2022 – two trainees from Moldova.

30.10.2022–25.11.2022 – two trainees from Moldova.

05.11.2023–03.12.2023 – three trainees from Transnistria and one from Moldova (a total of one man and 3 women).

06.05.2024–25.05.2024 – four trainees: two from Georgia and two refugees from South Ossetia residing in Georgia.

Multiplying events were attended:

In Moldova 01.10.–05.10.2024, by 5 representatives from Latvia. The event was attended by 73 participants from Moldova and 2 from Transnistria. 2 participants from Azerbaijan and 1 from Georgia also joined via remote connection.

In Moldova 11.11.–14.11.2024, by 3 representatives from Latvia (NLL), visiting Chisinau and Comrat in the Gagauzia region on the Transnistrian border. The event was attended by 47 participants from Moldova, including 25 librarians from Gagauzia.

In Armenia 16.02.–21.02.2025, 11 representatives from Latvia and 140 participants from all regions of Armenia participated in the two-day event.

In Georgia (Zoom) (20.03.2025) a total of 140 participants took part: 119 from Georgia (including at least 1 from Transnistria), 15 from Latvia, 2 from Moldova (including 1 from Transnistria), 2 from Azerbaijan.

In Latvia, 21 libraries and their structural units and 20 museums were involved in the project organization and implementation. Employees of these institutions, as well as experts and employees of the public administration – the Ministry of Culture and local governments – shared their experience, the exact number of whom cannot be determined.

PROJECT TEAM EXPERIENCE AND KEY LESSONS LEARNED

This chapter summarizes project team experience stories and recommendations resulting from the implementation of the development cooperation projects with partner countries from the conflict regions. They derive from project participant experience regarding various aspects – strategic considerations, project participant selection, content development, participant well-being, building long-term remote cooperation, as well as releasing creative thinking using LEGO Serious Play. Each sub-chapter is based on the project team stories about the lessons learned during project implementation. At the end of each sub-chapter, the author has summarized the key lessons learned from these stories, which form the basis for the next chapter – guidelines for the implementation of development cooperation projects in the future.

Challenges of the National Library of Latvia as a project partner, accumulated experience in project implementation

The large-scale project, whose objective was to promote cooperation and interaction in conflict regions through educational and cultural activities, was a challenge for its implementers. The field of culture and education has been used in development cooperation for a long time, however, the library sector has been used less frequently so far. This fact received the interest of international partners and opened up opportunities to popularize the field of libraries as a multifaceted player in political processes through educational events and cultural activities. The NLL, taking into account Latvia's emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation in development cooperation, decided to participate in the EU-supported EU4Dialogue project – component 3 – as one of the cooperation partners, assessing its institutional responsibility, experience in implementing international projects and existing capacity.

Ilze Strazdiņa, Project Manager

The National Library of Latvia, by taking the decision to participate in the EU supported component 3 of the EU4Dialogue project as one of the cooperation partners, assessed both its responsibility as an institution and its role in providing development cooperation support, as well as its experience accumulated so far in implementing international projects, and also its existing capacity.

Taking into account the fact that Latvia, after joining the EU in 2004, has transformed from an aid recipient into a donor country, it must fulfil its international commitments to promote global development and provide support to developing countries. A great deal of work has been invested in creating Latvia's development cooperation policy, and currently the goals, action directions and objectives of this policy are based on the Development Cooperation Policy Guidelines for 2021–2027 (henceforth – the Guidelines).

The NLL assessed the compliance of the planned project with the development cooperation policy in Latvia, which emphasizes the importance of various types of cooperation and partnerships applicable both in building relationships with partner countries and other development cooperation implementers. Despite the fact that the NLL has accumulated extensive experience in implementing projects financed by both EU funds and other foreign financial instruments, the planned project, whose objective was to promote cooperation and interaction (regional, interregional and/or with the EU) in conflict regions through educational and cultural activities, was a new challenge. It should be emphasized that the field of culture and education has been actively used in development cooperation for a long time, however, the field of libraries has been used rarely; this fact also attracted the interest of international partners and opened up opportunities to popularize the field of libraries as a multifaceted player in political processes through education and cultural activities.

At the same time, considering that Latvia emphasizes the need to create cross-sectoral and inter-sectoral cooperation and partnership in development cooperation, involving representatives of various sectors, including public administration, local governments, academic institutions, civil society, etc., and encourages institutions to attract funds from other donors for the implementation of projects, the NLL took a decision to become one of the project partners.

The positive decision was based on the projects compliance with the common development cooperation policy in Latvia and the opportunity to transfer and share experience and expertise accumulated by the NLL and Latvia, while, at the same time, on the possibility to accumulate experience in international development cooperation projects in a wide consortium formed by various organizations of the EU Member States, specializing in external cooperation in the field of education and culture.

The role of the lead partner in international projects is always very important because this position determines the direction, organization and implementation of the project. The lead partner of the project, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), has been fulfilling this role since the project preparation stage and has ensured the overall project management, supervision and coordination, as well as the distribution and redistribution of resources among the partners.

The Goethe Institute was the main responsible partner for the project's 4th work package, *Culture and Art Activities*, within the framework of which the NLL implemented activity 4.2 – *Increasing the capacity of local libraries*.

The project partner countries were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, which represent the conflict zones. Initially, it was planned to involve participants mainly from conflict regions (Abkhazia, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh) in the project activities. Already in the project launch phase, all project partners faced various obstacles, including political instability and geopolitical changes, which significantly delayed the launch of the project activities. At the same time, the NLL, which had experience from working in all project partner countries, including valid cooperation agreements (except for experience in conflict regions), initially expected more support from the project partners, including assistance in finding possible contacts in conflict regions. Unfortunately, our cooperation partners represented other areas and their local partners could not provide us with support to find potential cooperation partners, which was one of the reasons for the late start of the NLL project activities.

The project consisted of four work packages as a whole, within the framework of which different activities were implemented; all activities in the 4th work package were also different and with different target audiences. This was probably the reason for the lack of closer cooperation and exchange of information among partners, which would have been very useful for the NLL, especially in the project launch phase.

In order to ensure project implementation and the achievement of its goals, it was necessary to think of a different approach and look for other options in the search for cooperation partners, as well as to be flexible and adapt to the dynamically changing situation, which prevented the possibility of involving representatives from all conflict regions in the project. To achieve this, both the already known NLL partners in the partner countries, representatives of the diplomatic corps, the non-governmental sector, etc. were approached, as a result of which the NLL has currently has created a wide range of partners and shown itself to be a professional and significant player in the field of development cooperation.

To successfully manage a project that operates in different cultural environments, certain set of skills and approaches is required, which is denoted by the term "intercultural management". Such a set of skills was also vital for project implementation, because in all project activities we tried to unite participants who represented different cultures and who had different views, values, traditions and working styles, and we did our best to not allow these differences to prevent us from achieving common goals.

During the project, the implementation team accumulated invaluable experience in building diverse teams in which people from different cultures can cooperate, using their differences and complementing each other. Our experience is based on the basic principles of cultural diplomacy and helps build sustainable relationships based on mutual respect, which, in turn, is the basis for international cooperation, including peace-building and conflict prevention. The contribution, knowledge and experience of the NLL and all Latvian partners involved in the project have been highly appreciated, and it gives assurance that the work invested has not been in vain and must be continued. New ideas are being formed within the framework of already established partnerships, however, opportunities for new development cooperation projects and other cooperation models must be sought.

Key insights

1. Strategic planning and compliance with the development cooperation policy
   • **Sector selection:** To assess the potential of libraries and the cultural sector as a politically neutral platform for promoting cooperation and building trust in conflict regions. This area can be used as an effective tool for education and cultural activities, popularizing libraries as versatile players in political processes.
   • **Compliance with the national policy:** To ensure compliance of the project goals and activities with the national development cooperation policy, especially emphasizing the importance of intersectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation.
   • **Institutional capacity:** To assess the capacity and experience of the institution in implementing international projects, as well as its role in providing development cooperation support.

2. Partnership and cooperation within the consortium

• **The role of the lead partner:** To be aware of the essential role of the lead partner in the project progress, organization and implementation, ensuring effective management, supervision and coordination.

• **Division of responsibilities:** To clearly define the responsibilities and roles of each partner in the project work packages and activities.

• **Information exchange:** To promote regular and open exchange of information between all project partners, especially during the project launch phase.

• **Selection of consortium partners:** To carefully assess potential partners, taking into account their experience, expertise and ability to provide support in achieving the project goals, especially for establishing contacts in conflict regions.

• **Flexibility in attracting partners:** To be prepared to seek alternative cooperation opportunities and attract new partners if the initial plans encounter challenges.

3. Working in conflict regions

• **Contextual awareness:** To understand the political, social and cultural context in partner countries and conflict regions.

• **Adaptability:** To be flexible and able to adapt project activities to changing situations and unforeseen circumstances.

• **Seeking alternative approaches:** If direct involvement in conflict regions is difficult, seek other approaches to achieve goals, for example, by cooperating with partners operating outside the immediate conflict zones, but related to them.

• **Cross-sectoral cooperation:** To build partnerships with different sectors, including public administration, local governments, academic institutions, civil society and diplomatic corps, to expand cooperation opportunities.

4. Intercultural management

• **Respect for cultural diversity:** To be aware of and respect cultural differences between project participants and partners, promoting mutual respect and understanding.

