

Heritage Alliance Travel Grant: Post-Trip Report

Part 1:

Organisation: Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature

Name: Jim Hall

Job title: Programme Manager

Country travelled to: Spain

Specific region or cities travelled to: Granada

Organisation(s) visited: Granada UNESCO City of Literature

Dates of visit: 09 / 05 / 19 - 14 / 05 / 19

Part 2:

1. Original purpose of the visit:

The purpose of my visit was to engage with any past and present heritage projects that would enhance my own approach to heritage work, thus influencing the projects I currently run as Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature's programme manager. New to my role, I equally hoped to connect with the Granada UNESCO City of Literature team's practice and gain first-hand experience of the international scale of UNESCO's collaborative impact. As Nottingham's first ever guest of honour at the Granada book fair, this was also an opportunity to listen, observe and input myself throughout a wide-ranging series of events: from radical bookselling, to an exploration on the shared links between Granada and Nottingham's rebellious writers, thinkers and leaders.

I hoped to visit local book stores, libraries and cultural heritage venues to find out (with a focus on my own practice) if young people interact with those spaces and how, specifically regarding their engagement with literature and how historical influence can inform the work of today.

People, organisations, projects of relevance to your organisation/ project that you encountered during your visit:

I was welcomed by Granada UNESCO City of Literature programme manager Carmen Casares and executive director Jesús Ortega, who revealed their ambition for a project working with disadvantaged young people that will use known writing from wide-ranging time periods as prompts for new writing.

They gave me great insight into the history of the Granada City of Literature organisation, their role as the focal point and connector to heritage partners and initiatives. I attended an event 'Sense of Place' showcasing the prestige and historical respect of its literary heritage. This helped me to consider legacy on not just a local, but global level: of an event you produce, a project you present, a discussion around a table.

I met with the owners of numerous book stores and cultural venues. Highlights being the owner of Libreria Picasso Comics, who introduced me to a graphic novel reworking of the poems of Federico García Lorca and how that effectively encourages younger readers to understand how the work of the past resonates with the themes and issues of today, alongside a discussion with local poet Erika Martínez on how her focus on poetry in translation is more necessary than ever, as a means to understand one another's practice and reveal the complexity of what it means to truly connect with someone who is 'othered' by language.

2. Summary of the visit, including what went well and what was challenging:

The visit opened my eyes to the shared goals between cities with differing histories yet recurring themes within them. The potential of working with literature that holds a message that still resonates with contemporary audiences and can impact, despite the passing of time, was showcased in different ways, via a range of events and workshops during the week.

The week also featured a blend of visiting cultural sites (The Alhambra for example), attending and participating in events and meeting with poets, educators and organisers to share and exchange literary heritage project ideas and collaborative opportunity.

I made genuine professional connections with a wide-range of educators, speakers and advocates of the UNESCO mission and feel I now have a wider net of contacts who I can ask for support and advice from, as I devise my own future projects.

The challenges of the trip were balancing my time: exploring historical landmarks and sites of Granada (of which reference and provide great insight into the work of heritage educators and curators I wish the young people I work with to engage with), initiating meetings with relevant and available practitioners and supporting them to explore collaboration opportunities.

3. Experience and knowledge gained, with particular focus on how this experience and knowledge will benefit your organisation:

I have gained awareness of the importance of shared ideas and practical approaches to maximise the effect and legacy of a city, yet in ways that are relatable and encourage wide participation.

I feel more equipped to approach an organisation with a pitch for a heritage project, more capable of making key decisions around the shaping of such projects, than before I arrived in Granada.

For example, what specific poem of a specific writer of historical influence could be explored in relation to this contemporary theme and why does it matter that there is a link, something to bring up current conversation?

The value of the *root* of a story really struck me throughout my time in Granada: what prompts someone to want to talk about the place they have come from and how it relates to where they are now? As a literary educator, I gained so many potential areas to explore in my own creative writing workshops, and feel more well-rounded as a facilitator as to encouraging those conversations to happen in a space.

