



Experience exchange meeting
Project INTERACTIVE GARDENS meeting
Protocol

Date: 28th May 2024.

Time: 10:00 – 17:00 (CET)

Meeting place: Graudu iela 1, Dobele, Latvia

9:00	Bus from Hotel Jelgava to Institute of Horticulture			
9:30 – 10:30	Welcome, registration and coffee			
10:30 – 13:00	Inese Ebele	Horticulture Institute presentation		10.30 – 10.45
	Project progress – current situation, next tasks, questions, answers			
	Daina Feldmane	WP 1	Real demonstration gardens	10.45 – 11.00
		WP 1	Concept descriptions with joint work	11.00 – 11.30
	Arnis Cīrulis	WP 1	Virtual garden model	11.30 – 11.45
	Marja Uusitalo	WP 2	Preparing for piloting in Elonkierron	11.45 – 12.00
		WP 2	Discussion on methodology development	12.00 – 12.15.
	Linda Lancere	WP 2	Sensor use in piloting	12.15. – 12.30.
	LatHort	WP 3	Solution transfer for various groups of society	12.30. – 12.45.
Sigita Šilvjane	1st period report		12.45 – 13.00	
13:00 – 15:00	Lunch (in Zoltners, 20 min. to drive)			
15:00 – 17:00	Institute garden visit with coffee break. Workshop with associated organization “Redzi mani” in garden.			
17:30	Bus to Jelgava			

18:00	Dinner in Jelgava city (walking distance from hotel)
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Date 29th May

Time: 9:30 – 17:00 (CET)

8:30	Bus from Jelgava Hotel
9:30 – 17:00	Excursions in the Zemgale region to gardens
9:30 – 11:00	Abgunste manor garden. Coffee https://www.abgunste.lv/
12:00 – 14:00 14:00 – 15:00	Rundāle palace garden visit. Lunch https://rundale.net/en/
16:20 – 18:00	Rhododendron Breeding and Testing Nursery "Babīte" https://www.rododendri.lu.lv/en/
18.00	Farewells. Participants leaving for airports etc.

Meeting participants:

LUKE – Marja Uusitaalo and Anne Niesinen

Rakvere municipality - Kärt-Mari Paju

EMU – Leila Mainla

Dobele county – Liene Laurinoviča

Institute of Horticulture - Inese Ebele, Agnija Berķe, Linda Deičmane, Līga Lepse, Edgars Rubauskis, Ilze Grāvīte, Daina Feldmane, Sarmīte Strautiņa; Laura Sarkanābola

Vidzeme University - Arnis Cīrulis, Laura Ozoliņa, Linda Lancere, Zintis Ericis, Vineta Silkāne

Klaipēda PPS - Loreta Staškūnienē, Jurgita Vainauskienē, Ulijana Petraitienē

Aukštaitija Regional Park - Danutē Kondrotienē

Biržai district municipality: Jurgita Bruniuvienē, Laura Fukumoto, Renata Gražiniene

Aarhus University - Thayna Mendanha

Zemgale Planning Region - Sigita Šilvjane, Elīna Brese, Ilze Lujāne

Aizkraukle municipality – Alda Zenfa, Inese Rupenheite-Skeranska

Jēkabpils municipality – Anita Vanaga

Tukums municipality – Ingrīda Smuškova, Maija Fogele

RVNB "Redzi mani"/"See Me" - Līga Ķikute, Antra Balode, Elita Caune

Protocolist: Daina Feldmane

In 28th May, the Institute of Horticulture director Inese Ebele briefly introduced the participants with the history and development of institute, its collections, scientific trials and opening of garden for the visitors. The project progress was reported by activity leaders and discussed according to the agenda. S. Šilvjane explained the details of the submitting of 1st period report in BAMOS+ system. The representatives from Riga Association for the Visually Impaired and Blind "See Me" led a workshop helping to understand how people with vision problems perceive their surroundings and others.

In 29th May, meeting participants visited and explored the garden near a historical building at Abgunste Manor, a Baroque Garden at Rundāle Palace and an open-air rhododendron collection in a forest landscape at the Rhododendron Breeding and Testing Nursery "Babīte" of the University of Latvia.

Summary of experience exchange

General information

In Dobele, the breeding and research of horticulture crops has been done since 50s of the 20th century – the work was started by P. Upitis. Over the years, the institution has changed its name and status several times – approximately once in 10 years. Nowadays, we are the Institute of Horticulture with scientific staff, laboratories and field trials in 2 campus – Dobele and Pūre, and research directions covering basic biological research for horticulture science, breeding of horticulture plants for Baltic region, their producing systems, storage and processing technologies.