• **Adapting communication:** To adapt communication style and methods, taking into account communication norms of representatives of different cultures.

• **Building diverse teams:** To build diverse teams where people from different cultures can effectively cooperate, based on their differences and complementing each other.

• **Cultural diplomacy:** To use the principles of cultural diplomacy to build long-term relationships based on mutual respect that promote peace-building and conflict prevention.

5. Exchange of experience and sustainability

• **Documentation of experience:** To document project implementation progress, lessons learned and examples of good practice.

• **Knowledge transfer:** To share experience and expertise with partners and other organizations operating in the field of development cooperation.

• **Future cooperation:** To use the established cooperation as a basis for the creation of new development cooperation projects and other cooperation models.

• **Ensuring sustainability:** To plan long-term impact activities to contribute to sustainable development in partner countries.

Participant selection, challenges and solutions

Participant selection for projects related to conflict regions is an extremely important part of the process. Selection of suitable participants not only helps to achieve the project goals, but also promotes mutual cooperation and positive experiences between different groups. Since such projects often involve people from very diverse countries with different experience, it is important to carefully assess the professional and personal suitability of each participant to ensure successful communication and the achievement of common goals.

Katrīna Kukaine, Project Manager

Participant selection principles
In a project where the target audience is participants from conflict-affected regions, participant selection is particularly important and largely determines the project success. It is important to create a group that is able to cooperate and gain positive experience together. This is almost impossible if the group includes people who are in an active conflict phase. During the project implementation, such a situation existed between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh territory), therefore participants from these countries were involved in activities at different times. The remaining participants from Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Moldova (Transnistria) could be included in joint activities.
The primary selection principle was to include in the project activities participants – professionals from libraries and other cultural institutions – directly from the conflict regions, however, the selection was also extended to the areas bordering the said regions or to the institutions working with the library network in the mentioned countries (including conflict regions).
The second selection principle was the participants' professional interest and needs in the field of libraries, the third – a direct area of activity aimed at their community within which library services are provided, influencing opinion formation of in the wider society.
It should be noted that the EU's neighbouring countries, which are the target audience of this project, are in the zone of influence of Russian propaganda. Therefore, it was important to form a group whose members did not actively support the interests of Russian propaganda. The selection was also limited by the ban on entering Latvia with a Russian passport, as a result of which some of the candidates dropped out. One of the biggest setbacks was the failure to obtain visas for the selected representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh, who were in Armenia as refugees but had not obtained their asylum seeker status and a new passport in order to be allowed into the EU.

Participant selection methods, pros and cons
The participant selection criteria set out in the project were, firstly, related to the participants' professional activity, secondly, to their geographical location and connection with conflict regions, thirdly, to their personality traits (communication skills, motivation), fourthly, to a clearly outlined predictable result, how the knowledge gained in the activities would be used in their work, community and the country as a whole.
The selection procedure was applied to three types of project activities – internships (up to 1 month), summer schools (10 days on average) and the mentoring programme after the end of the summer school.
Common selection methods for all activities:
1) Preliminary suggestions – recommendations received from various sources (project partner organizations, professional NGOs, NLL partners – national libraries, embassies);
2) Interviews with candidates (conducted remotely);
3) Questionnaires – indicating topics of interest, motivation.

Advantages of selection methods:
– partner recommendations gave an opportunity to get closer to participants directly from conflict regions;
– individual interviews with each participant are one of the most effective methods to check all selection criteria, as well as to obtain personalized contact with candidates;
– questionnaires are a lasting value that allow for an analysis of participant needs when drawing up the programme.

Disadvantages of selection methods:
– partner recommendations were not always effective and useful;
– interviews, although very effective, take up a lot of the project team's time;
– often too broad interests were indicated in the questionnaires: it was difficult to match them with the programme activities, or sometimes the information provided did not correspond to the true interests that were revealed during the activities.

Communication with project participants
Communication with project participants was organized both in writing – by e-mail, WhatsApp – and also orally through online conversations. During activities, separate WhatsApp groups for participants were created. The Zoom platform was used for oral communication.
The project team had to adapt the way of communication to the habits and rhythms of the participants, for example, for slow communication – e-mail, for operational information – WhatsApp.

Languages of participant communication
Knowledge of English was, of course, preferable, but not decisive in the selection of participants, as the project team also communicated in Russian, when necessary, so as not to narrow the already limited circle of candidates due to the language barrier.

In Latvia and its neighbouring countries, part of society has historically developed an aversion to using the Russian language publicly. It has especially intensified after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, it should not be ignored that for some project participants it may also be their native language, as well as the only language of international communication. English, in turn, as a language of communication is usually spoken by only a few participants. Therefore, the project team had to resolve the issue of which languagesto use for communication during the project.

Recommended actions:
– To identify language skills through questionnaires before the project and to work out approaches how to address the language issues;
– To agree on working languages in an open process (also it promotes the experience of a democratic process);
– To encourage participants to assist each other in communication (it also promotes cooperation);
– To provide translation opportunities;
– Not to avoid using different languages, for example – presentation in English (or native) language, narration in Russian (or vice versa). Such an approach also promotes language skills and further understanding for all project participants.

Group formation – selection of leaders and their role
When forming groups of participants for summer schools, the most active group members were specially selected in order to address them to become informal leaders of each group.
Leaders were nominated and instructed already at the initial stage of planning activities because their task was to unite the group both for practical needs and emotionally. This facilitated the work of the project team, especially when participants were not yet in Latvia, were on the road or in the evenings after the end of the official part of the programme. This provided the opportunity for the project manager to communicate with only one participant – the leader – to obtain the necessary information from the participants (for example, personal data, documents, signatures, etc.) or to convey important operational information to all participants. Outside classes, the leader helped oversee the group members and emotionally unite them.

What were the success factors?
One of the greatest successes in the participant selection for project activities was the involvement of the entire team, which ensured a diversity of opinions, the "many eyes" principle, and also helped choose lecturers and mentors that matched the interests of the participants. The second aspect of success was the recommendations of various cooperation partners regarding which professionals to approach for selection. Without these recommendations, it would not be possible to approach candidates directly from conflict areas. The diversity of the representation of the participants was also successful – public, national, academic and school libraries, as well as other cultural institutions, museums, and NGOs, which also opened up the possibility of mutual networking. The greatest success was the promotion of dialogue between librarians from Moldova and Transnistria.

What would be done differently next time?
A common participant selection document would be prepared specifying exact principles and criteria for participant selection. Embassies would be more involved in order to prepare in advance for possible travel difficulties of the participants. If possible, more "mixed" country representations would be established to promote mutual contacts.

Key insights

1. Basic principles for participant selection
• **Building a collaborative group:** To prioritize the selection of participants who will promote cooperation and positive experiences in the group. To avoid involving participants from regions that are in an active conflict phase during the project.
• **Defining the target audience**
    • Primary objective: To attract professionals from libraries and other cultural institutions directly from conflict regions.
    • Secondary objective: To expand the selection by including border areas or institutions working with the library network in partner countries, including also cooperation with conflict regions.
    • Professional relevance and needs: To assess participants' professional interests and needs in the field of libraries.
    • Community connection: To give preference to participants who are active in their communities, providing library services and thus influencing society.
    • Political neutrality: To take into account the geopolitical context and the influence of Russian propaganda in partner countries, to select project participants who do not actively serve the interests of this country.

• Entry restrictions: To be aware of and take into account possible entry restrictions (e.g., passport validity, visa regime). To find out in a timely manner the possibilities of potential participants to enter the project country.

2. Participant selection criteria
• **Professional activity:** Connection with the field of libraries or other cultural institutions.
• **Geographical location and connection with conflict regions:** It is preferable to have a job in conflict regions or border areas, or a connection with the library network of these regions.
• **Personal characteristics:** Communication skills, motivation to get involved in the project.
• **Expected results:** A clear understanding of how the knowledge gained in the activities will be used in professional activities, country and community.

3. Participant selection methods:
• **Preliminary recommendations:** To collect recommendations from various sources:
    • Project consortium partner organizations;
    • Professional non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
    • NLL partners (national libraries);
    • Embassies.
• **Interviews with candidates:** To conduct individual remote interviews to check compliance with the selection criteria and to obtain personal contact.
• **Questionnaires:** To use questionnaires to identify candidate interests, motivations and needs and to use this data in the programme development.

4. Evaluation of participant selection methods
• **Pros:**
    • **Recommendations:** Help attract participants directly from conflict regions.
    • **Interviews**: An effective way to check all selection criteria and establish personal contact.
    • **Questionnaires:** Provide information about the needs of participants for programme planning.
• **Cons:**
    • **Recommendations:** Not always effective, useful and objective.
    • **Interviews:** Require a significant investment of the project team's time.
    • **Questionnaires:** Interests indicated by the participants may be too broad or do not correspond to the real ones.

5. Communication with project participants
• **Communication channels:** To use various communication channels: e-mail, WhatsApp, online conversations (Zoom).
• **Group formation:** To create separate WhatsApp groups for operational communication during activities.
• **Adaptation:** To adapt to the communication habits and rhythm of the participants (e.g., take into account slower communication via e-mails).

6. Languages of participant communication
• **Language skills:** To identify participant language skills during the survey process.
• **Working language determination:** To agree on the working languages in an open process, promoting the experience of democracy.
• **Mutual support:** To invite participants to help each other with communication, promoting cooperation.
• **Providing translation:** To consider translation options if necessary.
• **Supporting linguistic diversity:** To be open to the use of different languages (e.g., presentations in one language, questions and answers in another), promoting mutual understanding and language learning.

