

ADVANCED CURATORIAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

PARTICIPANT'S REPORT

On March 1st 2016, one of the latest project from Medias Synagogue and Archives, “The Stories of Tapestries and Books: Exploring the Past through Heritage Objects”, has begun. At the recommendation of Rothschild Foundation that the project manager should participate in the Advanced Curatorial Educational Program organized by the Association of European Jewish Museum, which took place in Southern Germany and Vorarlberg, Austria, in the week of April 17th to 21st, 2016, I joined a group of 15 professionals from various museums across Europe. Although the Medias Synagogue and Archive is not yet a museum, it was estimated that my presence at this program would be beneficial for the project and for future steps towards establishing a museum at this location.

Throughout this program, we had the chance to visit and learn from various museums and synagogues across the South of Germany and the Vorarlberg region of Austria. We were presented with a wide variety of approaches, which allowed me and my fellow participants to understand that no single solution works for all situations and that we need to first understand the circumstances of a particular location and then find a suitable approach that would bring out the most of that situation.

I found it especially useful to have visited various locations away from major urban setting, which is also the case at the Medias Synagogue and Archive. A lot of these locations were (and some still are) in villages and small towns, where the Jewish community was once thriving. At the moment, the buildings that were previously used by the Jewish population as synagogues, prayer houses or even homes, are maintained by the municipality and serve as Jewish museums.

The variety of approaches that we witnessed was staggering. For instance, the curators and managers of the synagogue of Memmelsdorf chose to keep the walls and floor of the synagogue untouched, to show the passage of time and the many layers of interventions that followed the years in which the synagogue was used for prayers. As if to counterbalance this lack of restoration, the educational section is very modern and exciting. Visitors are drawn into an almost detective-like “game” of discovering the layers of the building, while learning about the Jewish history and traditions.

In Binswangen, at the other end of the spectrum, the synagogue was so wonderfully restored, it looked almost untouched by time and history. The building is now used as a cultural center by the municipality and it hosts numerous concerts, exhibitions and other cultural events in the region. Although it was wonderful to see such a beautiful building

being restored to its original grandeur, our group agreed that a perfect restoration job is not necessarily good for the educational and social aspect, because it hides the “scars” of the past and the questions that they arise in the visitors.

The wealth of ideas and solutions that I have gathered from all these locations is immense. I have collected numerous notes and photographs that will later help me and my team recreate some of the solutions that caught my eye along the way.

The other aspect of my participation, which will prove invaluable in the years to come, is the connection with other professionals. These are wonderful and passionate people, who are not only skilled curators, but also kind and generous people. The network of professionals, enabled by the AEJM online forum, is a great tool for testing new ideas and for learning, long after the program is over.

This trip enabled me to recognize that the archive and the objects found in the Medias Synagogue constitute a valuable collection, the basis of a rich and varied permanent exhibition in the future museum, but also a constant source for temporary exhibitions, on various topics. As in many of the locations we have visited throughout this trip, the building of the synagogue itself represents an important part of the museum, with its own story and potential.

The curatorial program had a great impact on the future museum from the Medias Synagogue and Archive and I feel very fortunate to be able to contribute to the high professional level of our institution.

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