

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Project name and acronym:	Local Voices for Inclusive Communities: Strengthening Diversity and Combating Discrimination in Southeastern Europe – DiverCity
Participant:	DRUSTVO ZA RAZVIJANJE PROSTOVOLJNEGA DELA NOVO MESTO
PIC number:	946969873

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	2		
Event name:	Building Inclusive Societies: Strategies for Local Authorities		
Type:	Seminar		
In situ/online:	In-situ		
Location:	Novo mesto, Slovenia		
Date(s):	12–15.5.2026		
Website(s) (if any):	https://divercity-project.eu/events/		
Participants			
Female:	30		
Male:	18		
Non-binary:	-		
From country 1 [Serbia]:	10		
From country 2 [Italy]:	5		
From country 3 [Albania]:	5		
From country 4 [Greece]:	3		
From country 5 [Cyprus]:	3		
From country 6 [Romania]:	4		
From country 7 [Slovenia]:	18		
Total number of participants:	48	From total number of countries:	7
Description			

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

From 12th to 15th of May 2026, the Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo mesto (Društvo za razvijanje prostovoljnega dela Novo mesto - DRPDNM) successfully hosted the main international seminar of the European project DiverCity – Building Inclusive Societies. The two-day intensive event, expertly led by Ester Snedec, brought together experts, youth activists, and decision-makers from seven countries in Novo mesto. Through experiential workshops on challenging prejudices, presentations of local integration practices, and innovative methodologies, participants addressed the challenges of contemporary social inclusion and equality.

Alliance of European Cities for Systemic Justice

The event officially began with an address by the Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Novo mesto, Sara Tomšič, who emphasised the importance of inclusive planning of local spaces and services. On behalf of the host organisation DRPDNM, attendees were warmly welcomed by Tina Cigler, who gave a comprehensive introductory presentation on Novo mesto. She highlighted key local mechanisms based on three pillars:

- **Digital Inclusion:** The *Urbanka* city card project, designed for the digital inclusion of vulnerable groups.
- **Community Collaboration:** The successful implementation of participatory budgeting, which allows citizens to directly co-shape their environment.
- **Fieldwork:** The importance of working on the ground to identify overlooked stories through the concept of *The Forgotten Half*.

The international audience was also introduced to national umbrella bodies for equality, such as the Slovenian Advocate of the Principle of Equality, the Italian UNAR, and the Greek Ombudsman. These bodies complement the work of the foreign delegations present from Greece, Italy, Albania, Romania, Cyprus, and Serbia. The main goal of the entire initiative, co-funded by the European CERV programme, is to strengthen the capacity of local administrations to translate theoretical concepts of justice directly into practice and everyday life on city streets.

Roundtable: "Where Do Invisible Barriers Hide?"

The central thematic pillar of the first morning was a roundtable with exceptional guests who shed light on the concept of "invisible barriers" – obstacles that do not exist in legislation but in practice hinder the integration of marginalised groups daily:

- **Mitja Blažič (Independent Advisor to the Advocate of the Principle of Equality):** As a former journalist and fearless human rights activist, he brought an invaluable combination of personal and professional experience to the discussion. He explained the importance of analysing legislation and assisting local authorities in creating a more equitable environment.
- **Matej Auguštin (Member of DRPDNM and Top Athlete):** Despite his blindness, he proves through his life story that barriers often exist only in our minds. He provided invaluable insight into how the digital transformation of cities can become either the greatest ally or the greatest obstacle, cautioning that a "smart city" only demonstrates its intelligence when it is truly accessible to everyone.
- **Milica Tanasković (Project Coordinator and Intercultural Mediator at DRPDNM):** Holding a master's degree in history and having moved to Novo mesto from Serbia, she highlighted the intersection of theory and reality on the ground. She pointed out the importance of providing academic support to immigrant children and overcoming the administrative hurdles that foreigners face upon arriving in the community.

The afternoon session of the first day transitioned into an interactive presentation of the rich programmes of DRPDNM. A wonderful cultural and emotional highlight was provided by the DRPDNM dance group, led by Daniela, which demonstrated to the international guests—without words—the power of art as a universal language of integration and the breaking down of social barriers.

Experiential Learning: The Stereotype Game and the Living Library

The second day of the seminar was dedicated to directly confronting biases. It began with an exceptionally intense and impactful interactive game, "Breaking Stereotypes". Participants received a sticker on their forehead representing a specific social role (ranging from the president of the country to a homeless person or a blind person), which they themselves could not see, while others treated

them according to that label. This was followed by a deep reflection focused on the loss of humanity through labelling and the application of these insights to government offices and the everyday work environment.

Following this, Maja Žunič Fabjančič gave a detailed presentation of the *Living Library* methodology under the slogan "Do not judge a book by its cover". Participants were then able to "borrow" individuals from various vulnerable backgrounds as "living books" to share their unique and powerful life stories:

- **Muslim Woman:** Confronting cultural and religious stereotypes in Europe.
- **Blind Archer:** A story of overcoming physical limitations and the full inclusion of people with disabilities.
- **A Dancer from Venezuela:** A personal account of the migration experience and integration through art.
- **A Buddhist Traveller:** The search for different life paths and spirituality.
- **A Refugee from Ukraine:** A harrowing testimony about war, the loss of home, and integration into a new environment.