7. Group formation and selection of leaders
• **Identifying internal leaders:** To identify the most active participants with leadership potential during the formation of summer school groups.
• **Instructing leaders:** To instruct initially chosen leaders on their role in team building (both through practical involvement and on an emotional level).
• **Leader functions:** Leaders can help the project team gather information from participants, convey important information and contribute to team building outside classes. Leaders can also be agents of change in their countries after the end of project activities.

8. Success factors in selecting participants
• **Team involvement:** Active involvement of the entire project team in the selection process ensures a diversity of opinions and helps better identify suitable participants.
• **Partner recommendations:** Recommendations provided by the consortium partners are essential to reach candidates directly from conflict regions.

- **Diversity of participant representation:** Representatives of different types of libraries, cultural institutions and NGOs promote mutual networking and exchange of experience.
- **Promoting dialogue:** Successful selection can help promote dialogue between representatives of different conflict zones.

9. Recommendations for future projects
- **Common selection guidelines:** To develop a common participant selection document with precise participant selection principles and criteria.
- **More active involvement of embassies:** To cooperate more closely with embassies to identify and address potential travel-related difficulties of participants in a timely manner.
- **Diversification of national representation:** If possible, to create groups with representatives from different countries to promote mutual contacts and cooperation.

Developing programme content for groups from conflict regions

Although theoretically the programme objective is to acquire knowledge and skills in certain aspects of work (in this case – a library or a museum), joint learning in such a project is also a means for participants to reduce prejudices against each other and also about Latvia, its people and the EU as a whole. Therefore, it is very important to have the content as neutral as possible, without bias for or against the values and interests of any part of the participants. In this project, various aspects of the concept "library as a safe space" were analysed.

Evija Vjatere, Project Coordinator

In order to maintain the neutrality of the topic and to pursue the project goals, when developing summer school and professional internship programmes, the emphasis was placed on current trends in the library sector and interdisciplinary areas, promoting participants' understanding of the concept of a modern library, which breaks traditional boundaries and gradually turns into a multifunctional space, where not only traditional information media are offered, but also various other services are provided. Libraries embrace **digital accessibility** – modern libraries offer not only printed materials, but also e-books, e-documents, audiobooks, databases and other digital resources. Access to online courses and educational materials is offered more and more often. Libraries have multimedia rooms where computers, interactive screens, virtual reality equipment and other technology tools can be used. Visitors also have video and audio studios at their disposal allowing users to create their own content. Modern libraries also use technology to provide various services, for example, library parcel terminals and self-service kiosks. Attention is also paid to green construction and sustainable energy use. Buildings are equipped with energy-saving systems that are friendly to both people and the environment. A modern library is a community centre – a place where people can come together, organize creative workshops, participate in lectures, seminars and various literary, cultural or political events.

The functions of a modern library are closely linked to the **concept of a safe space** – as a multifunctional and inclusive environment, integrating in this concept physical, emotional and intellectual safety, as well as ensuring that every person can feel accepted, respected and free to express themselves. The above is consistent with the EU's core values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights.

Programme topics:
Physical accessibility of libraries. Libraries are designed to provide a comfortable and safe environment for all visitors. Physical accessibility includes the following elements – **a user-friendly environment for every user** (people with disabilities, seniors, etc.), as well **as a set of security measures** (video surveillance, evacuation plans).
Psychological and emotional safety. Libraries as a safe space promote an **inclusive environment** where everyone can feel free and be themselves, including the following aspects: **freedom from discrimination** – libraries actively oppose any discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or other characteristics; **a safe place for young people and minorities**, where they can freely discuss their ideas without fear of being judged; **silent/quiet areas** – offering respite from everyday stress or anxiety.
Intellectual freedom and access to information. Libraries are places **without censorship**, where people have the right to access different opinions and sources of information, even if they are controversial. The **right to privacy** is protected – for example, information about the content a person is reading or researching is not used without their consent.
Community support and cooperation. Libraries often become community centres where people can **engage in support groups** such as various workshops, community events, as well as build **social contacts** in a safe environment where people feel accepted.

Digital safety. Taking into account the rapid spread of technology, libraries offer **secure internet access**, protecting user data, as well as **digital literacy courses** that help acquire skills for online safety and have become an integral part of library services.

Based on the above, a modern library as a safe space does not only mean a physical environment, but also values: inclusion, freedom, acceptance and support. It becomes a place where people can both learn and be themselves without fear of being judged or excluded.

Finding out the needs of participants

Finding out the needs of the programme participants forms not only an experience of democratic decision-making, but also allows to assess the areas which participants will be interested in. This, in its turn, will stimulate their enthusiasm for participating in the programme, promote satisfaction and also perception and assessment of their experience in the EU country and people of this country, which may differ in terms of their values and understanding of history.

When developing the programme offer, however, it cannot be relied on the participant preferences only; the programme must be supplemented with topics that expand knowledge about other aspects of the library as a safe place, which potential participants may not have previous experience with – therefore, they "do not know that they may want it". This approach was followed in this project.

Evija Vjatere, Project Coordinator

To find out participant preferences and to ensure a personalized approach several methods were used that helped obtain a multifaceted picture of the participant interests. An online questionnaire was prepared with questions about predefined thematic blocks, formats (lectures, discussions, workshops) and practical aspects of the event. Online focus group discussions were held with potential participants to better understand their needs. Interviews were organized with industry experts or key persons to understand current trends and needs. Feedback (participant reviews) from previous summer schools and professional internships was systematically analysed. Data on industry trends were analysed, current industry publications were studied, and library best practices were identified.

When analysing participant interests and the topics they want to learn, the most frequently used keywords were related to the following topics:

Library collection organization. Participants emphasized the library collection as the central resource in library operations. They expressed a desire to deepen their knowledge of effective collection management and preservation, paying special attention to open access collections and library information systems for work process automation.

Cooperation with communities. Participants wanted to learn about effective community engagement strategies and to strengthen cooperation skills. They were interested in new cooperation models that would help promote the development of local communities, especially in today's changing social conditions. Many mentioned that community engagement in the sustainable development of libraries had become an important direction of library activities.

Accessibility issues. This topic is relevant, especially in relation to library access to new technologies and digital resources. Participants expressed a desire to gain knowledge about the ways to make library collections more accessible to different groups of society. This raises the issue of library target groups and assessment of their needs.

Exploring the local cultural environment. Participants acknowledged that processes of preservation and digitization of collections were still poorly developed in some countries, therefore this topic was particularly valuable.

Latest technologies and digital resources. There was an interest in the latest technology trends in the sector of libraries, as well as in the development of digital repositories and the involvement of communities in the use of these resources.

A brief reminder of their preferences during the project introduction session allowed participants to get to know each other better, as well as to build common understanding of what would happen during the summer school/internship.

Selecting partners in Latvia

When showing processes that take place in the library sector in Latvia, it is important not to focus only on a specific institution, but to involve as many and as diverse partners as possible, demonstrating diverse opportunities and also a range of problems relating to solutions for modern aspects of library and museum operations. The diversity of partners also corresponds to the diversity of the group members: large and small institutions, national, urban, municipal, as well as private libraries and museums. Such an approach allows the group members to potentially identify with the

achievements of an institution similar to theirs and to believe in the possibilities of introducing improvements in their work as well.

> **Evija Vjatere,** Project Coordinator
>
> The NLL is the professional support centre for the Latvian library system systematically monitoring the situation in the sector, accumulating library experience and best practices, and is therefore able to choose cooperation partners which have appropriate accumulated knowledge on the relevant topic in the most accurate and responsible way. The partner selection was followed by specific discussions to specify their role in programme content implementation, to identify necessary resources and to plan time schedules. The selection of participating Latvian libraries depended on the institutions represented by project participants. Since the project mainly involved participants from public libraries, Latvian public libraries were involved in implementation of the summer school and professional internship programme, but, taking into account the importance of meeting the educational needs of each participant, the programme also included visits to academic and educational institution libraries. Therefore, the project partnership was formed by all levels of the Latvian library system – nationally important, regionally important and locally important libraries, thus providing an idea of Latvian libraries as a unified and strong network with a diverse range of services.

Partners from all over Latvia were involved in the project. In all cases, they were responsive and interested in cooperation, and provided participants with an objective and emotionally vivid insight into various aspects of their operations.

> **Evija Vjatere,** Project Coordinator
>
> The basis of success was the NLL's long-term and professional cooperation with the Latvian library network, mutual professional trust and the readiness of Latvian libraries to share their accumulated knowledge and experience. Constant communication was maintained with the partners involved in the project, information was provided about participant interests and needs, and feedback was given after the relevant event.
> A versatile and inclusive programme was provided in line with participant interests: expanded understanding of the concept of a modern library, an interdisciplinary approach connecting elements of libraries, culture and social innovation, and provision of physical, psychological and intellectual safety in compliance with EU values.
> *What would be done differently?* More personalized activities could be organized to match the experience and needs of specific participants. We could try to cooperate more widely with local organizations and communities to ensure real experience in the local context. We could create a more interactive and dynamic lesson format.

Key insights

1. Content neutrality and relevance of goals
- **Neutral approach:** To develop politically and ideologically neutral programme content, avoiding bias and respecting the values and interests of all participants.
- **Prejudice reduction:** To use shared learning as a means to reduce participant prejudices towards each other, the host country and the EU as a whole.
- **Integration of project goals:** To ensure direct compliance of the programme content with the project goals, in this case promoting understanding of aspects of library and museum operations.

