

SOCIAL WORK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN BHUTAN AND IN SLOVAKIA

Report from the Erasmus exchange program

In 2022 – 2023, *Faculty of Arts (Prešov University, Slovakia)* and *Samtse College of Education (Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan)* participated in the *Erasmus exchange program* with the aim to deepen the existing cooperation in social work and implement joint academic activities in both social work and English language studies. On the Slovak side, the departments involved were the *Institute of Educology and Social Work* and the *Institute of Translation and Interpreting Studies*; on the Bhutanese side, the faculty represented the fields of social work and English language studies. Since the combination of a European and Asian universities guarantees different cultural environments, we hoped for fruitful and inspiring business trips.

The first trip was planned for early November 2022, when Slovak faculty visited *Bhutan*. The trip included meetings with the *Samtse College management*, with the representatives of the *Department of Social Work* and the *Department of Languages* (Figure 1), during which the vision and mission of RUB and PU was presented. The program continued with a campus tour, and a lecture for social work students (Figure 2). A strong element of Erasmus mobilities is the intercultural experience, thus the trip could not be complete without excursions that allowed for studying the cultural and natural environment (Figures 3 and 4). *Bhutan* is known for its fairy-tale-like countryside, magnificent cultural and historical sites that have preserved their unique character thanks to strict regulations on the development of tourism imposed by the Bhutanese government.

The second trip took place in June 2023, three Bhutanese colleagues came to *Prešov University*. The participants were directly involved in the life of the *University of Prešov* and *Prešov Konštantínova 2 Secondary*

school. Their trip started with the visit to the secondary school, where they had a discussion with the fourth-grade bilingual section students (Figure 5). Students were passionate to learn more about life in *Bhutan*, they could not stop asking questions about culture, history, religion, politics, king and queen, as well as the life of ordinary people in Bhutan. Next, the Bhutanese colleagues attended meetings with staff and doctoral students at the *Institute of Translation and Interpreting* and the *Institute of Education and Social Work*. They finished their trip with their participation in the conference “*Current Social Work Challenges*”. As part of it, they also established cooperation with prof. Jay Miller from the *University of Kentucky, USA*, a plenary speaker of the conference, and they witnessed the opening ceremony of self-care lab at *Faculty of Arts, Prešov University* (Figure 6). Their trip also included excursions e.g. to the *Špiš Castle* and the *High Tatras mountain lake* called *Popradské pleso*.

During our meetings we managed to discuss cooperation options. For cooperation in social work, we discussed a specific project and co-authoring of publication outputs. For the English language section, we discussed the possibilities of cooperation, online lectures, and other project activities, mainly accounting for the fact that English is a second language in *Bhutan*, while for Slovak students English is a foreign language, thus the approach may as well differ. We consider a high degree of compatibility of project intentions to be a success exceeding our expectations. The partner institution highly appreciated the research and methodological readiness of our workplaces, which for them represents a real promise of further cooperation.

The project was originally planned for the period of 2020 – 2022, however, the course of the project was largely affected by the COVID pandemic. The individual mobilities

were postponed. Even so, the cooperation fulfilled our expectations and created the basis for further joint activities, which we want to continue in view of the quality partnership. Both partner institutions were equally active and showed a proactive approach to all planned and implemented activities, which made the trip successful and triggered more intensive cooperation, which hopefully will receive further institutionalized support and funding.

Figure 1



Figure 3



Figure 5 and Figure 6



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Figure 2



Figure 4

