

Final Report

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It was indeed an astounding moment for me when I received my acceptance for attending the Museum Association Conference (MAC) 2019 at Brighton. Being an alumnus of the British Museum's ITP and seeing many of my former ITP colleagues added to this feeling of elation. For a museum professional and student of history, the allure of the city of Brighton is bolstered by its numerous well-preserved heritage sites. As someone coming from South Asia, the Indo-Saracenic architecture of the Royal Pavilion was of particular interest to me.

The five other ITP colleagues with me were Roshan Mishra (Nepal), Astghik Marabyan (Armenia), Xuejing Dai (China), Wesam Mohamed (Egypt) and Zulkifli Ishak (Malaysia). This diverse mosaic of nationalities with their own sets of ideas and experiences was a major factor in turning this visit into a stimulating and memorable one. In addition, it was a wonderful opportunity to interact with and learn from some of the most acclaimed academicians and museum professionals from across Europe.

The diversity of people and ideas in the conference can be gauged from the multifaceted nature of its themes. Thought-provoking debates and discussions ensued on topics such as decolonisation, environment and climate change, sustainability in museums, the question of gender in museum studies and of course, inclusivity and decentralisation in the museum discourse. The conference made a laudable effort towards deliberating on capacity building for co-curation, global partnerships, sharing of responsibilities, mentoring and developing effective networks in the field of museum studies. This was a very visible hint towards a paradigm shift of museums from objects to individuals.



The Keynote of the conference was delivered by **Maggie Appleton**, President of the Museum Association. She reflected upon the Museum Association's role in envisioning a hopeful future for the museum sector. **Clayton Thomas Muller**, the other keynote speaker, emphasised sustainability for museums and the need for global partnerships of community-led renewable resources and energy. A noteworthy moment from the conference was the **Museums Change Lives Awards**. This was a commendable initiative to appreciate and encourage museums making positive strides in their approach and outreach.

I am involved with a museum in Assam, a frontier province of India towards its north-east. My region is not yet closely connected to the fresh conversations and themes in the museum and heritage sector. MAC being one of the biggest museum events allowed me to immerse in the myriad new forms of dialogues and exchange of ideas in the sector. The conference was instrumental in bringing out representation from the global south to a larger international collaboration for the future of museums. MAC's emphasis on holistic strategies, capacity building, research methodologies and pedagogies will be vital for building a museum partnership much more global in nature.

MAC was a crucial opportunity for me and my museum (Assam State Museum) to experience the best practices in heritage management, and later transform these learnings into action. The conference was an eye-opener for me in acquainting myself with how academic engagement can be a way to identify and grapple with the challenges of the contemporary museums encounter. I'm positive that this will inspire me to work towards creating a similar network of academicians, policy makers and heritage professionals in my country to initiate conversations about museums.

Assam State Museum is coming up with its first ever Natural History Gallery. As someone in charge of its conceptualisation, I am now inspired to incorporate themes of environment and climate into the gallery space after attending MAC. In addition, we also plan to adhere to an environment-friendly code of ethics with green design, eco-friendliness and sustainable methods of display. As for target audiences, we are focusing more on children and young adults. Environmental Studies is a required subject in India's school curriculum, and we are optimistic that our initiative will inculcate more conversations about the environment in classrooms and in public spaces.

In addition to the conference, our stay in Brighton also encompassed visiting some of the notable sites around the city. The lovely Anna Cottle helped us in exploring the streets of Brighton and its culinary delights. The most notable heritage sites we visited included the Weald and Downland Living Museum in West Sussex, and the Edwardian country retreat of Polesden Lacey. I would like to express my gratitude to Lucy Hockley (Weald and Downland) and Caroline Williams (National Trust) who took us around the museums and guided us in navigating the history and importance of the collection. Julian Bell, the curator of Weald and Downland, also arranged for us to have a glimpse of the reserve collection of the museum for which I remain thankful.



The stay in Brighton also allowed me to reconnect with many friends and former colleagues. In the conference, I came across Hannah Crowdy from Ulster Museum and we talked at length about our first meeting in Belfast. It was a pleasure to reconnect with Daniela de Simone, Curator of Asia Department at the British Museum, and Claire Messenger, Manager of the ITP. They are the people who introduced me to the ITP network, and without them I would not have received this opportunity and exposure. For this I remain in their debt. Last but definitely not the least; I thank John Williams, Chief Photographer, British Museum, for the amazing photos of our visit.



I have always believed in learning opportunities, regardless of when and where they appear. No matter how experienced one is, we constantly need to learn and unlearn throughout our lives. Exposure to new ideas and learning from our peers enables us to inculcate the best practices in our field of work. This has the potential to keep our work and our commitments forward-looking and optimistic. The importance of MAC lies in strengthening these human connections and knowledge networks, not only for our personal betterment, but also for a collective future goodwill for our planet. So finally, I extend my gratitude to **Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust** for generously providing the financial support for attending this conference. This entire endeavour would not have been possible without their assistance.