2. Selection of thematic blocks
- **Current events and trends:** To focus on current trends and cross-sectoral connections in the library and museum sector.
- **Concept of a modern institution:** To promote participants' understanding of the concept of a modern library and museum as a multifunctional and inclusive space that goes beyond traditional boundaries.
- **Wide range of services:** To include topics on:
    - **Digital accessibility:** E-resources, online courses, digital skills.
    - **Multimedia spaces and technologies:** Computers, interactive screens, virtual reality equipment, video/audio studios.
    - **Use of technologies for service provision:** Self-service kiosks, library machines.
    - **Sustainability and green construction:** Energy saving systems.
    - **Community centre:** Creative workshops, lectures, cultural events.

• **A concept of a safe space:** To integrate the principles of a safe space as a multifunctional and inclusive environment, which includes:
  - • **Physical safety and accessibility:** Environmental friendliness, safety measures.
  - • **Psychological and emotional safety:** Inclusive environment, freedom from discrimination, safe place for young people and minorities, quiet areas.
  - • **Intellectual freedom and access to information:** No censorship, diverse opinions, protection of privacy.
  - • **Community support and cooperation:** Support groups, community events, social contacts.
  - • **Digital security:** Safe internet access, data protection, digital literacy courses.
• **Compliance with EU values:** To link the programme content to the fundamental values of the EU (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, human rights).

3. Identifying the needs of participants
• **Democratic approach:** To include participants in the process of creating the programme content, promoting the experience of democratic decision-making.
• **Identification of interests:** To use different methods to identify the needs and interests of participants:
  - • Online questionnaires with questions on thematic blocks and formats.
  - • Online focus group discussions.
  - • Interviews with industry experts.
  - • Analysis of feedback from previous projects.
  - • Analysis of industry trends and best practice.
• **Balanced approach:** To supplement preferences expressed by the participants with topics that expand their knowledge of other important aspects that they may not have previous experience with.

4. Most popular topics and their integration
• **Library collection organization:** To include topics on effective collection management, open access collections and library information systems.
• **Cooperation with communities:** To offer strategies for community engagement, new models of cooperation for library sustainability.
• **Accessibility issues:** To consider the ways of making library collections more accessible to different groups of society, as well as to identify target groups and their needs.
• **Exploring local culture:** To include topics on the preservation and digitization of the collection.
• **Latest technologies and digital resources:** To discuss latest technology trends, development of digital repositories and community engagement in their use.

5. The importance of the introductory session
• **Getting to know each other:** To include short sessions at the beginning of the project during which participants share their expectations in order to get to know each other better.
• **Building shared understanding:** To help participants build shared understanding of the upcoming activities. To develop internal terms and conditions for common work.

6. Selecting partners in Latvia
• **Diverse representation:** To involve different partners on the Latvian part (large, small, national, urban, municipal, and private libraries and museums) to demonstrate diverse approaches and problem-solving.
• **Identification opportunities:** To choose partners whose experience participants could potentially identify with.
• **Professional support:** To cooperate with institutions that have appropriate knowledge and experience in specific topics.
• **Clear definition of roles:** To agree with partners on their role in programme content implementation, the necessary resources and the time schedule.
• **Proper representation of participants:** To select partners according to institutions represented by the project participants (e.g. public libraries, academic libraries).
• **Territorial coverage:** To involve partners from all over Latvia to provide an overview of the network of public libraries and museums.
• **Positive cooperation:** To cooperate with responsive and interested partners who are ready to share their experience..

7. Success factors for developing programme content
• **The NLL cooperation with the Latvian library and museum network:** To build on the long-term and professional cooperation with the Latvian library and museum network and mutual trust.
• **Communication with partners:** To maintain regular communication with involved partners, providing the information about the interests of participants and receiving feedback.
• **Versatile and inclusive programme:** To provide a programme that meets the interests of participants and broadens their understanding of a modern institution.
• **Interdisciplinary approach:** To connect elements of libraries and museums, cultural and social innovation.

• **Ensuring safety:** To integrate aspects of physical, psychological and intellectual safety into the content in accordance with EU values.

8. Recommendations for future projects
• **More personalized activities:** To adapt activities to the experience and needs of specific participants.
• **Wider cooperation with local organizations:** To involve local organizations and communities to ensure real experience in the local context.
• **More interactive format of classes:** To use more dynamic and interactive teaching methods.

Mentoring programme – maintaining effective long-term relationships

The mentoring programme was a tripartite cooperation among specialists from various fields of Latvian libraries, their colleagues in partner countries and the NLL as a coordinating institution. This chapter analyses the experience gained in organizing a mentoring programme, based on the individual stories of three involved parties – programme coordinator Madara Vīlipa, mentor Anna Pakere and mentee Lola Sanaja. Their different perspectives reveal both the strengths and success factors of the programme, as well as challenges and recommendations for future cooperation of this type. The most important lessons from the experiences of all three perspectives, also taking into account the feedback provided by other mentees, are summarized at the end of the chapter.

Madara Vīlipa, Mentoring Programme Coordinator

Mentoring programme and mentees of 2024
The mentoring programme interviews were held in English and Russian. The project team already knew the potential mentees and the planned topics. Communication with the summer school participants mainly took place in Russian, however, the interviews were held in both languages. One of the mentees was very grateful for communication in English, as it gave her the opportunity to additionally improve her English; another mentee began to communicate in English, not Russian, at the end of the programme. At the closing event, where mentees presented results achieved within the programme, presentations were held in both languages. When starting the second mentoring programme, the mistakes of the previous programme period were taken into account and this mentoring programme was launched smoothly, without major issues, and communication among mentors, mentees, and the programme coordinator was also conducted only in English.
As part of the project, four mentees arrived from Georgia in May 2024. Two of them had good knowledge of English and Russian, while the other two were looking for ways to communicate better, for example, by translating via phone. Over time, communication with the mentees noticeably improved. Although there were sometimes difficulties with providing answers, at the end of the internship, the Georgian representatives were already more self-assured and confident in communication.

Success factor: Safe environment for communication and awareness of not being condemned in case of making a mistake. During the project, the mentoring programme coordinator observed that mentees preferred the WhatsApp platform for daily communication rather than communication via e-mails. It is very important for the representatives of these countries to be addressed individually and to be asked how they are doing and whether they need any help.
Recommendations for the future: To try to get to know participants better, to spend more time with them in order to understand the internal climate of the group and create a safe environment both in person and remotely.

Unhurried communication
As part of the mentoring programme, WhatsApp groups were created for faster communication. Conclusion – unlike the general electronic communication practice in Latvia, mentees did not reply to emails immediately, and they also had to be reminded several times about documents sent by email and for feedback. It was the slow communication that became a problem in the mentoring process. Not all mentors were willing to switch to this communication platform, so there was a three-way communication – the mentoring programme coordinator, mentor and mentee. During the second mentoring programme, communication via email went much smoother, because from the very beginning mentees were set clear conditions for a more successful process.

Success factor: It is very convenient to have a single WhatsApp group, however, individual communication showed that unhurried and supportive conversations, an understanding of mentee problems and involvement in solving them were important for mentees.

> **Recommendations for the future:** Not to be afraid to communicate, using also private telephone contacts and platforms. Use e-mail for formal communication and various social networking platforms for everyday communication. Agree on the preferred form of communication with guests – voice messages, texting, video calls. Today there are many different options, so choose the most convenient communication for both parties.
>
> **Motivated mentees**
> The key to successful implementation of a mentoring programme is not only responsible coordination of the programme and suitable expert-level mentors, but also motivated mentees. There were moments during the mentoring programmes when mentors were almost ready to give up due to unsuccessful communication, but by cooperating with the programme coordinator, they managed to find a common language and the work continued. All 10 mentees motivated to mobilize and achieve their goals. The final online Zoom conversation showed that the mentees were excited about what they had achieved together with their Latvian mentors. It is commendable that everyone met the deadlines set and the result of the mentoring programme was achieved.
>
> **Persistence factor:** If a person truly wants to change and improve something, he or she will be motivated to look for ways and opportunities to do so.
> Recommendations for the future: To have close communication between mentors and mentees. Both mentoring programmes showed that the key to motivated mentors and mentees, and also to a successful programme outcome, was individual communication.
>
> **Conclusions**
> Communication with people from different countries and generations, both during the mentoring programme and internship, was a real challenge. However, by skilfully finding the right approach to each mentee, we managed to establish an excellent contact. The main key to maintaining a good mutual relationship was an individual approach. The development of the mentoring programme recommendations was also very helpful as they allowed both mentors and mentees to stick to the plan.

Madara Vīlipa, the mentoring programme coordinator, provides a valuable overview of the organizational aspects of the programme, challenges in overcoming language barriers, and communication strategies. Her experience highlights the versatility of the programme and the need to adapt to different cooperation partners and their needs.

As we continue getting acquainted with the practical implementation of the mentoring programme, it is important to learn about the experience of the mentor – Anna Pakere – who provides insight into direct cooperation with the mentee and allows us to understand how the theoretical goals of the programme were carried out in practical work.

