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# Project Supervisor Report: *The Banned Books Museum - Developing a Seminar on Censorship for Educators and Librarians*

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This report outlines the development and delivery of the ELU project X between February and May 2025. The project was supervised by Katri-Liis Lepik, Associate Professor at the School of Governance, Law and Society, and Piret Jeedas, Visiting Lecturer of Andragogy at the School of Educational Sciences. The project included the following student participants:

- Joseph Maximillian Dunnigan, Student Project Supervisor and author of this report
- Elis Vaher, Co-Creation Team member
- Kertu Säsil Aas, Co-Creation Team member
- Kristlin Ringas, Seminar Team member
- Liisa Toonekurg, Seminar Team member
- Robert Drew Trumpis, Research Team member
- Ivan Frolov, Research Team member
- Elise Britta Aidla, Communication and Marketing Team member
- Uchechi Martina Agbakwa\*

\*Agbakwa began the project as a participant, however due to other commitments she ceased participation in March 2025. Her participation was limited to preparatory work on the project, and thus her activities are not detailed in this report.

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## Outline of the Project

The aim of the project was to develop a educational seminar in partnership with the Estonian non-profit organisation Banned Books Museum and Romanian non-profit EduCab. Banned Books, which is founded by the student supervisor of this project Joseph Dunnigan, aims to educate the public on the topic of literary censorship, and EduCab aims to deliver beneficial events and skills to librarians in Romania and beyond. This represents a valuable opportunity for interdisciplinary project management skills development for the students from Tallinn University, an opportunity for inter-institutional cooperation between the University, museum, and libraries, and also an opportunity for international knowledge exchange between Estonia and Romania.

The broader objective was to not only deliver one seminar in Romania, but to create a template that Banned Books and EduCab could take forward, to librarians

around the world and give them the tools to understand censorship and how they might protect themselves and authors' rights in the future.

This template seminar was successfully delivered on April 9th 2025, thanks to contributions from all team members. The process was broadly smooth, and went largely to schedule with only a few delays. Written feedback from the Romanian participants is pending as of time of writing, however our team has identified opportunities for refinement of our process and potential partnerships in the future, described in the conclusion to this report.

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## Project Development and Implementation

As the founder of the Banned Books Museum, I was the originator of this project. I identified the need for an intervention aimed at supporting librarians during my day-to-day management of the museum, during which I often have professional librarian visitors, who describe the challenges they face around the topic of censorship given their lack of training in this area. Given the aim of the museum to develop skills, and our recent partnership with EduCab, the ELU initiative seemed the perfect chance to develop such a programme, which could potentially expand into a service for our museum in its capacity as a social enterprise.

Given the existing partnership with EduCab, and their expectations that we would deliver a high-standard service for their Romanian librarian participants, there was a great deal of pressure for us to deliver, and I felt particularly responsible for ensuring that success given that my reputation as a museum director was also at stake. The challenges associated with that pressure are detailed in my personal reflection included in the project portfolio.

The project began in February 2nd, when we divided our team into five sub-teams. This entailed individual interviews with each of them on my part, understanding their skills and preferred areas of contribution, and then grouping them appropriately. Fortunately, all participants responded very positively to their groupings, and no major areas of the project were left unattended. The teams were:

- Project Management Team, in which I was the only participant
- Co-Creation Team, with two members
- Seminar Team, with two members
- Research Team, with two members
- Communications & Marketing Team, with only one member, working closely with me

Within subsequent sub-group meetings, we established each group's responsibilities and a timeline (as shown below). This was challenging on my part, because I was still unfamiliar with the students and unable to evaluate the degree

of responsibility that each student could take given the wide range of educational attainment, professional expertise, and life experience between the members.

The broad plan was that the Co-Creation Team would communicate with library partners provided by the Banned Books Museum to get guidance on what form the seminar would take, gathering data which would then be used by the Seminar Team to construct a 'skeleton' seminar informed by academic theory in educational science. In parallel to this, the Research Team would study the wider global relevance and potential market for our intervention. That seminar would then be delivered by me to our Romanian participant librarians provided by EduCab in a one-day event in April, and afterward each team would perform an analysis of the outcomes in relation to their area of participation.

