

Team Research Report — Banned Books Museum Seminar Project

Robert Trumpis & Ivan

May 7, 2025

1. Introduction and Research Intent

Our research began with a shared goal: to determine where the Banned Books Museum seminar could make the greatest impact internationally. Rather than simply replicate models from countries with well-established intellectual freedom infrastructure, we focused on locations where a seminar could both educate about global censorship and provide under-recognised librarians with a platform to share their experiences.

2. Why We Focused on Lithuania, Kazakhstan, and Beyond

Lithuania was a clear starting point. Its national identity is closely tied to a historical culture of resistance through book smuggling during the Tsarist period. This history is commemorated through national observances like Book Smugglers Day (March 16) and the Press Restoration Day (May 7), as well as institutions like the Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas and Lithuanian Book-Smugglers Museum. Lithuania not only resonates with our museum's mission but also reflects a broader cultural reverence for the printed word and its role in resistance.

Kazakhstan emerged from our "might be good—with caution" category. While politically complex, the country shows potential for civic openness. Libraries and educators operate in a delicate environment where international support and solidarity could offer new opportunities. Our seminar could provide a respectful but impactful space for exchange.

Other countries selected included:

- **Tunisia: With the INELI-MENA leadership program and a robust National Library, Tunisia offers both institutional grounding and grassroots momentum for exploring censorship.**
- **Colombia: Home to the oldest national library in the Americas and the innovative Biblored network in Bogotá, Colombia demonstrates how public engagement and digital inclusion intersect with freedom of expression.**

- **Kenya:** The Kenya National Library Service and Book Bunk project showcase vibrant efforts to reimagine public libraries as cultural and civic centres.
- **Georgia:** With a strong national library system and emerging science-focused library innovation, Georgia is actively positioning itself as a knowledge-sharing hub.
- **France:** Though not in immediate need, Bibliothèques Sans Frontières models an outward-facing, mobile and humanitarian approach to access that we may adapt for mobile or pop-up versions of our seminar.

In total, these countries were selected using criteria including geopolitical stability, cultural alignment with anti-censorship values, and the presence of libraries that actively support community engagement and/or international collaboration.

3. Key Opportunities and Reflections from Bucharest

Bucharest affirmed the need for flexibility and humility in our approach.

These insights have shaped how we intend to frame future events: part research, part storytelling, and part advocacy.

4. What We Might Adapt Moving Forward

- **Less structure, more dialogue:** Rather than fixed modules, we may experiment with open forums, testimonies, and co-curated discussions.
- **Record and amplify:** Short-form videos and social media-ready clips could be recorded with permission to extend reach.
- **Focus on grassroots institutions:** Innovative or independent libraries are not only easier to partner with but also more likely to carry forward the seminar's values locally.

- **Support local organizers:** Toolkits or templates for running their own version of a censorship-focused seminar.

We also intend to explore timing the seminar in line with local commemorative holidays, as we observed in Lithuania, to boost local engagement and historical relevance.

5. New Technologies and the Virtual Reality App

I have been developing a Banned Books Virtual Reality (VR) App to complement and extend the impact of our seminars. This immersive tool allows users to explore 3D renderings of censored books, literary history, and activist spaces in ways that traditional formats cannot achieve.

The VR app can support future seminars in two major ways:

- 1. Engagement Tool:** In regions where discussion around censorship remains sensitive, the app offers a neutral yet compelling entry point into banned literature, making it suitable for schools, libraries, and museums.
- 2. Living Archive:** In upcoming seminars, I aim to record librarian testimonies and embed them within the VR experience. This will create an evolving, interactive archive of global resistance to censorship.

As the project grows, I envision integrating localised content, so each seminar leaves behind a virtual space reflecting the voices of the librarians and communities who participated.

Display URL: 7p3z6.zappar-us.io/3917661832918794462/

6. Looking Ahead

Our next phase involves finalising five to six additional countries for potential partnership. For each, we will identify:

- A central/national library with symbolic or archival significance
- An innovative, community-run or independent library with event or outreach experience

- A local cultural history or contemporary issue related to censorship
The research has clarified not only where we are going, but why. It has grounded our mission in lived experience and given us a roadmap to expand our reach without losing authenticity. We aim to bring the Banned Books Museum message to places where it can resonate, amplify, and endure.

Potential partners in Kazakhstan

1) Nazarbayev University

- - Located in Astana
- - Great library, where different seminars take place
- - Library contact: library@nu.edu.kz.
- - Library website(librarians phone numbers): <https://library.nu.edu.kz/liaison>

2) L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University

- - Located in Astana
- - University contact: enu@enu.kz

3) S. Toraighyrov Pavlodar Regional Universal Scientific Library

- - **Located in Pavlodar**
- - Library contact: pavlodarlibrary@yandex.kz

4) Tashnev University

- - Located in Shymkent
- - **Vice-Rector for Strategic Development and Science might be interested in our projects**
- - His contacts (**Bitursyn Galymzhan Shamshidinuly**)
science@tashenev.edu.kz
+7 747 757 07 37
- 5) The International Literacy Association (Kazakhstan Reading Association)
- - They advocate for equitable access to literacies among individuals of all ages and diverse communities as a basic human right and a matter of social justice.
- - They also support teachers and researchers
- - Contact (Zeinegul Kopbaeva, Executive Director)
zika_kopbay@mail.ru
+7 717 2426997
