



## PERSONAL TOWN TOURS PROJECT

Final meeting of the Personal TownTours project

Ljubljana, 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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### **A town is what we know about and feel about it Ljubljana, Town Hall, May the 28th 2014**

Our immediate concern today will not be spectacular architectural buildings which despite the diminished resources are typical of the end of the 20th century. Today, we will not be discussing spectacular buildings like museum in Bilbao etc. making all other buildings around look ordinary. Our immediate concern today is with the town, the urban way of living and of course personal town tours.

Now, since I was 18, I have been travelling a lot, from country to country, from town to town, from place to place. Thus, one night, years ago, when I arrived in Alger, I was asking myself why had come there? For one reason: I had come there because of and for Albert Camus, the author of The plague (La ciuma, La peste, La peste, die Pest, чумата in your languages). Alger was the city, *the place that formed him and sustained him*.

And I remembered Camus writing “*when I was in Prague, I thought desperately of my own town on the shores of the Mediterranean, of the summer evenings that I love so much, so gentle in the green light and full of young and beautiful women.*”

Everything that is most important about Camus is the experience of growing up poor in Alger. Everything that happened subsequently is drenched in this early experience of poverty and sunlight. The city of Alger has beautiful light indeed.

I believe we are many in Europe and elsewhere that could say the same that *a place or places of our lives have shaped us*. Therefore, going back to Camus,



and his novel *The Plague*, let me quote his words: *Knowing a town is knowing how people there work, love, and die.* Knowing a town means knowing the paths we take through it and the stories we live there. It is not enough, of course, to know only how people live there today, it is important also to know how they used to live there, what their past ways of life were. *Because a town is a very special creation, that has to be approached in its continuity. We have to go back into its history, recognize its cultural heritage which we have to maintain and pay tribute to it.* This is exactly what you have done preparing your personal town tours, exploring your cultural heritage and exchanging your personal stories, your understanding of your town and feeling about your town as well as the story between the town and yourselves.

### **A town is what we know and feel about it**

The Chart of Venice (1964) draws our attention to the fact that the monuments of cultural heritage witness about a civilisation and its important developmental phases. There is a lot in our collective memory. All we have to do is to dig in it, to say it, to record it and make it available to others.

If we knew better the way we used to live in Ljubljana, in this town, we would perhaps, I say perhaps, take better decisions for the present and future, we would be more able to protect our cultural heritage, integrating it into new developments.

The Union cafe you'll be visiting would perhaps be redecorated as to get back its original, comfortable, not yet completely forgotten Viennese image.

Armchairs traditionally upholstered in green leather would come back instead of today's brown chairs upholstered in brown artificial leather. May be besides the new cakes and tarts there would be also some old ones I remember from my childhood. May be we would not need to travel to Greece or Turkey to drink nicely served Greek coffee and there would be again tables topped with marble.

## Ljubljana in educational programmes of Slovenian U3A

At Slovenian Third Age University exploring and knowing Ljubljana in its continuity was present already thirty years ago when U3A was established. In those times step by step I was creating the first study programme for older students, learning French, civilisation and culture comparing them with our own culture and life. In French mythology town has a very special place therefore learning about the development of Ljubljana and the way of life in Ljubljana soon became a part of this special study programme. Miša Kusturin, a retired pharmacist and a student of mine wrote about Ljubljana saying:

*"In 1935 I was a little girl. I had short wavy hair and I a thin face. With my parents I lived in Ljubljana. In those days the town was not large. Most houses had only two or three or four storeys. Adjacent to them were also very old and very small ones. Streets were narrow and cars were rare. There were street cars rattling through the town. Townspeople were neatly dressed, wearing small hats. They walked slowly through the town, not hastily. Life was beautiful, or it seemed beautiful to us, because we were young".*

Studying Ljubljana and its ways of life has been incorporated into numerous study programmes.

Art history, of course. There was a very popular and productive study course of Oral history. There are Stories of Ljubljana's townspeople and their world. There was a study programme called Ljubljana, not yet discovered. There is a study programme of urban geography. There have been public conferences dealing with the urbanism of Ljubljana. The last one only two weeks ago: Ljubljana, urban space and older people's aspirations.

Meta Kutin devised a new programme and a new study circle. Buildings, streets and squares around us. The programme is being shaped, and this has always been the case at this university, due to her enthusiasm, her knowledge and her will to study and research shared with her older students and supported by her students.

Finally, it was impossible to predict at the very beginning that Meta's knowledge and the growing knowledge of her students will get reshaped so



soon in a European project Personal town tours. A project supported by European Commission and its Lifelong Learning Programme.

Meta Kutin with her students Dušanka, Nada, Ana, Mateja, Andrej, Lijana, Vida, Ivica took a step forward and this is how its fresh new publication Meta will be introducing today and Vida's exhibition of her photos of Ljubljana were born.

Above all, you will, through these days have the privilege to be guided through the town by »new born« and enthusiastic guides, your colleagues.

### **Literature and references**

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