

Report Museum Education Study Visit Riga // Museums and local communities

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I was more than happy, when I saw the programme of this year's AEJM study visit, that led me and my fellow colleagues from other European Jewish museums to Riga. As the new head of education at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt I attended the Study Visit program for the first time and was curious and exited to both get to know other colleagues from abroad and find out more about new concepts of community engagement beyond common methods of education. After having tried out new ways of engaging with our visitors at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt in course of our Pop Up museum projects, where participatory displays were developed and visitor feedback was included into the further development of our permanent exhibition, I was looking forward to three days of learning about and discussing different approaches and outcomes of community engagement.

After a thorough and very informative introduction to Riga's rich Jewish history and a passionate tour at the Žanis Lipke Memorial on day one, it became clear during the informal, cooperative exchanges that engaging with a local community can take different forms: From being accepted as a place of cultural and political education in the first place to shaping access to young visitors with low-threshold educational programs.

Great examples of how such programs can evolve were presented on day two at the Lativan National Museum. Ewa Chomicka, leader of the Museum Practice Lab at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews talked about *A Recipe for Muranów* and ways to shape access to the museum, when being faced with reservations by the surrounding neighborhood. She described POLIN's different outreach programs to get to know and understand its neighbors better, aiming at the fact that the development of a genuine co-creative partnership is a long-term process that needs trust, funding an (wo)manpower.

The investment of time and dedication it takes to conduct a co-creative educational project was also made clear by Lisa Shames, educator at the Jewish Museum London, who presented the *My Faith and Me* project, which invited young people of different religious backgrounds to reflect artistically upon their religiosity in their daily lives. The participants were asked to take photographs, which were later displayed at the Jewish Museum London. During her presentation, it was made clear that when conducting co-creative projects like ones in London or Warsaw, the whole museum staff, from curators to educators and archivists, need to be on board and share a certain attitude and understanding of what the museum wants to be in the future.

After the inspirational presentations and follow-up talks, I started wondering about the sustainability of our approaches to engage with audiences and the requirements it takes to build long-term partnerships with new communities. When proceeding with this approach, which I think is the right thing to do for a Jewish museum in order to be an accessible place of exchange and mutual learning, we, as educators, will need to promote a new understanding of exhibiting in our museums in order to shape an infrastructure with actual spaces - as de- or pre-scribed by Nina Simon - for co-creative projects and expanding our staff, so that we can engage with more than one community at a time.

The awareness for certain tools, methods and frameworks to further develop existing concepts of co-creative programs is what I took with me to the Jewish Museum Frankfurt. Participating at the AEJM Study Visit was inspiring and motivating and a great opportunity to get to know a network of aspiring and creative colleagues from all over Europe.