Anna Pakere, Mentor

In the beginning of 2024, I was invited to participate in the project "EU4Dialogue: Improving exchanges across the divide through education and culture" as a mentor – to provide professional consultations, share knowledge, and encourage my colleague from Moldova – Aurica Vrabie, Director of the City Public Library Ștefan Vodă – to embrace changes. Already at the beginning, we agreed on the form of cooperation – online meetings and communication. It was a big challenge because previously I had mentoring experience only in the pedagogical field, when I helped a new colleague to acquire the specifics of working with students and parents, as well as providing support in the integration process of an educational institution. I was aware of the fact that I would face obstacles that would be easier to solve on-site, by working together practically and immediately achieving noticeable results. In general, I was not sure about the work result, although I was aware of the fact that in the work environment of the mentee both subjective and also objective reasons could affect the transfer and implementation of experience.

The colleague from Moldova was given a problem question: how to motivate and get young people to visit the library and use its services in their free time. When meeting with colleagues from Moldova and listening to the experience of this direction of work, attention was paid not only to their professional librarianship, but also to the way they communicated with young people. Options of free and open communication were discussed and it was found that employees of Latgale Central Library were much more open and progressive in their dialogue with young people, while the Moldavian colleagues used more formal communication.

One of the aspects that attracts young people to use library services is the design of the premises and the collection (books, magazines, other physical resources), so I paid increased attention to this aspect in the conversations. Several virtual tours of the library premises were taken, and solutions were offered for involving young people in creating an environment they liked. I also demonstrated the arrangement and design of libraries, both in recently renovated premises and in those where repairs have not been made for a long time. Access to all information was provided, presentations were sent. The mentee was given the task of developing a collection of ideas for premises design and arrangement and versions of which elements to use in designing premises for youth. The feedback was supportive and with big plans for the future, but immediate action did not follow. Was it due to lack of time, funds, motivation, or lack of practical activity in general – it is difficult to say. By cooperating onsite, the mentor and mentee would certainly achieve measurable and visible results that would encourage also to make other changes.

Several librarians from both Moldova and Latgale Central Library were involved in all meetings. They selflessly shared their experience, were very positive and interested in solving problem issues. However, the initiative came from the mentor; unfortunately, the mentee took a passive role, although the action was aimed at supporting them. As it is known, mentoring is a mutual growth process, however, this time it was more one-sided – in terms of exchange of information, the creation of new ideas and their implementation.

For a successful mentoring process, mutual communication between the mentor and the mentee, and, of course, also the work culture and responsibility towards each other are essential. In Latvia, including Latgale Central Library, there is an internal work culture that also includes feedback (replies to e-mails, sending information on time, notifying about obstacles to completing the task, time planning, etc.). Perhaps, as a mentor, I had to specify more precisely the type of communication, times, number of meetings, results. However, this also does not ensure the quality of the result, and it is difficult to formulate conclusions about the work done, because along with the measurable results, an immeasurable result is also obtained. Sometimes moral support is needed more than just a financial investment. Basically, this cooperation offered the opportunity to develop, gain experience and contacts with other Latvian colleagues.

When engaging in the mentoring process, it should be borne in mind that the time allocated for mutual cooperation will most likely be insufficient. After the end of the project, I concluded that in another similar situation, it is necessary to get to know the mentee and his or her professional environment better. This will protect those involved from drawing hasty conclusions. Also, the time period for adopting the experience should be longer. It should also be noted that sometimes it was difficult to combine the work of a mentor with my own basic duties.

Mentoring can be successfully implemented in the future because it creates a supportive cooperation between an experienced practitioner who shares his or her knowledge, experience and opinions and the mentee who is ready and willing to improve professionally. In an ideal experience, both benefit – one by giving, the other one by taking and also by giving in return. May it be easy to give and easy to take for those who continue this work!

The story of mentor Anna Pakere reveals the nuances of individual cooperation and challenges that a mentor faces when working remotely with a colleague from another country. Her reflections on communication styles, lack of initiative on the part of the mentee, and the importance of face-to-face cooperation provide valuable insight into the dynamics of the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective.

To fully understand the impact of the mentoring programme and the lessons learned, it is important to get acquainted also with the mentee's perspective, by highlighting, for example, the opinion of Lola Sanaia, which will reveal how the programme has helped her grow professionally and what she has learned from this cooperation.

Lola Sanaia, National Library of Georgia, Georgia

What does mentoring mean to me and what has it given me?
As for the mentoring programme, I chose the subjects on which the library system is based. I chose fundamental questions and summarized information for the gradual, yet unwavering, step-by-step directed, and at the same time modern functioning and development of the library. The knowledge acquired and the shared experience play a crucial role in ensuring the functioning of a balanced Georgian library system. In our country, we especially need to improve legislation issues and those issues related to the role of institutions that determine or influence the activities of modern urban and regional libraries. For me, every piece of shared information is valuable because I really wish the situation in Georgian libraries would improve. My colleagues from different libraries are professionals, they work with great enthusiasm and are creative, and I am really worried that there are still many unsolvable problems. However, I am aware that together with my colleagues we are able to solve them. Therefore, the mentoring programme is very important for me, and I am glad that I was chosen and could learn. I am pleased and happy for the opportunity to work with such a mentor as Madara. Thank you!

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Key insights

1. Preparation phase
- **Getting to know the context:** Before starting the programme, it is necessary to carefully examine the geopolitical situation of the participating countries, the political views of their citizens and mutual conflicts in order to better understand the context of the participants.
- **Rapid implementation:** If the programme needs to be implemented in a short period of time, effective communication with the project participants has to be ensured from the very beginning.
- **Participant selection:** To select participants, it is recommended to conduct remote interviews to find out the needs and interests of potential mentees. The project team and the potential mentee should participate in the interviews.

2. Language issues
- **Language choice:**
    - To indicate from the beginning which languages will be used in the programme for communication (e.g., English).
    - To be flexible if participants choose to use another language (e.g., Russian), if this facilitates communication.
- **Promoting language learning:** If possible, use the programme as an additional opportunity for the participants to improve their English language skills.
- **Consistency:** In the second phase of the programme, maintain consistency in the language use to ensure smooth communication.
- **Safe environment:** Create a safe environment where participants can comfortably communicate without being afraid of judgement for possible mistakes.
- **Communication with trainees:**
    - Be aware of possible language barriers and be prepared to use different means of communication (e.g. translation tools).
    - Take time to get to know trainees better and establish personal contact with them.

3. Communication methods and principles
- **Various communication channels**: Use various communication channels such as email and social media platforms (e.g. WhatsApp).
- **E-mail for formal communication:** Use email for formal communication such as document exchange.
- **Social media for everyday communication:**
    - Do not be afraid to use personal phone numbers and social media platforms for operational and informal communication.
    - Understand the form in which participants want to communicate (texting, voice messages, video calls) and adapt to their preferences.
- **Fast communication:** Create WhatsApp groups for faster communication.
- **Personal approach:**
    - Maintain individual communication with mentees, regularly asking about their progress and offering help.
    - Be unhurried in communication, take the time to understand participant problems and help solve them.
- **Regular communication:** Maintain close and continuous communication with mentors to ensure effective programme coordination.

4. Motivation of mentors and mentees
- **Motivated participants:** The successful implementation of a mentoring programme requires not only competent mentors, but also motivated mentees.
- **Support and communication:** Stay in close contact with mentors and mentees to help solve communication problems and maintain motivation.
- **Individual approach:** Individual communication with participants is an important factor in ensuring their interest and motivation.

5. Conclusions and recommendations
- **Challenges:** Communicating with people from different countries and generations can be a challenge.
- **Successful relationships:** A skilful and individual approach to each participant is the main key to building good relationships.
- **Programme recommendations:** To develop programme recommendations that help both mentors and mentees stick to the plan.

• Future recommendations:
> • Get to know participants by spending with them as much time as possible to understand the group dynamics and to create a safe environment.
> • Do not be afraid to use different communication platforms and be flexible in choosing communication methods.

Participant well-being – a significant project success factor

In projects where different cultures are represented, it is very important to the provide for basic needs of each participant, to ensure that everyone's wishes are heard, understood, and taken into account. Only then a participant can freely express himself or herself, perceive others, and gain meaningful experience.

The group moderator or leader must primarily be able to see each participant as a person, and only afterwards as a representative of a certain culture or nationality, position, gender, and other roles. At the same time, it is also necessary to assess the extent to which these roles are respected in different situations. For example, eating habits. On the one hand, there might be a desire, for example, to provide an experience of eating vegetarian food during an event. However, in a project whose objective is to create positive cooperation between people with very different values such an imposed experience can cause the opposite effect, annoyance, and resentment. This, in its turn, can prevent a participant from gaining a positive experience from the main project activities.

Viktorija Piščikova, Project Coordinator

It is important to realize that the development processes and historical turns of each country have left a certain impact on how modern events are perceived. In this regard, it is of great importance whether a person has witnessed these processes himself or herself or inherited his or her views from family, history lessons at school, etc. In cases of conflict of opinions, one should not escalate the conflict and side with one of the parties involved. Usually, a person wants to express his or her opinion and simply be understood; his or her goal is not to convince the conversational partner of his or her rightness, but to allow the moderator and the host party to understand the ambiguous nature of the situation and the diversity of opinions.

An important factor is to let the knowledge "settle in the head" by taking short breaks, planning free time and ensuring rest if the schedule includes calendar holidays. Do not assume that participants can maintain full attention around the clock.