I will take all of this knowledge with me as I plan and devise future projects at my organisation.

4. Top tips for other heritage professionals working internationally, based on the learning gained during your visit:

I would suggest trying to balance the specific, planned individuals and/or places you aim to engage with, alongside the unplanned, 'spontaneous' encounters of the physical city, or environment, you find yourself in.

I feel I learned so much from walking unexpectedly into Liberia Picasso Comics and observing a teenager flipping through page after page of a graphic novel interpretation of the work of Lorca: this prompted a lengthy discussion with the owner as to why they felt the young people who come to their store *do* care about the work of the past. It just sometimes needs to be shown in a way that resonates with how it feels to be alive in the world today.

Be open to share the knowledge you have built up in your own practice and approach to it, but continue to ask questions of the research you carry out and seek new learning from unexpected places.

Also I feel it important to constantly be reminding oneself of the depth of the word 'heritage' and the ripple effects it can cause even today, in the attitudes and values one holds.

Being aware and acknowledging the whole spectrum of a place's history is something I have taken from this trip that will really stay within me.

5. What are the next steps you are going to take following the visit, and what resources/ support might you need in order to successfully realise your ideas?:

The most immediate steps will be to continue close dialogue with the Granada UNESCO City of Literature team to build on the relationships formed. Reflect on the collective and individual experience through documentation of the trip. (photo, video, personal journal notes) Follow-up links forged between, for me personally, local poets and educators from the city.

I wish to specifically support Jesús Ortega in his planning for the 'Do You Like Writing?' literary heritage project and offer advice and resources on recruitment and retainment of the participants he is seeking to be involved.

I will utilise the work of Lorca and other writes/poets encountered whilst in Granada in my sessions with young people and encourage them to engage with this work, documenting those creative responses to share with the people in Granada I connected with.

Resources required for these ideas to be realised would be structured time/scheduled sessions with Jesus' Ortega (via Skype / phone) and access to the texts discovered in Granada to use in the projects I am currently working on.

6. In one sentence, please summarise the impact the visit has had on your organisation and the organisation(s) you visited:

The visit has galvanised our mission of building a better world with words through international collaboration, during a time when this has never felt more vital to exchange ideas and build bridges.

7. In one sentence, please summarise the impact the visit has had on you personally:

After this visit, I feel confident to take the lead in devising future heritage projects with a global vision and have understood with more depth how powerfully the work of historical literature informing and interacting with that of the present can impact upon a project and its participants.

8. Quote from your Director / Trustee / senior staff member on the benefit and impact of your international visit on your organisation:

"Jim has returned from Granada having expanded his knowledge and ability to develop international partnerships and projects. The funding from Heritage Alliance has served as a catalyst for cultural dialogue and exploration of Granada's unique literary heritage. I am delighted with the outcomes of

Jim's trip and look forward to supporting a new project that will bring benefits to Nottingham's Young Ambassadors."

9. Following this international experience, how likely is it that your organisation will fund another international visit in the next 12 months from 1 to 5 (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely)?

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10. Will there be any follow up to this visit (e.g. jointly paper writing, online community building, future project applications, formal partnership formed, etc.)? (max. 150 words)

Yes. As previously mentioned, Granada UNESCO City of Literature director Jesus' Ortega and I began plotting a collaboration between young writers in Nottingham (who I work with) and the young writers of his future project, 'Do You Like Writing?'. We plan to invite participants to respond to the work of historically renowned literary figures and then share these responses in a Skype 'showcase' between Nottingham and Granada.

I have shared the resources and strategy of Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature's Young Ambassador programme and will offer support around ideas of recruitment and engagement with the young people Granada UNESCO City of Literature hope to engage.

We will exchange any collaborative project ideas and opportunities that arise following this visit, making sure to champion the respective work carried out in communities on our websites and social media platforms.