

ITP 2019 Final Report
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There are those experiences that can affect and change one's perspective in life. These experiences can motivate us or reveal some aspect that we have never seen before. And when all this occurs at the right time in a certain path, the effect becomes stronger. My ITP experience was an experience like that. In addition to the programme occurring at a very good time for the new museum project that I am working on, it came also at a perfect time for my personal career and life. I have experienced things that encouraged and motivated me to add and change so many new aspects in my career, and also to my personal life plans. This is a very rare opportunity and I am grateful I had it.

I have been appointed recently to manage a new private museum project at my city, Basra, in the south of Iraq. I was very excited at first to start working on the early vision of the museum, but then I thought how it is challenging to start a museum from scratch. Although it is encouraging to start like this as you will make sure to hire all the right tools and systems in setting your museum. But then it is also a very hard job; a whole new museum on a topic that was rarely covered in a museum aspect. 'Iraq's Modern History Museum,' this is our museum title. There are obviously so many histories to cover on very sensitive events, and it is a topic which is not usually seen in Iraq's museums. Mostly Iraq's museums, which are not too many, would cover the great history of Mesopotamia and other significant periods like Islamic culture. Iraq's history in general is very hard to narrate; in addition to the country's history of wars and struggle, the country has been the home for many successive civilisations. All have created their own stories that should be told through places like museums. Bearing that difficulty in mind, I thought the best way at this stage was to equip myself with the right knowledge. A knowledge that is not only a theoretical, but also a practical one, that would give me the right tools and techniques to apply. Speaking of such a difficulty, a friend of mine suggested the ITP. She told me that would be the perfect source of such a combined knowledge to get, and she was absolutely right.

And so I joined the 2019 ITP. The first thing to highlight about this programme is the friendly atmosphere it has. I have felt from day one the harmony we have as a group. The ITP participants are great people, we had a very good learning and fun times together and eventually at the end, we felt like we are a family! One would say that maybe the fact that we are all coming from a similar professional background is the reason why we became like this; like having a base of things in common to speak about. However, that was not the only reason. I've been to international programmes before, but they haven't had the same friendship experience as the ITP. I was trying to figure out what is it that created such a lovely atmosphere and I think it is the nature of the ITP programme and schedule. The integration of the activities with the classes has helped a lot to build such a friendship. The programme schedule was

designed in a very good way to incorporate theoretical lecture slides with group work assignments, gallery assignments, other museums tours and fun trips to different sites and cities. These aspects of the programme were integrated in a precise balance that there was, all the time, something exciting and interesting happening. That friendly atmosphere was enriched by the knowledge each one was bringing to the group. Although we were coming from a similar professional background, each one of us had a different work style, institution, and working experience. Also, being from different countries and cultures added to the gained learning package. There was so much to learn and to know.



Image 1: While me and my colleague Nyaz from Kurdistan-Iraq got our ITP colleagues to an Iraqi restaurant. We had to make them try our Iraqi delicious food.

What I have loved about the ITP schedule is that it covered all aspects of museum work. Each day we were learning something different, meeting new department staff, and getting to know their own work and experience. And as the participants were coming from different roles, this helped to acquire an overall comprehensive view on everything. For them maybe, the value of this learning experience, when covering an aspect that they don't work with, is either to compare their own institution specific work with the one of the British Museum for the sake of improvement, or to learn new things for their own comprehensive knowledge. For me, it was a different experience; the reason is that I am working on this new museum where everything is established from zero, so every single bit of information was very important and valuable. For

instance, it was great to know all about the re-opening of the Islamic World Gallery. We were able to have classes on the very beginning of the re-establishment of the gallery, the designing, the presentation, deciding on the themes, deciding on the collections, the management and the execution of the plan, the technical side, the marketing, and the vision behind the whole project until the opening of the gallery again. That was by itself a whole training programme!

There was also this feeling of being 'behind the scenes' of an institution like the British Museum. We had the opportunity to see how this museum is managed, worked and organised, and to meet and learn from the team behind that. That was such a great aspect of the ITP. But then, when thinking of the size and type of the BM visitors compared to our local museums, visitors would raise a different experience of comprehension. I have found it interesting to do so; to learn from a big institution like the BM, and then adjust the learned tools and techniques to suit my institution and meet these different expectations. This type of learning experience, that juxtaposes two different institutions flourished all the more by having the actual chance to learn from a smaller and more local museum during the partner museum 10 days programme. Mine, which was at the National Museums North Ireland, was very effective for many reasons. Being in a smaller museum has helped to put the theoretical combined knowledge into a real scenario. Managing a smaller museum can bring its own challenges. What was mainly interesting for me was the challenge of how to keep the same people coming in to the museum. The challenge of inviting the visitors, who are mostly locals, to come to the museum to see something new and different - I found that very helpful to learn and to use in our future museum, as most visitors would be locals as well.

Another aspect that made Belfast's experience very helpful was to see and learn about the creation of "The Troubles Gallery". Knowing about how the curators handled such a sensitive topic and put it in a museum context was great to learn. Iraq's modern history have so many sensitive events and histories that we will be covering in our museum. Learning on this gave me a certain vision on how we would do that. Besides, it was beautiful to see another part of the UK and meet new people. People in Belfast were so friendly and welcoming. The museum team were great; and Louise was like a friend to us from day one. We have shared together so many lovely times, walks, meals, and laughs. She has done a great job in managing our training and to introduce her city, culture, and history to us. In addition to the museum knowledge, I have learned so much of a new culture, learned how to say some words in an Irish accent (something that I kept on showing it off when back to London, and I still do at home), and of course learned about the '15s', such a delicious sweet!

