

Partner Meeting of Grundtvig Learning Partnership
"You can do it! – New perspectives for women to have own businesses"
04. - 06.07.2011, Šakiai, Lithuania



Monday, 04.07.2011

Most participants had arrived during the previous Sunday. The meeting began at the Jundula Hotel meeting room with a project management meeting where the progress of the project and the next steps were discussed. The Bulgarian partners had the chance to introduce their organization. The participants from Estonia got an introduction to the project website. All partners were encouraged to send information and pictures about typical regional and local handicraft to Wisamar, for upload onto the project website. Especially the “market of cultures” on the website isn’t comprehensive with information of all participating countries, yet. The Estonian partners promised to translate the two already existing newsletters as soon as possible. Hasan Er from Turkey made the suggestion to feature examples of successful businesswomen as good practice examples of how to become self-employed with handicrafts. All partners welcomed this idea. The deadline for the submission of national good practice information for the newsletter is 1. August 2011. The task of writing the third newsletter is up to the Estonian partners, according to the application. Partners should send their information to Wisamar, who will then transfer it to the Estonian partner.

After the management meeting the partners visited the Labour Exchange office in Šakiai, where Mrs. Rasa Masteikiene explained the situation of the unemployed women in the Šakiai region. The biggest group of unemployed women is the one living in rural areas and without formal education. The Labour Exchange office in Šakiai has different measures to help these and other groups of women suffering from unemployment, one being the support of self-entrepreneurship. The Labour Exchange office sends women to different courses to learn a trade, employs them to twine Christmas wreaths.



After lunch the group went to visit the home business of Asta Bybartiene, who sews foot-wear using natural materials. The fabrics for the footwear she receives from furniture factories, thus also contributing to a sustainable handling with resources. She and her husband build an own workshop and warehouse for the home production of footwear next to their home. Mrs. Bybartiene started her business 10 years ago. First of all she tried to sew a pair of slippers for her daughter, than for her family members. Later friends asked to sew shoes for them, too. She liked this activity. Once she tried to sell slippers and the business started.

What is considered waste at the furniture factory helps to keep up a successful handcraft home business. The inevitable waste from the shoe sewing business can be used even further for the creation of little handcrafted toys, as Nadezda Lanberg from Estonia pointed out. Mrs. Bybartiene happily handed a big bag with remains of the shoe production to her. Nadezda thanked with a knitted cat, which Mrs. Bybartiene found a nice place for in the workshop. The Bybartiene family then surprised the participants with a picnic with traditional local products as cheese, honey, bacon, cucumbers, bread and kvass. The guitar was unwrapped and songs sung as a thank you for the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Bybartai.



The nearby chapel in Suodziai had been visited afterwards. This chapel was built using donations given by devout people in the period when Lithuania got independence. Mrs. Matijosaitiene, who Jesus and the Holy Virgin Maria appeared to and foretold the erection of the chapel, lives in a house next to this chapel. She takes care of a lot of flags, sculptures and crosses which are donated by devout people. The day ended with a first common dinner in Šakiai.



Tuesday, 05.07.2011



The second day of the meeting started with a visit to the Zanavykai folk museum, where the group during a tour through the museum learned about the life of this region in the past. There we had a practical workshop painting a dower chest using traditional patterns of the region.



The participants had a good time with this practical exercise and produced unique and sophisticated miniature dower chests.

After lunch we visited the knitter Vilma Kubiliene, who founded a knitting business after being unemployed. Mrs. Kubiliene used to work in a knitting factory but after being out of the job because of maternity and the close-down of the factory had to come up with another idea. She bought knitting machines, revitalized her knitting skill and knowledge and started a business. Today she can make a living from knitting on demand.



In the late afternoon we visited the sculpture park and Zypliai estate in Lukšiai, where we met folk artists, the director Vidas Cikana and the Women's Activity Club members. The Zypliai estate is a big complex of former barns, stables, houses and the main manor building. It has been turned into a socio-cultural center and meeting place, hosting folk artists workshops, galleries and a hostel. Vidas Cikana, who is an artist himself and used to be mayor of Šakiai, told us about the development of the estate into the socio-cultural center and the plans for the future. Zypliai is a very inspiring place where common good is

put in the center of attention, thus attracting thousands of tourists each year. Handcraft workshops for laymen or seminars for artists are offered as well as school trips or a place for festivities. Folk art is used and understood as a means to better the human environment. The ladies of the Women's Activity Club presented their self-designed and very impressive collections of linen and woolen dresses with a surprising choreography. All participants then presented traditional sweets or other presents from their countries for a common feast with more songs and even dancing with the ladies of the Women's Activity Club of Šakiai.



Wednesday, 06.07.2011

In the morning another project management meeting was held, in which the planning for the next meeting in Prague, 14.-17.09.2011 as well as the final meeting in Budapest with the “market of cultures” were discussed and certificates handed out by Aurelia Grinkeviciene, who was applauded for organizing this wonderful partner meeting. Furthermore Marie Haisova had the great idea of trying to value handcraft. She said that women often underestimate their work. Therefore the jewelry crafted by Gabriela Fuchsova was handed to the participants in order for them to estimate a retail price. The prices the participants named were quite similar but in any case higher than Gabriela thought. This was an interesting little experiment to raise awareness for this problem of underestimation of their work by women. Concerning the meeting in Budapest and the “market of cultures” it was pointed out that the handcrafted items brought to Budapest should be unique and characteristic. The market is planned to take place in Szentendre, a town with a long folk art tradition, 20 km outside of Budapest. Since people there are a bit spoiled when it comes to handcraft products, they need to be offered something special to spark their interest. Furthermore it was agreed that Hasan Er presents a preliminary programme for the partner meeting in Ankara which is planned from 28.3. to 1.4.2012.



After the seminar, the group went to Gelgaudiškis where we took place in the celebrations of the coronation day of king Mindaugas, nowadays an important holiday also known as state day. In the Gelgaudiškis estate we took part in the ceremony, consisting of traditional songs and music as well as speeches.



After this interesting experience we had a tour to the top of the manor and through the extensive park. In the park several surprises waited. At a star formed junction of paths hunters awaited us to let us try blowing the horn or shooting a gun and afterwards treated us with a traditional hunters’ picnic and herb brandy.

Later we met three women of different ages who depicted possible scenes from the time when the estate was still an agricultural economy. After their performance they treated us with cheese.





On the way through the park we finally met a celebrating party of aristocrats from the 19th century on a hill. They played music, sang songs, offered us kvass and sweets and invited us to dance, which we happily did. The tour through the park was a real surprise and very special event that everybody who participated will keep in mind. Some of us used the chance to listen to a chamber music concert at the Lutheran church of Šakiai. After this we met for the final farewell dinner again including much singing and laughter.