When planning the second summer school programme, the above principle was taken into account because the first summer school programme was over-scheduled. This was also noted by participants themselves, who in several situations, which were both valuable and interesting in terms of content from the organizers' point of view, were no longer able to fully concentrate on the ongoing process. During such breaks, it is recommended to promote networking among participants. If during the basic programme and daily communication division by groups and regions was observed, then during these breaks participants were happy to communicate in mixed groups, exchanging current events in their regions, without, however, establishing connections with the host country. As an example, I can mention a coffee break at Anšlavs Eglītis exhibition in Inciems. The group quickly viewed the exhibition, but then formed a spontaneous "round table" over coffee for 60 minutes. During this break, representatives from Armenia and Georgia shared their current events and discussed the common historical features and cultural figures of the two countries.

During the project's final event in Yerevan, one of the summer school participants said that after the summer school in Latvia she visited Georgia, and also continued to maintain contacts with colleagues she had met in Latvia. She noted that it was this informal part, as well as the time together in the evenings at the hotel, that facilitated communication and helped maintain contacts.

Timing and punctuality issues can sometimes cause problems, but it is important to maintain a balance. The visit should provide positive emotions, it should not be rushed. On the one hand, chaos should not be allowed when the group takes over and the programme is not followed, but at certain moments, depending on the situation, it is advisable to go with the flow. If it is noticed that certain programme activities arouse more interest, it is worth to stay a little bit longer, without rushing the process. Participants should be given the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, talk about their libraries, thank the host, take a photo, sign the guest book, etc.

An interesting peculiarity was the way of documenting events by the project participants – during lectures and visits, they mostly took pictures and made videos. This might seem unusual for the Latvian audience, which is more inclined towards taking notes. However, this approach had a very positive impact on the project, as all activities were reflected in the private accounts of participants and library profiles. Later, thematic videos and reports on summer schools and internships were prepared, thus facilitating the transfer of knowledge in the project participant regions, as visual information is easier to perceive, remember, and synthesize into new ideas and pass on to their followers.

Be ready for a situation when, arriving to another country, guests will be interested in various aspects of life, historical facts and cultural peculiarities that are characteristic to the country they are visiting, and guests expect complete honesty from the host. These questions should not be approached formally as a representative of a public institution, thinking about the correct answers, but rather humanly – as if foreign relatives or friends have come to visit. Likewise, do not impose your own opinion and agenda, invoking democracy and freedom of speech everywhere, and under no circumstances criticize the guest's home country. Instead show positive things and examples resulting from joining the EU and participation in its supported projects, while emphasizing both the personal and institutional investment and active participation necessary to receive such support. For example, I can mention a comment from a participant from Transnistria, who came to me and thanked me for not criticizing the (unrecognised) country in which she lived. She admitted that she was afraid of reproach and efforts to convince them to become part of the Republic of Moldova at all costs. Try to convince them by using cultural diplomacy and good examples from experiencing the environment in which the participant is during the project.

Success factors
A friendly attitude promotes the openness and understanding essential for building trust and promoting constructive dialogue.
The ability to accept the new and step outside the comfort zone is an essential step to develop and gain new experience that broadens the horizons and promotes comprehensive growth.
The ability to listen to and highlight positive things in the conversational partner's story promotes understanding and better mutual communication, creating an open and supportive conversation environment.
The ability to go with the flow in order not to lose important, successful communication moments ensures self-reflection and other unplanned activities that can create new valuable experience and insights.

What would you do differently next time?
In the summer school programme, it would be advisable to include more activities allowing to enjoy the local culture and customs because such moments unleash participants' creative potential, contributing to team-building.
I would let internship participants be more independent in reaching internship and excursion destinations, thus, there would be no need to accompany them, and they would not be overly "supervised" by the organizers. The issue of independence was improved closer to the end of the internships.
Before developing an internship and summer school programme, it would be advisable to visit the countries of the target region, participate in an excursion with a local guide and talk to the local population. This type of excursion is an excellent study tool that helps prepare for the real environment, perhaps even better than theoretical documents based on analytical articles and research.
Do not expect that "frozen conflicts" will continue to exist in such a state throughout the project, so it is important to be morally prepared for the fact that the situation in the political arena can change very quickly. Since the project lasted four years, a significant factor was the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which actually excluded South Ossetia and Abkhazia from the project activities, as well as contributed to turbulence and a chain reaction of various political events in the partner countries as a whole. The presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova and referendum on joining the EU, the parliamentary and presidential elections in Georgia, as well as the war in Nagorno-Karabakh were important historical events that influenced the course of the project. To witness these events while being involved in the project activities allow to look at the situation from a different perspective and experience ongoing processes more personally than it would be just by reading the world news.

Key insights

1. Individual needs and respect
- **Human-like approach:** It is important for the group leader to see each participant as an individual person, not just as a representative of a certain culture, nationality, profession or other roles. At the same time, it is necessary to assess how these roles can be respected in different situations.
- **Listening and understanding:** To provide an environment in which the wishes of each participant are heard, understood and, if possible, taken into account.
- **Not to impose experience:** To avoid imposing experience that could cause a negative reaction, annoyance or resentment, especially in matters related to personal choices such as eating habits.

2. Understanding cultural and historical context
• **Impact awareness:** To be aware of the fact that the historical events and development processes of each country impact people's perception of contemporary events.
• **Refraining from conflict escalation:** In the event of a clash of opinions, do not escalate the conflict or engage in supporting one side.
• **Respecting diversity of opinions:** To allow the participants to express their opinions and to ensure that the host party understands the diverse nature of the situation.

3. Time planning and rest
• **Breaks and free time:** To include sufficient short breaks, free time and rest in the programme, especially if the programme includes calendar holidays.
• **Avoiding over scheduling:** When planning the programme, avoid over scheduling, which can reduce participants' ability to concentrate.
• **Promoting networking:** To use breaks and free time to promote networking and communication among participants in an informal atmosphere.

4. Flexibility and adaptability
• **Balance between planning and flexibility:** To stick to the schedule, however, be willing to adapt and go with the flow if an activity sparks more interest.
• **Participant involvement:** To give participants the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and share their experience.

5. Documentation and visual information
• **Supporting visual documentation:** To support the documentation of events by taking photos and recording videos because this approach can promote knowledge transfer and dissemination of information in the participant regions.

6. Honesty and respectful attitude
• **Openness and honesty:** To be honest and open when answering participant questions about different aspects of life, history and culture.
• **Human-like communication:** To communicate with participants in a humane way, not just as a representative of a public institution.
• **Avoiding imposing opinions and criticism:** Do not impose your own opinion or criticize the participants' homeland.
• **Demonstration of positive examples:** To show the positive examples and benefits from being an EU Member State and participation in its supported projects.
• **Cultural diplomacy:** To build a positive image of the country through culture.

7. Success factors in ensuring participant well-being
• **Friendly attitude:** Promote openness, understanding and trust.
• **Acceptance of the new:** Create an environment in which participants are ready to accept the new and step out of their comfort zone.
• **Listening and highlighting the positive:** To listen actively and highlight positive aspects in participant stories.
• **Going with the flow:** Be ready to react flexibly to situations and unplanned activities.

8. Recommendations for future projects
• **Local culture activities:** Include more activities in the programme to get to know the local culture and traditions.
• **Promoting independence:** Promote participant independence in practical activities.
• **Preparatory study in partner countries:** Before developing the programme, visit the countries of the target region to better understand the local context.
• **Being prepared for political changes:** Be morally prepared for possible rapid changes in the political situation of the partner countries.

Releasing creativity and experiencing democracy: LEGO Serious Play

Problem solving often requires more than just a logical and analytical approach. In order to find innovative and sustainable solutions, it is essential to release the creative potential of participants. Creativity allows you to look at challenges from new perspectives, discover unusual solutions and generate original ideas. This promotes flexible thinking, which is especially important when working in complex and unpredictable conditions, which are often encountered in development cooperation projects, especially in conflict regions.

Games that involve close cooperation among participants, on the other hand, are an effective and innovative way to gain experience in democratic decision-making. Such games create a playful, informal environment in which each participant has the opportunity to express their opinion, listen to others and participate in joint decision-making. The process of discussing and analysing different opinions, seeking compromises and reaching agreements reflects the basic principles of a democratic society.

The project summer school included LEGO Serious Play® as an effective tool for releasing creativity and promoting cooperation in the problem-solving process. This method offers a unique and interactive approach that not only helps discover new perspectives and generate innovative ideas, but also promotes teamwork and mutual understanding.

Kristina Papule, Project Lecturer

LEGO Serious Play® is a seminar in which participants analyse problems and seek solutions, creating during the process models from LEGO blocks and parts. Each model visually reflects participant perspectives on a specific problem or issue. The seminar includes two main tasks:
1) to create a model that reflects the essence of the problem or issue;
2) to transform the model in such a way that it reflects the solution to the problem.
In both stages, seminar participants present the models to their team-mates, commenting on model elements and their meaning. Other participants ask clarifying questions and share their experience. The play involves creating models both individually and in groups, but it is important that all seminar participants are involved in both cases.

Benefits for problem solving

The play allows to discover and formulate previously unknown problems and find solutions to them. Both analytical and creative approaches are released and individual solutions are integrated into the team's vision.