It is important for the Institute to find ways to open the gardens to the public not just for science. Director I. Ebele emphasized the mission of public garden and INTERACTIVE GARDEN project - stay longer, observe more carefully, get more meaningful information and deeper impressions.

Lilac is one of the most famous plants here, and Dobele unofficially is named as the Lilac capital. The collection of lilac cultivars in Dobele was started already in 19th century by the pastor and researcher A. Bīlenšteins. After the 2nd world war, new Latvian lilac cultivars were bred by P. Upītis, L. Kārklīņš. Nowadays this work is continued by S. Strautiņa. In addition to the cultivars created in Latvia, our collection includes the best lilac cultivars from Ukraine, Russia, Byelorussia, and other countries. The information about of lilac breeding and cultivars has been spread through the museum of Horticulture and Visitor Center (which belongs to institute) The name and symbolic of the lilacs are used for better recognition of the Institute of Horticulture for the large society.

The Institute of Horticulture maintains separate websites with the information for garden visitors (<https://www.dobelescerini.lv/en>) and for the dissemination of practical research results with the professional garden magazine (<https://fruittechcentre.eu/lv/>).

Organization and safety issues

Institute of Horticulture garden

An increase in the number of visitors happen during lilac flowering in May, in cherry picking time in July and during apple harvesting. According to it, the seasonal events have been organized - the Lilac Blossom Festival, the workshops about cherry and plum growing and an Apple festival in autumn. Besides it, the information has been spread by direct communication during the Field days researchers Night.

The Institute garden is open for individual visitors and for guided excursions for the groups; the entrance fee depends on the season and events. There are places for the rest, chairs and gazebos in the garden which will be improved during the project. In the warm season, coffee, fresh fruit, vegetables, snacks and ice-cream produced in the institute are offered near the entrance. In the lilac flowering season with most intensive visiting, an additional place for coffee and snack sell is arranged in the garden. In total, 20 – 30 000 people visit the Institute garden per one season.

In the peak of lilac flowering, about 6 – 7 thousand people visit the garden during one weekend. In the most intensive visiting time, one cashier with at least one assistant works near entrance and 2 cashiers with 2-3 assistants – in the coffee point in the garden. There are about 5 assistants for ticket

control. Few medical specialists are present in the garden to provide the first aid if needed. The water has been offered also for the pets.

The optimal group size for one guide is 20 – 25 people, if the large bus with 45 – 50 people arrives, they are divided in 2 groups. The visitor groups mostly request a 1.5-hour long garden tour, but the guides are able to meet various group requirements.

Institute rents about 10 rollators for the people with mobility difficulties in the intensive season and about 2-3 rollators- in less intensive season. The lawn is kept so smooth to be suitable for the movement in the roll chairs. Flower beds with high flowers which clearly separates the smooth paths from other area. The special place near the entrance has been reserved for the people with the mobility impairments for the getting on and off the bus, and the experienced guide always awaits their arrival. In these cases, also for the guiding only experienced guides are employed.

In the rainy weather, and indoor activities are offered – the presentation about the institute, the museum tour with thematic exhibitions, the degustation of fruits and processing products, historical movie presentation. The impression of garden is possible to get also by 360° view photos in website. Thematic exhibitions in the museum and in the garden complement each other (e.g. the route – get known the personalities in the museum, visit them - their lilac cultivars in the garden).

The institute employees receive the information in e-mail about actual plans of garden treatments with plant protection means to provide the safety for the workers and visitors. According to it, the signs of the closed plots are placed in the garden map near the entrance.

Near each plot, there are informative boards with short information about the trials. To avoid the disturbance of data collection in the trials, the movable boards are placed in the garden with the information if the plot is open for visitors or closed for the data collection.

To ensure, that individual visitors will find the way out of the garden, they receive the garden map near the entrance, and the location is indicated on the informative boards in the garden. Several trees with outstanding height mark approximately middle-point of the garden.

Redzi mani

L. Kikute explained, that there are several myths about the perception of the people with visual impairments.

1st myth – a larger object is easier to see

Vision disabilities are various. Most well-known are the disabilities to see small objects at large or close distances - near-sightedness or farsightedness, and in such cases the increase of object image can help. However, there are also other types of disabilities – the difficulties to see the centre of vision field, only the periphery or opposite – difficulties to see the periphery; or irregular poorly visible areas in the vision field. In such cases, the increase of picture, text or other object even worsen the perception.

