

IO2 – VIRTUAL SEMINARS

Evaluation Report of the seminar

“Literature, Reading Clubs and Intercultural dialogue”

CuturePolis
February 2022



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Introduction

The present Report is part of the European project “READ-IN CLUB” (2020-1-EL01-KA227-ADU-094627), which is a KA2 project in the field of adult education, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. More concretely, this report is subject to the IO2- Virtual Training Seminars for «Lit.Mentors», which foresees the conduction of virtual seminars, under the guidance of Sandorf.

Six (6) different seminars were conducted, in total, one per partner organization, and took place online being addressed to reading club coordinators from 5 different countries: Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia. The seminar discussed topics derived from the READ-IN-CLUB key subjects (creativity, intercultural dialogue, lifelong learning, post covid era), and particularly they were the followings:

- Seminar #1:** Literature, Reading Clubs and Intercultural Dialogue – By CulturePolis
- Seminar #2:** Reading Clubs and lifelong learning – By IED
- Seminar #3:** Digital tools for adult training/education – By ITStudy
- Seminar #4:** Developing Intercultural Intelligence in a reading community – By Sandorf
- Seminar #5:** The prosperity of Philanagnosia through book fairs in the post covid-19 era – By HFC
- Seminar #6:** Social interaction through common subjects in literature: fighting the physical limitations and using the technological tools to achieve boundless travels to the imaginary - By SWA

The purpose of the seminars was to create a common space for book club mentors and members and exchange knowledge and experience on book club coordination, lifelong learning, and interculturalism.

The present report refers to the seminar conducted by CulturePolis with the title “**Literature, Reading Clubs and Intercultural Dialogue**”. Its objectives were:

1. to serve as an opportunity to meet with coordinators of reading clubs from all over Greece.
2. to discuss the role of literature in promoting intercultural dialogue.
3. to examine the function of reading clubs as incubators of knowledge and ideas for the understanding the "other".
4. to collect real experiences and practices that contribute to the awareness of a reading club on issues of intercultural dialogue.

The virtual seminar was conducted online, through the Zoom platform, and involved a total of 5 participants, 2 staff members, and 1 guest lecturer. These participants actively participated and offered ideas and remarks on the presented topic. The idea was to develop a module with and for the target groups, paying great attention to their involvement.

1. Implementation

- **Organizer:** CulturePolis
- **Country:** Cyprus
- **Location:** Zoom Platform
- **Date:** 10/02/2022, 18:00 pm
- **Participants:** 5
- **Profile of participants:** book club coordinators, book club members
- **Available at Youtube** → <https://bit.ly/3MdsGBm>

1.1. Participants' Profile

The seminar was attended by 4 coordinators representing reading clubs all around Greece (1 from Corfu, 2 from Athens and 1 from Komotini) and 1 book club member (from Corfu). It also involved 1 key speaker and 2 staff members of the partner organization CulturePolis (the project manager and the president).

1.2. Methodology

The methodological framework of the seminar was similar to a “focus group” approach and aimed to involve as much as possible the participants in a conversation that triggers their interest and to create an interactive environment where participants remain active and well-engaged during the whole process. To do so, it had been agreed among partners, beforehand, to keep the group of participants in a small size (in our case only 5 participants were selected) and not use live streaming or open it to the wider public, during its implementation. However, the seminar was recorded in a video format for archival and dissemination reasons, with the consensus of all the involved parties and now is available on Youtube. The process followed the basic model that the IO2 task–leader proposed, adjusted to the national context and the experience that CulturePolis holds in the implementation of online seminars. Particularly, the structure of the seminar was the following:

- Welcome message by the staff members of CulturePolis
- Introduction to the READ-IN-CLUB project/ Presentation of the objectives and the first intellectual output (IO1)
- Check-in activity and introduction of the participants
- Keynote speech on the topic “Literature, Reading Clubs and Intercultural Dialogue” by Persa Koumoutsis, author and translator of Arabic Language.
- Experiences and practices for understanding the other: Open discussion with the reading club coordinators.
- Evaluation and Check out.



Σεμινάριο για συντονιστές λεσχών ανάγνωσης

**ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΙΑ, ΛΕΣΧΕΣ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΔΙΑΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΙΚΟΣ ΔΙΑΛΟΓΟΣ**

Πέμπτη 10 Φεβρουαρίου 2022

ΔΟΜΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΕΜΙΝΑΡΙΟΥ

Πρώτο μέρος (18.00-19.00)

- Καλωσόρισμα
- Λίγα λόγια για την CulturePolis και το Κέντρο Ελληνικής και Αραβικής Λογοτεχνίας και Πολιτισμού
- Λίγα λόγια για το READ-IN-CLUB
- Γνωριμία με τους συντονιστές (check - in)

Δεύτερο μέρος (19.10-20.30)

- Λογοτεχνία, λέσχες ανάγνωσης και διαπολιτισμικός διάλογος - Ομιλία από την Πέρσα Κουμούση
- Εμπειρίες και πρακτικές για την κατανόηση του "άλλου" - συζήτηση με τους συντονιστές.
- Αξιολόγηση και Check out.



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In order to encourage engagement, a greater emphasis and time were given to the “Check in activity and introduction of participants”. The participants were asked one by one about their club life, their activities, and their habits; at the end of their introduction, there were invited to share with each other the name of their favorite book. Following that, they were engaged in a warm-up activity, specially designed and developed by CulturePolis staff members, using the Slido Platform. The activity was called “the 5 words” and required participants to continue the following sentences, providing their personal testimony:

- To me, literature means....
- To me, a reading club means...
- To me, intercultural dialogue means...