Kristina Papule, Project Lecturer

The LEGO Serious Play method is based on three aspects: 1) a solution is found in the system (i.e. the best answer or solution can be found by the participants themselves, no external expert involvement is required); 2) the diversity of participant opinions must always be taken into account; 3) there are no incorrect answers – all interpretations are taken into account. This helps ensure an inclusive process, within which opinions of all participants are heard and taken into account, regardless of their formal position in the group or organization. Moreover, the use of LEGO parts involves visualization of the problem and metaphorical thinking, thus reflecting participants' judgements, emotions and experience regarding the problem.

Benefits for the projects that promote cooperation

Kristina Papule, Project Lecturer

This play as a method promotes cooperation because of its simplicity and the opportunity to both create (build) a model together and show (present) the model to other participants, while commenting on its meaning. Model building is followed by the exchange of experience and practical advice from other participants/groups. The LEGO Serious Play method has several important benefits. It fosters the exchange of not only opinions, but also emotions in the context of discussing a question or problem, and also provides an opportunity to visually and metaphorically reflect experience that cannot always be accurately described in words. Play promotes the involvement of all (not just some) group members, and it also clearly shows the possibility of having different interpretations of the same problem.

Such shared experience is especially useful when building mutual trust in a group that includes people from conflict regions. The most obvious benefits from play:
• It encourages also those participants who are usually not used to expressing themselves;
• The playful situation helps to reduce mutual distrust – all are beginners, interpreting their understanding of the issue under discussion;
• It promotes a good mood, laughter, relieves tension in the group;
• It promotes team-building, everyone experiences new, emotionally powerful experience together.

Play as an impact assessment tool

Kristina Papule, Project Lecturer

LEGO Serious Play seminars can be included in the project at various stages of its implementation. This method is well suited not only for problem solving, but also for analysing and summarizing the results and insights obtained during the project. One option is to offer participants to build models that reflect their insights about the project before and after its implementation.

If play is offered to the group both at the beginning and end of the project, and purposeful observations are made, it could allow assessing the impact of the entire project and changes in the participants themselves.

For example, at the beginning of the seminar, people from authoritarian countries/regions who identify themselves with their position (role) or even their workplace, do not perceive themselves (or do not want to reveal themselves to others) as an individual, a personality. At the end of the seminar, participants from these regions could become more open, appreciate and become aware of themselves as individuals with their individual vision and role in the common process.

The given example of including play can be further developed and tested in future projects.

Key insights

1. Understanding the importance of creativity
• **Innovative solutions:** To realize that a creative approach is required to solve modern problems in order to find innovative and sustainable solutions.
• **New perspectives:** Creativity allows to look at challenges from new perspectives and discover unusual combinations.
• **Flexible thinking:** To promote flexible and adaptable thinking, which is especially important in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

2 Basic principles and process of LEGO Serious Play
• **Goal:** To use LEGO models as a visual and metaphorical tool for analysing problems, finding solutions and exchanging opinions.
• **Two basic objectives:**
    1. To create a LEGO model that reflects the essence of the problem or issue.
    2. To transform the model so that it represents a possible solution.
• **Presentation and discussion:** Each participant presents his or her model, explaining its elements and meaning. Other participants ask clarifying questions and share their experience.
• **Types of participation:** Model building can be done both individually and in groups, ensuring the involvement of all participants.

3. Benefits for problem solving
• **Discovering unidentified problems:** Play helps identify and formulate problems that are so far unidentified.
• **Activation of creative and analytical thinking:** Play promotes both logical analysis and a creative approach to finding solutions.
• **Integration of individual and team visions:** Play allows to combine individual solutions into a common team vision.

4. Basic findings that ensure an inclusive process
• **A solution is in the system itself:** The best solutions are found in the knowledge and experience of the participants themselves, without requiring the mandatory involvement of external experts.
• **Diversity of opinions:** Diverse opinions of participants must always be taken into account and respected.
• **No incorrect answers:** All interpretations of the models are valuable and worthy of consideration.

5. Benefits for promoting cooperation
• **Simplicity and accessibility:** The simplicity of the play method facilitates the involvement of all participants.
• **Co-creation and presentation:** Co-creation of models and their presentation promotes cooperation and communication.
• **Exchange of experience and practical recommendations:** Once the models are presented, other participants exchange their experience and provide recommendations.
• **Exchange of emotions:** The play promotes the exchange of not only opinions, but also emotions in the context of the issue under discussion.

- **Visual and metaphorical representation of experience:** The use of LEGO parts allows for a visual and metaphorical representation of an experience that may be difficult to formulate in words.
- **Involvement of all participants:** Play ensures active involvement of all group members in the discussion.
- **Discovering different interpretations:** It clearly shows different interpretation of the same problem..

6. Advantages of the LEGO Serious Play when working with participants from conflict regions

- **Expressing oneself:** It also helps those participants, who are not used to speaking up, freely express themselves.
- **Reducing mistrust:** The playful atmosphere reduces mutual mistrust because everyone is equally a "beginner" in reflecting their understanding.
- **Mood booster:** It boosts the positive atmosphere in the group, laughter and stress relief.
- **Team-building:** It helps team-building by experiencing emotionally powerful and new experience together.

7. LEGO Serious Play as an impact assessment tool

- **Stages of use:** Play can be included in various project implementation stages.
- **Result and insight analysis:** It is suitable for analysing and summarizing the results and insights gained during the project.
- **Impact assessment:** It is recommended to offer participants to create models that reflect their insights about the project before and after its implementation in order to assess the impact of the project and changes in the participants.
- **Purposeful observations:** It helps conduct purposeful observations of changes in the participant models over time.
- **Awareness of openness and individual significance:** It allows to observe whether participants from authoritarian regimes become more open at the end of the project and are aware of their importance as individuals in the common process.

The use of LEGO Serious Play can significantly promote cooperation, trust, and democratic decision-making in development cooperation projects, especially by involving partners from difficult and conflict-affected regions.

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GUIDELINES FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTERS

These guidelines summarize the project team's experience and recommendations for implementing development cooperation projects with partner countries from conflict regions. They include recommendations on project planning, implementation principles, participant selection, programme content development, mentoring programme specifics, participant well-being, and promotion of creativity.

Cooperation project with colleagues from conflict regions: considerations for engagement

Identifying library potential in development cooperation

Project planners should take into account the unique role of libraries – to be multifaceted players in development cooperation and conflict mitigation processes. Libraries can serve not only as cultural and educational centres, but also as platforms for dialogue, mutual understanding, and political participation.

Strengthening inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation

Inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships, involving representatives of public administration, local governments, academic institutions, civil society, and other fields, are essential for successful project implementation. Such cooperation provides broader expertise, resources and more sustainable results.

Partner assessment and support provision

Potential partners should be carefully assessed at the early stages of project planning, taking into account their experience, expertise and ability to provide support in achieving project goals, especially in geopolitically difficult regions. Mutual support and information exchange between partners should be ensured at all stages of project implementation.

Flexibility and adaptability

When operating in conflict-affected regions, project implementers should be prepared to face political instability, geopolitical changes and other unforeseen obstacles. The ability to quickly adapt to the changing situation and seek alternative ways of cooperation is essential for successful project implementation.

Intercultural management competencies

Project managers and teams should develop intercultural management skills to effectively lead diverse teams involving participants with different cultural backgrounds, views and working styles. The ability to build relationships based on mutual respect is the basis for successful international cooperation.

Purposeful cooperation in conflict regions

When planning projects in conflict regions, one should be purposeful and look for ways to involve participants directly from these areas, while being aware of the possible risks and limitations. Cooperation with local partners and organizations that are experienced in working in these regions can be very valuable.

Long-term cooperation perspective

Project implementers should strive to build sustainable relationships with partners and participants and maintain them after the end of the project. Likewise, they should seek opportunities to develop new cooperation initiatives and continue the exchange of experience.

Experience documenting and popularisation

During and after project implementation, it is important to document the experience gained, success stories and challenges. This information can be useful in planning other similar projects and can help popularize the role of libraries in the field of development cooperation.

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Participant selection

According to the project team, participant selection is very important. **The following aspects should be considered:**

One should aim at creating groups capable of cooperation.

The priority should be to select participants who are ready to promote cooperation and positive experience in the group. At the same time, the involvement of participants from different regions that are in an active conflict phase should be avoided.

It is important to clearly define the target audience.

The primary objective is to involve professionals from libraries and other cultural institutions directly from conflict regions. However, in cases of need, selection can be extended to border areas or institutions that work with a library network in partner countries, including also cooperation with conflict regions.

Defining clear selection criteria.

These may include professional activity (association with the field of libraries or other cultural institutions), geographical location and connection to conflict regions, personality traits (communication skills, motivation to engage in the project) and expected results (a clear understanding of how the knowledge gained in the activities will be used in professional practice, country and community).

Choosing appropriate selection methods.

These may include preliminary recommendations (collecting recommendations from various sources), interviews with candidates (individual remote interviews to check compliance with the selection criteria and to have personal contact) and questionnaires (to identify candidate interests, motivation and needs, which are useful for the programme development).

The importance of effective communication with project participants. Use different communication channels (email, WhatsApp, online conversations), create separate WhatsApp groups for operational communication during activities, and try to adapt to the communication habits and rhythm of the participant (for example, taking into account slower communication via e-mails).

The importance of participant communication languages.

Assess participant language skills, agree upon working languages in an open process, encourage participants to help each other in communication, consider translation options, and be open to using different languages, promoting mutual understanding and language learning.

Think about leader selection during the group formation process.

