

Report London Study Visit // Accessibility & Inclusivity // Maria Popielawska

For some time already I was referring to British society as an example of a well-established accessibility approach. Therefore, the AEJM Study Visit to London's cultural institutions was very much anticipated. Access for all and inclusion-thinking is still a fresh, but dynamically developing topic in Polish context. The programme of the visit was giving me the opportunity to deepen my knowledge and compare my experience with actors, who are doing it for much longer.

The programme included an impressive range of institutions and projects, focused on inclusivity and accessibility, and a few more dedicated for participants with disabilities. Our planning ensured that we could learn from the biggest and more chambers institutions. My institution POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a complex organization, with about 150 employees and over 1 million visitors of our main exhibition since the opening 3 years ago. Therefore, having the opportunity to go behind the scenes of accessibility strategy in the Science Museum or the V&A was something that I could refer to.

For sure, the very worthwhile aspects of the visit were meetings with other access officers. I realized that despite that the specialization exists for some time already, there is always a need for finding an individual way to incorporate the perspective of accessibility in a framework of each institution. Personally, this experience proved me that this is the work that I want to continue to do and gave me a real support in sometimes challenging task to make everyone feel really welcomed in my museum. I continue to be deeply inspired by the people I have met, and thankful for their openness and readiness to share knowledge and answer endless questions.

I will definitely keep in mind example of educational team of Jewish Museum London. I am impressed that each team member feels responsible and remains engaged in ensuring inclusivity of her/his project. I believe this is the approach that we all should have in mind. The real inclusion should be present at every level, and not limited to separated projects.

When I am being asked "where to start", I share the experience learnt at Shakespeare's Globe, and the example of "Relaxed performances". This already existing project was tailored to be accessible for wider range of visitors, including participants suffering from dementia and proves that we can start with what we have already "on the table", and build based on that.

While sharing experience and know-how from the visit with my colleagues at home, I realized that there is a deep interest in the topic. This inspired me to hold a presentation for my education department team on "Accessibility and Inclusion – how to do it? Observations from educational workshop in London". The know-how was so relevant, that I was offered the opportunity to share my experience and thoughts on accessibility and inclusiveness for the whole team of the museum.

I find the AEJM study visit deeply inspiring and relevant for the role of the museums of the 21st century have to play. During a stirring speech Ms Sharon Heal, the Director of the Museum Association, outlined that we all have an important role to play in facing the discrimination of persons with disabilities and to set standards in accessible and inclusive societies. I am definitely on board.

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