

AEJM, Museum Education Seminar 2015 in Vienna

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How the seminar is relevant for your educational work at the museum

This year I attended the AEJM Seminar for the first time. It took place in Vienna and lasted about a week – quite a long time to spend with people who do similar work in similar institutions. I've never had such an experience before, so I was very excited to see who educators from different countries are and what their attitude toward their work is – what ideas, inspirations, reflections the seminar would bring me. It's nearly as if I was preparing myself to look into the mirror – what would I see there?

First of all, I wasn't disappointed. The people I met were very interesting – each person had his or her own story and reason to be engaged in educational work. I felt very clearly that it was not by accident that they had chosen this work or mission. This feeling of being together with people who have similar passions and values was, for me, the most empowering aspect of the Seminar. During many formal but also informal situations we had the opportunity to share our experiences, hopes, and doubts.

I discovered that I work in a very big museum (POLIN Museum in Warsaw) and that thanks to this we have a lot of staff members, rooms for workshops, and a big, modern exhibition. A lot of smaller institutions struggle with lack of space, exhibition, workers, and money. But I also talked with people from bigger museums – like the museum in Berlin or London – and we had many common problems to discuss – how to organize our work, how to improve educational programs that are very developed, how to work in a big team of educators.

We also talked about the cultural and social environment that influences our work. For example educators in Germany or in Great Britain told us that they have many Muslim visitors and consequently when they speak about Judaism they relate it not only to Christianity but also to Islam – which is very different from the situation in Poland. Also the political situation connected to the refugee crisis influences our work, which we discussed a lot. In fact, when I think now about the Seminar I remember it as a sequence of meetings and discussions!

This does not mean that the program of the Seminar itself was not interesting or valuable! It was – first of all it was incredibly varied. Each day we had a different type of activity – one day we could spend time in the Stadttempel (synagogue of Vienna) talking about the modern Jewish community in Vienna, another day we could stay inside the Jewish Museum Vienna inventing our own concepts for educational workshops for youth, and the next day we could go on a walking tour of Bratislava. The program gave me a lot of educational inspirations. For example, I discovered the way Hannah Landsmann and Dan Fischman work in the Jewish Museum Vienna with objects in the exhibition: I loved the idea of using hand puppets of well-known persons like Sigmund Freud or Marilyn Monroe (Which object in the exhibition would Freud like the most...?), and of giving children a lot of freedom, focusing on what is most interesting for them. I remember also our dynamic discussion about using Judaica objects like tallit or the Torah itself during workshops about Jewish culture: is it appropriate to use in education a religious object that should be treated with great respect? I also felt very inspired by the workshop in the Essl Museum – Contemporary Art where we got to know artistic methods for working with objects: using intuition, associations, connections of ideas and images. It strengthened my belief that using artistic methods in museum education can have a very powerful effect. The Seminar was organized meticulously, everything went as planned which brought us great comfort.



I am sure the Seminar was an important step in my educational development and I feel that it has an influence on my work and the way I perceive what I do. I could feel that my work is a part of a bigger whole – that my museum is one of many Jewish museums in which people are engaged in building a more open society and bringing back the memory of those who perished in the Shoah. This consciousness supports my educational efforts and gives me hope that we can accomplish something...