After the division into sub-groups, the teams largely operated independently except when data needed to be transferred from one team to another. We chose the platform Discord as our primary method of communication, allowing for easy transfer of files and communication between any two team members or groups.

There were two major, and two minor obstacles to our success that had significant impact:

1. The availability of the librarians to be interviewed by and answer questionnaires from the Co-Creation Team did not give them enough time to deliver a full data report to the Seminar Team before it was time to deliver the seminar. The Seminar Team thus relied primarily on verbal feedback from me as to the expressed wishes of the librarians. Fortunately we did have access to written feedback from the specific Romanian librarians that would participate in the actual seminar, and thus their expectations were built into the structure of the seminar. In the future, the additional feedback from non-Romanian librarians will inform the structure of the service.
2. Communication between myself and the groups became less frequent after the mid-term presentations in March, and even less after the actual delivery of the seminar on April 9th. This was due to extreme demands on my schedule from the University, the museum, and my other company in the film industry which required immediate attention due to a sharp decline in business. I had not anticipated the degree to which this would leave the team members feeling lost, or that their contributions had not made a significant contribution toward the project. If I were to run this project again, I would certainly maintain a better schedule of communication and inform all sub-teams as to the developments in the other sub-teams, so that they can see how their work cross-pollinated and informed the whole project development. I would also find a better way to illustrate the long-term aspect of this project, to clarify at an earlier stage that their contributions may not be immediately used within the 3-month timeframe of the ELU project, but are foundational to the development of a seminar that can work internationally.
3. The political agitation caused by the annulment of the 2025 Romanian elections required that our partners in EduCab attend emergency meetings during our scheduled time for the seminar in early April, causing a delay of one

week. This date was also not ideal, given its closeness to Easter, however after a round of negotiations it was confirmed for April 8th, with the consequence of limiting us to only that morning and afternoon with no possibility of expanding the seminar to other interested libraries in other parts of the country.

4. There has been an unexpected delay in written feedback response from the Romanian participants, for reasons that are not known as of the time of writing. This absence limits our post-seminar analysis to the verbal feedback given by the librarians during the seminar itself, which fortunately we did record.

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## Key Outcomes

This project yielded the following tangible outcomes:

- A. Increased knowledge of literary censorship among the participants, as evidenced by verbal and written feedback.
- B. A methodology for co-creation between the Banned Books Museum and partner librarians, including a template preliminary questionnaire and feedback questionnaire.
- C. A list of candidate partners for future seminars, including specific contact details and a method for approaching the most considerable candidate.
- D. A structure for a 3-hour educational seminar, that has been tested and positively received by representatives of our target audience.
- E. A communications and marketing strategy that maximises the public awareness of our intervention, with a particular emphasis on the social media platform Instagram and how to most effectively utilise its nuanced mechanics.
- F. A bank of media content, photography and video, that allows us to publicise and communicate the benefits of our seminar to future potential partners.
- G. Increased skills and knowledge among the student participants of this project, as outlined in their individual personal reflections included in the project portfolio.

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## Conclusion

The seminar that we delivered on 9th April was considered by participants in the room to be highly beneficial. As indicated verbally during the event, which can be heard during the recording, the librarians indicated that the presentation delivered new and beneficial information for them, and during the teamwork exercises they shared their experiences and learned from each other as we had hoped.

After the seminar, feedback forms were sent to the participants through our partners in EduCab, and although that data has not come through as of the time of writing, as the project supervisor I am personally satisfied that we successfully delivered an educational transformation, and that the librarians are better skilled for having participated.

In my capacity as the manager of the Banned Books Museum, the outcome is more complicated. Although the social impact objectives are highly appealing and deserving of further pursuit, the business case is harder to make. In consultation with EduCab and the participants, they communicated that it would be unrealistic to expect libraries to pay for the seminar as a service due to minimal funding among the specific communities that would most benefit from the service in places like Romania, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. The expenses related to providing this service would therefore have to be borne by third parties, for example European-level funders like the Erasmus+ programme. Unfortunately nobody within the Banned Books team has experience in fundraising, and this creates a barrier that will require refinement of our approach to make it financially sustainable. Upon receipt of the written feedback from Romania, the museum board members will address potential solutions to this obstacle and evaluate the future of the Banned Books Seminar.