

*LATVIAN NACIONĀLĀ ENCIKLOPĒDIJA VISITING HRVATSKA
ENCIKLOPEDIJA WITHIN THE ERASMUS+ EXCHANGE
PROGRAMME*

The need for international cooperation among people who professionally create encyclopedias is obvious. The very simple reason is that there are very few specialists in this field of producing knowledge for the widest possible audience. Usually, from 8 to 30 editors in any given country in Europe and North America are spending their work hours focusing on how to provide »packaging« for texts that are academically created but intended for the general public. Illustrations, technological issues, communication channels, the very editing of the texts, analysis of audience numbers and trends—all these tasks require specific knowledge and experience. Usually, one cannot share experience within the borders of one state, where there is normally only one universal encyclopedia and a limited number of employees. Therefore, any cooperation between various national encyclopedias is of highest importance. It helps to learn, to look from different angles, and to share one's own experience.

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. The 2021–2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life (<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>). The programme supports and prioritises activities related to education and digitalisation, which is exactly what our encyclopedias are doing. Thus, the application for financial support for the exchange between the National Library of Latvia (of which the Latvian *National Encyclopedia*, or *Nacionālā enciklopēdija*, is part) and the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography in Zagreb, was successful and we were able to visit and learn from our Croatian colleagues. The visit took place in the form of »shadowing«: all participants had intense contacts with their colleagues, everyone had a chance to interact, discuss, compare, and analyse.

During two days, 5–6 September 2023, almost the whole team of editors from the *National Encyclopedia* editorial office visited their Croatian colleagues in the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography. We had introductory lectures on the natural features, history, and culture of Croatia and of Zagreb by the Institute's

director, Dr Filip Hameršak, followed by lectures on the history and contemporary issues of the Institute as well as on the *Croatian Encyclopedia (Hrvatska enciklopedija)* by Dr Bruno Kragić, the Institute's director general and chief editor of the *Croatian Encyclopedia*. All participants were then introduced to their »shadows«, and a practical »eye-to-eye« meeting started. Different approaches, challenges, specific local and general issues, and language questions were compared and discussed. As the chief editor of the *National Encyclopedia*, of particular importance to me were the highly intense, useful, and open discussions on the management of encyclopedias with Dr Bruno Kragić.

What are the results of the Latvian visit to Zagreb? Firstly, all participants (not just the people in charge) had a chance to discuss and see challenges of everyday work. The differences and similarities in our approaches, methodology, communication channels, technological questions, and human resource management, as well as the position of encyclopedias in our societies and probable future developments, offer us views from different perspectives.

Since most of our colleagues were first-timers in Croatia, we had the chance to get to know the basics of Croatian history, culture, and academia. Even more, exchange, communication, and further projects correspond to the very core of European values such as openness, transparency, trust, and mutual understanding. This is of utmost importance today, when global and local upheavals are taking place all the time. Of course, there should be continuation—we expect a return visit to Riga some time soon. European funding provides support for promising mutual co-operation, which could bring promising and long-term results; it is up to us how we use these possibilities.

Our gratitude for welcoming us to Zagreb goes to all our Croatian colleagues, but our visit would have been impossible without the efficient, professional, and friendly management of Dr Nataša Jermen, the Institute's assistant director for research and inter-institutional cooperation. Despite the most unfortunate loss of our national basketball team in the World Cup quarter finals while we were visiting the *Croatian Encyclopedia*, we all left with warm memories of Zagreb and new ideas and how to implement them when we return to work in Riga.

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