During the formation of summer school groups, it is recommended to identify the most active participants with leadership potential and initially instruct these leaders about their role in team-building (both practically and emotionally). Leaders can help the project team to obtain information from the participants, pass the information on, and unite the group outside classes.

Summarizing participant selection success factors, it can be said that the active involvement of the entire project team in the selection process, recommendations provided by consortium partners, and suggestions from representatives of various types of libraries, cultural institutions and NGOs are important. Successful selection can help promote dialogue between representatives of different conflict zones.

In similar projects, it is recommended to develop common and clear selection terms with detailed criteria, to cooperate more closely with embassies of the participating countries in order to identify and resolve possible travel difficulties for participants in a timely manner, and, if possible, to form groups with representatives of different countries, thus promoting mutual contacts and cooperation.

Programme content development

The programme content is the central axis that determines participant willingness to participate in the project, the transfer of knowledge, and helps maintain their attention during the project. When creating the programme content, several **important aspects** must be taken into account:

The importance of content neutrality and its compliance with the project goals. Project implementers should develop a politically and ideologically neutral programme, avoiding bias and respecting the values and interests of all participants. Shared learning should also be used as a means to reduce participant prejudices towards each other, as well as towards the host country and the EU as a whole. It should be borne in mind that the programme content should directly comply with the project goals, in this case – to promote understanding aspects of library and museum work.

Choosing appropriate thematic blocks. Project implementers should focus on current trends and interdisciplinary connections in the library and museum sector. Participants should be encouraged to understand the concept of a modern library/museum as a multifunctional and inclusive space that goes beyond traditional boundaries. It is important to include topics on digital accessibility, multimedia premises and technologies, the use of technology in provision of services, sustainability and green construction, community centres, the concept of a safe space and compliance with EU values.

The importance of identifying participant professional needs. Participants should be involved in the process of creating the programme content, promoting experience in democratic decision-making. A variety of methods should be used to identify the needs and interests of participants: online questionnaires with questions on thematic blocks and formats, online focus group discussions, interviews with industry experts, feedback from previous projects, analysis of industry trends and best practices. At the same time, it is important to remember about a balanced approach, supplementing preferences expressed by participants with topics that expand their knowledge of other important aspects that they may not have prior experience with.

Integrating popular topics into the programme. For example, effective collection management, community engagement strategies, new cooperation models for library sustainability, exploring local culture, development of digital repositories and community involvement in their use, etc.

The importance of the introductory session should also be kept in mind. By including short expectation sharing sessions early in the project, we help participants get to know each other better and build a shared understanding of the upcoming activities.

Equally important is the selection of Latvian partners. Project implementers should involve a variety of partners (large, small, national, urban, municipal, and private libraries and museums) to demonstrate diverse approaches and problems, and should also choose partners whose experience participants could potentially identify with. They should cooperate with institutions that have appropriate knowledge and experience in specific topics, and they should agree with partners on their role in implementing the programme content, the required resources and time planning. Partners matching the institutions represented by the project participants should be selected, covering entire Latvia as much as possible in order to provide an overview of the national library/museum network, cooperating only with responsive and motivated partners which are ready to share their experience.

Summarizing success factors in developing the programme content, we can emphasize the importance of cooperation between the NLL and the Latvian library network, communication with partners, a versatile and inclusive programme, an interdisciplinary approach and security guarantees. Regarding future projects, it is recommended to create more personalized activities, a wider cooperation with local organizations and a more interactive format of classes.

Building effective long term remote cooperation

One of the project activities – the mentoring programme – differed from other activities due to its long-term nature and remote cooperation throughout the programme. **The most important success factors of remote cooperation**, as identified by the project team, are as follows:

Careful preparation and goal setting.

Before starting a mentoring programme, it is essential to conduct in-depth research on the context of the participating countries and regions, taking into account their geopolitical situations and cultural differences. The programme goals and expected results should be clearly defined by both mentors and mentees to ensure mutual understanding and progress towards a common goal.

Overcoming the language barrier.

Particular attention should be paid to the choice of language used, ensuring flexible communication options (in both English and Russian, if necessary) and creating a safe environment in which participants can communicate comfortably, regardless of their language skills. When choosing the language of communication, it is recommended to take into account participant preferences and skills, while promoting the use of a common communication language (e.g. English) in the long term.

Flexible communication strategy.

Project implementers should be open to different communication methods and platforms. Experience shows that more informal platforms such as WhatsApp can facilitate more efficient and personal communication, while e-mail can remain as a formal communication channel. It is important to find out the most comfortable communication methods for participants and adapt to them, while setting clear communication rules and expected feedback times.

Maintaining motivation and individual attention.

Engaging motivated mentees is the key to success. Project coordinators should maintain close communication with both mentors and mentees, regularly asking about their progress, challenges, and providing necessary support. An essential project success key is an individual approach to each participant, taking into account his or her needs and goals.

The importance of face-to-face cooperation.

Although remote methods are convenient, face-to-face meetings and practical work together can provide significant added value through knowledge transfer and mutual understanding. Whenever possible and whenever it complies with the programme goals, project planning should consider the possibility of organising face-to-face meetings or exchange visits between the mentor and mentee.

Realistic time schedule and expectations.

The mentoring process takes time, and it is important that both mentors and mentees have realistic expectations about the results to be achieved within a certain period of time. Project implementers should take into account that getting to know the mentee and his or her work environment closer is essential for effective cooperation, and this may initially require more time than expected.

Promoting feedback and work culture.

Positive feedback and work culture methods should be promoted within the projects. Participants are encouraged to share their insights, questions and challenges. A clearly defined work culture that includes timely information exchange and accountability for previously defined commitments is essential for a successful mentoring process.

Mentoring as a process of mutual growth.

Project implementers should be reminded of the fact that mentoring is a mutually beneficial process in which both the mentor and the mentee gain new knowledge and experience. An environment should be fostered in which both parties involved feel like equal partners of the learning process.

Ensuring participant well-being

When working with participants who represent different cultures, especially from conflict regions, it is extremely important to ensure their well-being. In an environment where a person feels satisfied and safe, the emergence or escalation of potential conflicts and disagreements is prevented.

A human-like attitude should be adopted – it is important for project managers to see each participant first of all as an individual personality, and not just a representative of a certain culture, nationality, profession or other roles. At the same time, it is necessary to assess how these roles can be respected in different situations.

Participants should be heard and understood, creating an environment in which the preferences of each participant are heard, respected and, if possible, taken into account.

Avoid imposing experience, especially in matters related to personal choices.

It is important to understand the cultural and historical context, being aware of the fact that the historical events and development processes of each country influence the perception and interpretation of contemporary events.

Avoid escalating conflicts and supporting one side in the event of clashes of opinions. Respect the diversity of views and allow participants to express their opinions.

Remember about time planning and rest, include enough breaks and free time, and, when planning the programme, it is preferable not to overschedule.

During breaks and free time, it is important to support networking, which promotes communication between participants in an informal atmosphere.

One must be flexible and able to adapt, sticking to the time schedule, but at the same time being ready to adjust and go with the flow if an activity arouses greater interest.

It is important to involve participants in communication, giving them the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and share their experience.

It is necessary to support event documentation by taking photos and recording videos, as such an approach can promote the transfer of knowledge and further dissemination of information in the regions of the participants.

Finally, one must be honest and respectful, communicating with participants personally, not just as representatives of a public institution, without imposing one's opinion and without criticizing the homeland of participants, creating a positive image of the country through culture.

Summarizing the success factors in ensuring participant well-being, it can be said that it is important to have a friendly attitude, to accept favourably the new and unfamiliar, to listen to and highlight the positive, and to go with the flow of events. In future projects, it is recommended to include more activities in the programme to enjoy the local culture and customs, and to promote participants' independence in practical activities. For a better understanding of the local context, it would be valuable to visit countries of the target regions before developing the programme. It is also important to be prepared for possible rapid changes in the political situation of the partner countries.

Releasing creativity as a prerequisite for a positive participant experience

To promote a positive participant experience and facilitate effective cooperation in projects, especially in an intercultural context, it is essential to release the creative potential of participants. Creativity is not only an artistic expression, it is also an important tool for solving problems, generating innovative ideas and developing flexible thinking. Creativity allows to see new perspectives, to look at challenges from unusual points of view, as well as to generate original ideas, which can be particularly valuable in solving difficult problems. Besides, creativity helps develop adaptability and flexibility, which are essential skills for working in dynamic and unpredictable conditions.

Various methods can be used to promote creativity. One of them is LEGO Serious Play®, which is an interactive method that encourages participants to express themselves creatively by building situation models from LEGO blocks in order to analyse problems and find solutions, and also helps visualize and metaphorically reflect experiences that cannot always be expressed in words. Other interactive games and activities that involve cooperation, communication and creative problem solving, as well as group work and discussions can also be used, promoting open discussions and exchange of opinions, in which each participant is allowed to freely express his or her ideas.

Creativity promotes positive experiences because creative activities help participants emotionally engage in the process, thus increasing their interest and motivation. Creative and playful methods create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in which participants feel comfortable. Joint creative activities promote team-building and cooperation among participants. Creativity gives participants the opportunity to express themselves and share their ideas, increasing their self-confidence and satisfaction.

Therefore, it is important to include creative activities such as LEGO Serious Play® or other similar methods in the project process. It is advisable to experiment with methods to find the most suitable ones for the specific group and project goals, as well as to evaluate the impact of creative activities on participant engagement, cooperation, and project results.