

ITP Conference Grant Awarded to Ioan Oprea (Romania, ITP 2019): Muze.X Shaping Museum Futures, International Conference, 18-20 October 2021, Valletta, Malta

We are very happy to announce that we were able to award an ITP Conference Grant to Ioan Oprea, Conservator at National Museum of the Union Alba Iulia, Romania and ITP 2019 Fellow. Ioan was awarded a grant to support his attendance at Muze.X Shaping Museum Futures, an international conference held in Valletta, Malta.

Ioan has returned from the conference and has written a blog to share his experience of the event. A report on Ioan's conference grant will be shared soon!

Written by Ioan Oprea, Conservator, National Museum of the Union Alba Iulia (Romania, ITP 2019)

Malta has many wonders and many can be included among the most amazing in the world; even the translation of the name suggests it's rich past and heritage, but in a metaphorical way. It was baptised by the Romans with the term *melite*, meaning "honey", the islands were rich in wild honey and it was associated with the sweet of honey by the sea people who, in time of crisis or simply while crossing the Mediterranean Sea, had the vital chance to take shelter in the island's ports, to repair their ships, take supplies and start again their road. Due to its strategic position, Malta inspired many legends and created many stories over the centuries, but these lines are about my story and my participation to Muze.X Shaping Museum Futures international conference.



View from daily conference road by ferry, from Saint Julien's to Valleta

I had the amazing opportunity to be in the 2019's ITP team and since then I tried to follow the group's posts and news regularly; it was among the news shared by Claire, where I've seen the announce of an international conference in Valletta, and despite so many Covid restrictions, I decided to apply for a participation grant and travel to Malta for this event. I am very grateful to the ITP for the accepted application and for the chance to be again, physically, among museum people for an international event. Nearly two years since Covid started, the new reality is sometimes like a shaded bad dream and this chance to be again (nearly) like in the normal times, was just pure oxygen.



Conference opening on the second day

The MuzeX. Shaping Museum Futures took place between 18-20 of October in Malta's emblematical capital, Valletta. The event was organised by the Malta University and very well received by the Maltese institutions. I must mention that I was very nicely surprised by the president of Malta, George Vella, who was present at the official opening on Monday evening and held a speech for the participants and for all those concerned by the future of museums and their role in the modern society.



His excellency, George Vella, President of the Republic of Malta

In the next two days that followed, the conference was a psychical and virtual hybrid, it accepted both types of registrations and presentations on site and on-line and in this context, I can say it became one of the most “global” events in which I took place, gathering participants from several European countries, but also from other continents like the Americas and Asia, presenting more than 50 research themes and projects. I like to believe the themes proposed by the organisers were the “bait” which concerned and attracted people from so many corners of the planet and personally, I wanted to be there because of the same reasons and interests. If themes like the role of the museum is something that I heard, discuss before, I didn’t had the chance to hear and participate in workshops dedicated to the climate changes and measures to stop or reduce the dangerous effects. Museums must form an international stand against climate change effects and inform people about the critical direction in which our world is heading fast.



Plenary discussions

The conference's presentations and themes were enforced and introduced by five keynote speakers who also tried to offer a general view of the present museum's situation and interconnect the participants' themes. In the conference opening, Riel Miller, Head of Futures Literacy (UNESCO) was the main keynote speaker and he was followed in the next days by Jette Sandahl (European Museum Forum), Diana Drubay ("We Are Museums"), Fabio Viola (museum gamification experience developer) and Mike Murawski (#museumarenotneutral campaign). It was useful to see different visions and presentations of solutions to make the museums more effective in modern society, more accessible and open to new trends in the world. Seeing so many participants talking about these subjects, made me think that democratisation of museums, climate change actions and futures of museums are now among the trends in the world, but also that these themes must be very carefully approached, in specially democratisation of museums.

As historical points in our societies, we must remember they are here to complete our knowledges and save us from error that can be prevented by simply learning from the

past. Many have also seen the futures of museums in a digital world, but the beauty of museum is in the classical shape where the artefact is exposed and waiting to tell it's "odyssey"; digitalisation for visitors, in my personal opinion, is just an invitation in the physical museum when the situation allows is (after we get rid of Covid, for example).

I enjoyed listening so many different points of view in this event, diversity is a beauty that mortals and gods share alike – as the ancients Greeks use to say – and the most effective way to learn. I am sure these topics will be carefully approached in the future and hopefully, much sooner implemented.



Short break during the session, University of Malta – a beautiful 16th century building)

I left Malta having these ideas in my mind, but not before I revisit some of its nicest places. The Maltese islands have a special place in my mind and with many memories.

My first time here was in 2012, as an Erasmus student with an archaeological scholarship in Mosta for two months, two weeks at the Malta Superintendence in Valletta and two weeks in a field survey in Gozo. In the last years, I also ‘conducted’ two Roman missions in Ghajnsielem (Gozo’s main port), visiting some Roman friends right before their events near Christmas in 2017 and 2018. While in Malta, it’s not allowed to skip Mdina, Malta’s best place with a fantastic view of the land and sea in the same frame. It’s also called “The silent city”, but if you pay attention, all those yellowish-white stone buildings just can’t wait to tell you their stories. While visiting, revisiting, you must try some of the local flavours and tastes: pastizzi and kinnie; they will not be forgotten.



The Mosta's dome is the second largest in Europe and a must see if you travel here



Rotunda of Mosta, view from inside

I particularly like when an event combines professional work with visits and local experiences (or may be is just my visual memory that holds the information like this). The Muže.X Shapping Museum Futures was a great event and I am very grateful for this opportunity provided by the British Museum International Training Programme and for the provided support of Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.

Nawguralkom l-aħjar! (*Maltese* “All the best!”)



Mdina fort, the main entrance in the fort and city can be seen in the right side



Maltese tastes: pastizzi and kinnie



*Taken in the last day
with Prof. Sandro Debono and Prof. Carmel Borg, main organisers of the event*

In the past, the ITP has supported fellows from Zimbabwe, Egypt, India, Uganda and Armenia to attend or speak at conferences or carry out research and we would like to extend this offer to the entire network through open application, for conferences and professional research. Due to a very positive response this year, we are extending the budget for this legacy project. Each fellow can apply for up to 60% of the costs incurred by attending the conference or carrying out their research – up to a maximum of £1000. You can read more about the grants [here](#).