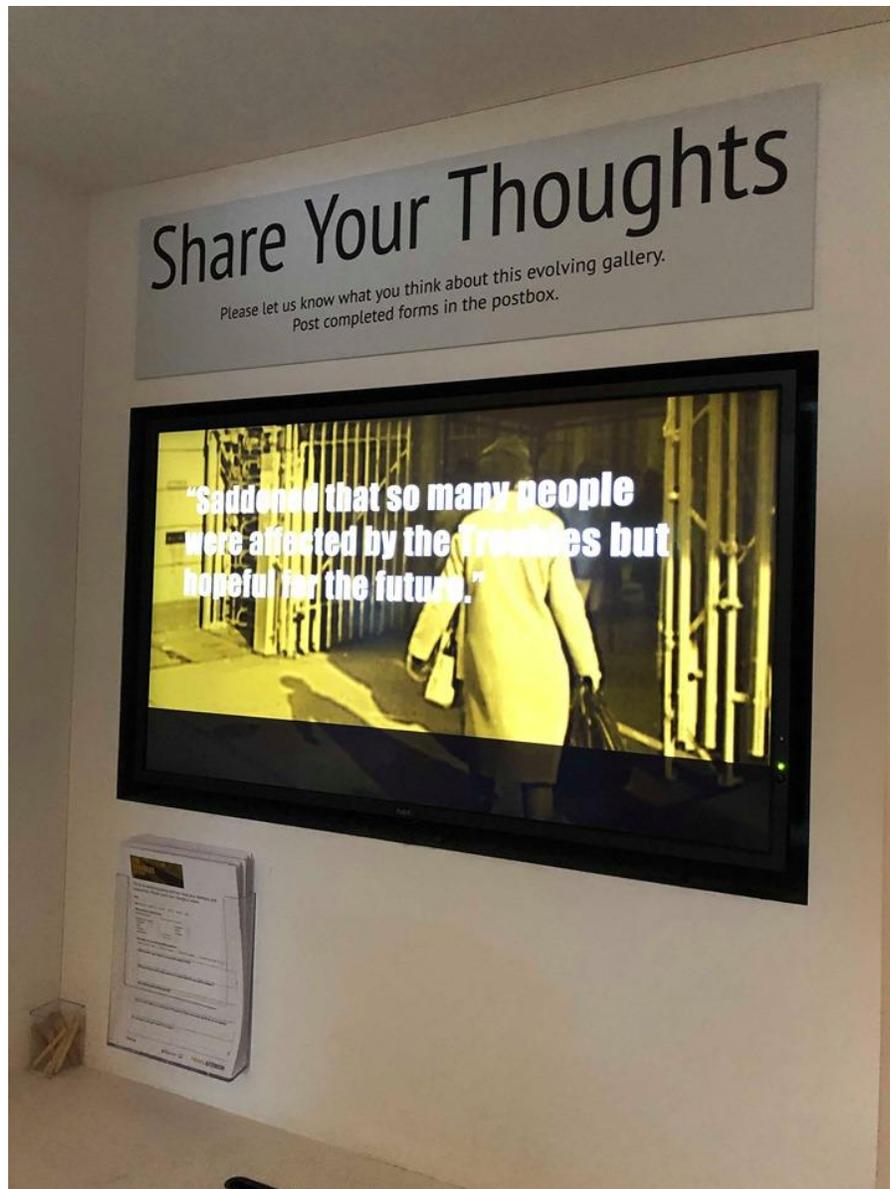


Image 2: A corner at the “Troubles Gallery” at the Ulster Museum in Belfast where the gallery team have put this sign for visitors as an encouragement for their own participation in the gallery. A technique I loved. It was not a feedback form but rather an invitation for their involvement; such a clever technique in a sensitive topic of a gallery like that!

It happened that I was not feeling well before joining the ITP, I had some health problems, and I had my doubts if I am going to fit into the programme and do my best. Then I did join, and it turned out to be the best learning experience I have ever had. Everything was perfect, from the programme schedule, to the ITP participants, to the ITP team. Claire Messenger and her team were such great people, very professional and dedicated, and very friendly. Coming from a management background makes me notice how people manage their work, and I was able to see how they all cared about each and every detail that made the programme go so smoothly. In addition to having our experience in its best form, this had also taught me many things to my

personal work experience. I have also learned so much from the Middle East Department team. They were great in sharing their own knowledge, teaching us about their work and plans. I spent such an amazing time with ME department team, and in seeing so many objects from Mesopotamia. We had so many interesting discussions and insights into possible collaborations with Iraq institutions and individuals or with our projects.

The ITP came at a perfect time both in the museum timeline and in my personal career. I am motivated now to work on the museum project and other related projects that were evoked during my time on the ITP. I have changed some perspectives within my own personal career plan. There were things that I experienced that have opened my eyes to new ideas. It was a significant experience and I am grateful to everyone who helped in that.

I would like to thank the Mosawi Foundation for their support and partnership with the BM. Contributions like this can have an enormous effect in this context. One participant in such a programme can have an effect on so many individuals when using her/his new learned experience. So thank you again and I wish you will continue this support and being part of such a powerful effect.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Claire, George, Emily and Mohamed, you have made our ITP experience a great one. Thanks!

Tamara Alattiya



Image 3: Final ITP reception group photo.