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ITP 2022, Report

Armenia, Yerevan

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This year I had the opportunity to participate in the British Museum’s International Training Programme.

The 4-week programme was quite full of exchanges of professional experience, the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, to study and get acquainted with the museums and museology of the UK.

I am a museologist by profession; hence this programme was vital and fundamental for me.

During the programme, the British Museum and cooperating museums shared their great experience, also the professional experience of our group participants was shared as well, which was important.

The course provided an opportunity to present our country, our museums and research institutes where we work. We tried to find connections between the British Museum and the participants' museums thus increasing the scope of cooperation.

Before the visit, I felt that I particularly wanted to get acquainted with the popularization approaches and tools implemented at the British Museum, the organization of exhibitions and the work carried out with visitors, and the accessibility of visitors with physical and mental problems. During the course, I was greatly impressed by the detailed approach to the organization of exhibitions, the presence of platforms of interest to each target group, the availability of explanatory materials and the use of marketing tools.

ITP was an important training opportunity for my institute and especially to me during my participation. After COVID 2019 it was important to get acquainted with the new trends in museology and especially the new challenges facing the British Museum after the lockdown.

My institute was originally founded as a research center for ancient manuscripts, but for about 10 years it has also assumed the status of a museum, so it has the task of organizing professional exhibitions and being accessible to all target groups.

I am the head of the public relations department, but at the same time I am involved in the organizational group for exhibitions and the implementation of educational programmes. The new experience that I got during the ITP programme, I am going to share in the implementation of the work of the relevant departments. During my days in London, a new exhibition was opened at my institution and as I was part of the organizational group, I took part in the discussions

online, and already every day, gaining the experience from the British Museum, I tried to use the exhibition approaches from the perspective of the new knowledge.

I will write a report, which will be shared with colleagues from the scientific and museum departments. I will present the experience I have gained and come up with proposals that will be implemented in 2023. I will begin to implement this particularly in these areas:

- PR
- Exhibitions
- Educational programs
- Accessibility of disabled visitors

The complex knowledge I acquired was important for my institute. I am also going to share the contacts that I made in the UK and cooperate with these specialists, whose collections are related to ours, in the future having joint research, exhibitions, and cooperation of restoration departments.

I plan to share all the ideas that I will implement in my museum, as well as my professional experience, with my partner museums, particularly in the regions of Armenia, because the problems they experience are bigger.

During museum experiences, I had a chance to visit the British Library and the partner museums in Northern Ireland. During my visit to the special book depository of the Queen's University Library, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, I shared my thoughts with specialists about various issues related to library work, about the Armenian collections in these institutions, manuscripts and books that are exhibited. We also discussed about the individuality, difficulties and challenges, and questions related to conservation and paper restoration. I presented my institute and we exchanged thoughts on prospective cooperation, which is crucial for my institute, both for exhibition cooperation and restoration works, particularly in connection with Armenian manuscripts and ancient books.

The participation also helped me to carry out my research work. I am studying the topic "Armenian Trajectory of Coffee Culture" and I am a PHD student at Matenadaran. Due to the study of the topic, I had the opportunity to have a tour by the curator of the "Life in a cup: coffee culture in the Islamic world" display, Zeina Klink-Hoppe. I received new information about coffee culture and Armenians. I also had the opportunity to be in the storage areas, where I was able to see various samples related to my topic, Zeina and I discussed various questions about the topic, as a result of which we exchanged different ideas, which will contribute to both mine and Zeina's research interests.

The visit to the partner museums was also very important. I was given the opportunity to do this in Northern Ireland, where I went to the museum in Cultra and met with senior staff. During the meeting, partner museum specialists presented their responsibilities and I also had a chance to present on Armenia, my institute and my research. With the partner rep of National Museums

Northern Ireland, Louise Smyth, our group had a nice meeting at the Ulster museum and a tour of the open air museum. I was impressed with the ways of their organization and by the work they do with visitors, especially in the field of sociological research and work with volunteers. In the museums of my country, we have a problem with the integration of volunteers. With the experience I gained from the British Museum and Northern Ireland museums, I plan to carry out an experiment relating to this in my institute. Soon, I am going to announce the involvement of volunteer groups in educational programmes.

The slow progress of the planned steps that I want to realize is usually caused by limited finances and sometimes a lack of specialists. For example, in Armenia we have a great shortage of museum exhibition curators and marketers. Another obstacle can be the foreign policy in our country and the dangers of war.

During my one month stay in the UK, due to the programme, I had the opportunity to see a number of museums, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Ashmolean, National Gallery, Tate Modern, the Design Museum and the Museum of the Home. I got to know London's architecture masterpieces, and visited a number of other cities, such as Cambridge and Oxford. It was especially interesting to see Stonehenge, because in my country we also have such an excavation site. The Stonehenge visit helped me to learn about the history of sightseeing.

I am very happy that from now on I am a part of the ITP global network, where I will be able to share the important cultural news of my country and my institute and my professional achievements. I will try to participate in further training courses announced by ITP. I will try to keep in touch with both the experts and the participants of my group.

My greatest thanks to the supporters of the ITP programme and my individual sponsor, the Lambert Fellowship, for this opportunity.

My special thanks to organizers Claire Messenger, Anna Cottle, George Peckham and Senior Fellow Roshan Mishra. With organizers, sponsor and supporters help, I became a member of the ITP family, gained new knowledge, established new connections with various museums of the world and had the opportunity to get to know the UK.