Fieldwork Through the Eyes of the "Forgotten Half"

The afternoon of the second day was dedicated to discovering Novo mesto from a completely new perspective. Led by Klavdija Kotar, participants set out on a guided walk along the "Forgotten Half" route. The walk was designed as an exploration of public space through the lens of overlooked social groups and the historical memory of women who have significantly shaped the city. Participants thus directly observed within the urban environment how social exclusion or inclusion is reflected in architecture, public monuments, and collective memory.

The event achieved outstanding success, which is further confirmed by the perfect scores in the evaluation questionnaires, where both overall satisfaction with the organisation and the fulfilment of expectations regarding the knowledge gained received a perfect score of 5 out of 5.

Schedule:

- **Day 1 - Morning session:**
 - 9:30 – 9:45 Arrival and registration of participants
 - 9:45 – 10:15 Opening remarks by DRPDNM and other local community representatives
 - 10:15 – 10:40 Presentation by the host about Novo Mesto
 - 10:40 – 10:45 Equality Body in participating countries and in three pillars in Slovenia
 - 10:45 – 11:00 Break
 - 11:00 – 12:30 Seminar (roundtable): Theoretical frameworks of inclusion and overcoming invisible barriers – Living Inclusion in Novo Mesto.
 - Content: Analysis of systemic discrimination through the lens of national legislation and personal experiences.
 - Guests: Experts – Advocate for the principle of equality in dialogue with representatives of vulnerable groups: a young refugee or migrant, and a person with a disability.
 - 12:30 – 13:00 Conclusion of the morning session: summary of findings and preparation for fieldwork.
- **Afternoon session:**

- 13:00 – 14:30 Lunch at Gostišče (Glavni trg 30, 8000 Novo mesto)
- 14:30 – 15:30 Interactive presentation of most important DRPDNM programmes, 2nd floor at Novi trg 9
- 15:30 – 19:00 Free time
- 19:00 Dinner

- **Day 2 - Morning session:**

- 9:15 – 9:30 Arrival and registration of participants
- 9:30 – 10:15 Breaking Down Stereotypes: An intensive, interactive exercise designed to help participants recognise their own biases and prepare them for entering the Living Library
- 10:15 – 10:30 Coffee break
- 10:30 – 10:45 Presentation of the Living Library method: Maja Žunič Fabjančič presents the methodology, explaining how to read “living books” safely and respectfully, and how to adapt the method for use in other cities.
- 10:45 – 12:30 Living Library: Do Not Judge a Book by Its Cover
 - Learning through direct dialogue. Participants “borrow” people with interesting life stories.
- 12:30 – 12:45 Morning reflection: A brief exchange of thoughts on how personal stories complemented yesterday’s theoretical discussion.
- 13:00 – 14:30 Lunch at Gostišče (Glavni trg 30, 8000 Novo mesto)

- **Afternoon session:**

- 14:30 – 16:00 Field activity: The Forgotten Half
 - Walk through Novo Mesto, with a practical demonstration of how the theory of “invisible groups” from the morning seminar is reflected in public space and historical memory (on the 10th anniversary of the project).
- 16:00 – 17:00 Evaluation and official closing of the meeting with the awarding of certificates
- 17:00 – 19:00 Free afternoon
- 19:00 Dinner

Media Coverage and Social Networks

The event resonated on social media, where key moments and messages were shared:

- **Facebook DRPDNM International:**
<https://www.facebook.com/drpdnminternational/posts/1009745975032423>
- **Instagram DRPDNM International:**
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DYhGtrGjn0g/>
- **Facebook DRPDNM:**
<https://www.facebook.com/DRPDNM/posts/pfbid02X1VDyTHZAzNihx1f1a2TzSDLDXnyKi6h9YcG2aM1dy6Jm5sxxkxW4bwroiP5RM9yul>
- **DRPDNM website**
<https://www.nevladnik.info/si/novice/?id=19308>
- **DRPDNM LinkedIn**

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7462454634146836480/>

- **Economic Intelligence Center**

<https://www.facebook.com/economicintelligencecenter/posts/pfbid0pgCvs5Dwf7suH4PgNx9bGVz5k3shfdqmtPZ6So7XbZ13iKdjyogAwM4Hd9SSrV56l>

Conclusion

The seminar concluded with a guided tour of Novo mesto and a joint dinner, where partners strengthened ties for future cooperation and the next events in the DiverCity project. The message of the meeting remains: the "city" in the DiverCity project must become a space for everyone, where local authorities successfully translate the theory of justice into everyday life on the streets. The project serves as a vital bond, ensuring that social and digital innovations do not outpace the human factor and that inclusion remains accessible to all generations and vulnerable groups.

The event achieved remarkable success and consensus among participants, who rated their overall satisfaction with the organization in Novo mesto with a perfect average score of 5.0 out of 5. Notably, participants identified the greatest benefit as not only the high level of knowledge gained (score 5.0) but also the extraordinary experience of directly reading Living Books (score 4.95). These results confirm the outstanding execution of the meeting and reinforce Novo mesto's role as a key hub for social innovation and international cooperation.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).