2nd myth – Braille is very helpful for people with visual impairments

Usually, Braille is learnt by people who can not see since the childhood and it is the only one writing type available for them. The people who have partial vision impairment or lost their vision in adult age mostly don't learnt the Braille because it is too difficult to switch to such type of writing.

3rd myth – the yellow and black colour are easier visible

In fact, the contrast of any light and dark colour helps distinguish the objects for the people with vision disabilities.

About the communication and environment

When you start to communicate with a visually impaired person, let him/her to know when you are here as well as when you left. Don't touch, pull the hand or push such people without the warning. Don't rearrange their things. People with visual impairment learn by touching their neighbourhood near home step by step. It may look incomprehensible for other people – don't rush to help without warning, ask if your help is needed. A tactile environment with objects to touch is important and welcome. Don't rearrange the objects in the surrounding (benches, waste bins) frequently. If the garden is not located close to visually impaired person home, there would not be possible to learn the paths in it, and an accompanying is needed. If a visually impaired person is accompanied by a dog – remember, that you firstly meet and great the person. The dog must focus on accompanying, other people should not call and touch it.

Visually impaired people use the specific computer program which transfer text to audio file and opposite when needed. Therefore, the communication through e-mail is convenient when text is used, but it is not possible to transfer pictures.

Garden tour

Each place visited in the garden tour had its own style and site peculiarity. The common approach was – to highlight the beauty of the garden by collaboration with the artists, integration of art objects and events.

Abgunste manor

No initial plans or paintings about greenery around Abgunste manor were preserved. Nowadays, the garden plan was created by professional company respecting the style of manor, and implemented by manor owners. In front of the manor, the flower beds, bushes and trees were arranged in English landscape garden. building foreground was decorated by large potted plants. Behind the building, the rosary, spice garden, the espaliers with apple and pear trees and the greenhouses were placed. The meadows with naturally grown flowering plants connected the greeneries with the wild.

The story of manor renovation from almost ruin condition is related to the story of saving and adopting of several local kittens. The "cat topic" here enriches the site peculiarity and emerges in original, artist created pictures, art-photos and garden sculptures as well as in presence of real manor cats.

Rundāle Palace garden

Rundāle garden has been re-established near the Rundāle baroque palace. The installation of the Rundāle Palace garden took place simultaneously with the construction of the palace (1736–1740) according to the project of the architect Francesco Rastrelli. The works were led by gardener brothers Christopher and Michael Weiland. The re-establishment of the garden was based on the original garden plan. Currently, all the typical elements of a baroque garden have been restored in Rundāle Palace Park: the ornamental parterre, bosquets surrounded by hedges, the Green Theatre, pergolas and pavilions. A special place is designed for the spring of drinking water.

Rundāle garden stands out by its rich collection of rose cultivars. The roses were grown here since the beginnings of the garden. Initially – in the garden of the Dukes of Kurzeme, the roses were grown only in the pots. Nowadays, around 2,230 varieties of roses grow in the garden of Rundāle Palace, around 600 of them are historical roses. The less resistant historical roses still overwinter in the pots. The rose beds are grouped by historical periods, origin countries and breeders, including also Baltic Sea countries as Finland. The most resistant roses are used for a hedge formation.

Most part of the garden is sunny and meet the light requirements of roses. Shady spots are found in the alleys, bosquets and pergolas, but in the centre of the garden, the water fountain refreshes the air. During our visit, the air temperature raised until + 30 °C, and establishment of more spots with water and shadow seemed recommendable.

In the rose flowering time, the annual Garden Festival has been organized with the activities and concerts in the Rundāle garden.

Rhododendron Breeding and Testing Nursery "Babīte"

At the Rhododendron Breeding and Testing Nursery "Babīte" of the University of Latvia, an open-air rhododendron collection was matched in a pine forest landscape and Japanese garden elements complement it. Here the information about growing conditions for various type of rhododendrons is important as the natural soil in Baltic Sea Region pine forests is not recommendable for the growing of most rhododendrons. In Babīte, the soil is supplemented by approximately 50 cm thick peat layer and the bushes are irrigated regularly. Only one Rhododendron species (*Rhododendron tomentosum* or *Ledum palustre*) - is a native plant in the moistest pine forest places.

Also rhododendron garden keepers recognize the need to enrich garden experience with the music, and the small stage was build near the water to organize the concerts in flowering time.