The second phase of the seminar that required the active engagement of the participants was the open discussion, followed by the keynote speech, which aimed to collect experiences and practices for the understanding of the “other” in a reading club context. This session was implemented through dedicated questions by the project coordinators, such as:

- Do you remember books and other literary works, discussed in your reading club, that reflect on the concept of otherness? Briefly describe the story.
- What impressions did these books make on your members? What knowledge did they gain? What opinions were expressed?
- In what methodology/way did you discuss the issue of diversity/understanding the "other" with your members?
- Did you encounter any difficulties in coordinating the discussion around the topic of intercultural dialogue? How did you deal with them?

1.3. Insight & Results

This section summarizes the most remarkable comments and aspects that the participants pointed out regarding the topic of the seminar.

As shown in the results of the warm-up activity, all participants recognize the interconnection between literature, reading clubs, and intercultural dialogue. To them, literature means a way of living and traveling. It is an expression of feelings and it is connected with a sense of enjoyment and wellbeing.



To go one step further, reading clubs seems to be a place where knowledge, interaction, and friendships may be generated. They are “*shelters for readers with questioning minds*”, where someone may feel a sense of belonging, the safeness of a family environment, delight, and an opportunity for sharing.



As for the intercultural dialogue, participants perceive it as a process of meeting, sharing, getting in contact, and being familiarized with something or someone different and “foreign”. It also means to show empathy, inclusion, respect and having, feeling, or offering freedom.



Having been introduced to the three main concepts of the seminar, the participants had the opportunity to attend the keynote speech given by the author and translator of Arabic language, Persa Koumoutsi. She investigated 3 main questions:

- What is intercultural dialogue?
- Why intercultural dialogue is so important?
- What is the value of literature in intercultural dialogue?

To answer these questions, the key speaker discussed the concept of “universality” and through the use of deductive reasoning and a series of arguments and bibliographic references, she ended up to the conclusion that “literature is a universal language that transcends all borders”.

The above preparation supported participants’ interaction with the seminar and led them to share their thoughts and opinions on the subject. Some of their testimonials, collected during the whole process of reflection are the followings:

"There is love for books, in our reading club, but after the love for books somehow the love for the fellow man is also practiced".

"Everyone is different. Our members come from different social groups, different political beliefs, different sex, different educational backgrounds...but the book unites them."

"Literature brings us in contact with the 'foreign' and makes us realize our identity by seeing ourselves through others".

"Literature sometimes captures the urgency that these people have, that is, the "juice" of their problems, so you may have read too many essays, too many journalistic articles, but by reading a book I think you get into the shoes of these people and you understand from a different perspective the difficulties, the problems or what concerns them very much as writers".

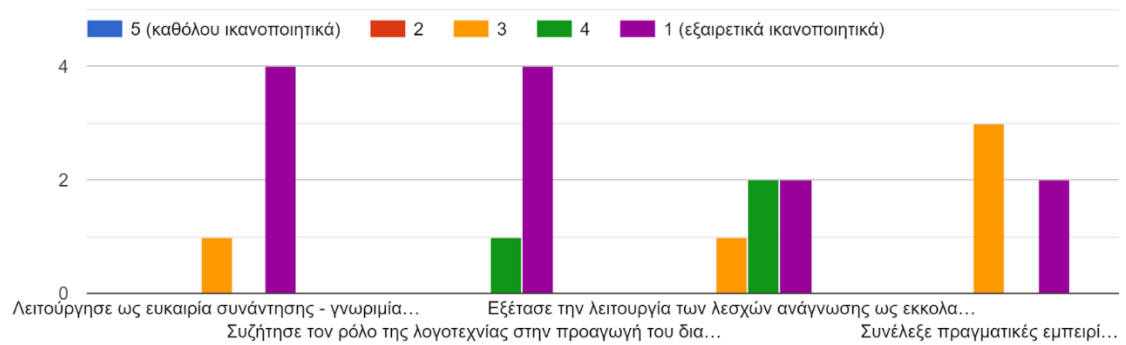
"Literature brings us in contact with the foreign and makes us realize our identity by seeing ourselves through others".

"It's so interesting through literature to get close to a different reality".

The seminar closed with the distribution of an online evaluation which collected insight regarding the performance and the success of the seminar in relation to its initial goals:

To what extent do you consider that the seminar achieved its objectives? [1: highly satisfactory – 5: not at all satisfactory]

Κατά πόσον θεωρείτε ότι το σεμινάριο πέτυχε τους στόχους του;



2. Conclusions

The insights and the results of the seminar show that:

1. Reading club coordinators recognize that the institution of reading clubs creates an environment of lifelong learning and informal adult education.
2. Intercultural dialogue, seems to be much more related to the concept of literature rather than to the institution of reading clubs.
3. Intercultural dialogue exists among the reading club members mainly in terms of the interpersonal relationships generated among individuals with different characteristics.

All in all, it seems that reading club coordinators recognize the existence of interconnection between literature, reading clubs, and intercultural dialogue. It is not clear though to what extent the three key concepts (literature, reading clubs, and intercultural dialogue) are approached as a body of elements – mutually and constantly linked to each other - in a conscious, targeted, and constructive way within the lifetime of a reading club. To investigate it, there is a need to clarify to what extent reading club coordinators develop practices and methodologies to incorporate the relation of the three elements into the processes of their clubs. Finally, the provision of guidance and training to the reading club coordinators regarding practical tools and methodologies was discussed and considered useful in order to bring intercultural dialogue practices into the context of reading clubs.