



Human Stories

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Polish artists with disabilities fight for recognition in the arts

[I am an artist](#) was a campaign commissioned by the British Council through the [Europe Beyond Access project](#), in collaboration with six professional disabled Polish artists. Under the claim 'I am not a curiosity', the initiative aimed at raising the visibility of artists with disabilities in Poland. Tatiana Cholewa, dancer, choreographer, and performer with alternate motor skills, had an advisory role and participated in the campaign.

For Tatiana, the I am an artist campaign was important because it raised the awareness of disabled artists and portrayed their positive images.

'I think it has given hope and encouraged others to enter the art world. It also showed that the "different body" can be a unique material to work with.'

The situation of disabled artists in Poland isn't ideal.

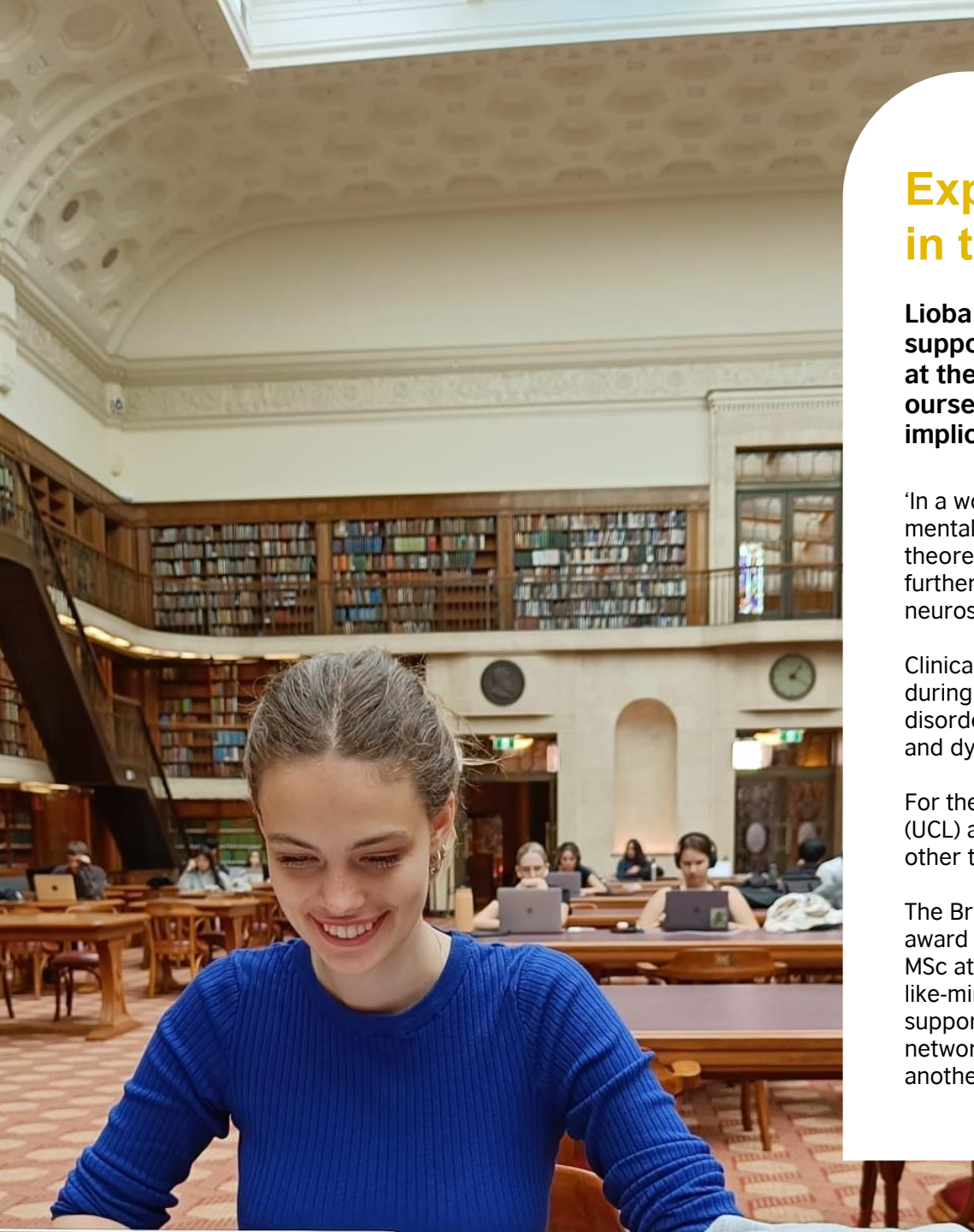
'There are still many challenges that we need to face. The conversations about the need of training art university staff to work with young disabled artists started. Art centres are trying to make their venues more accessible to everyone, and tentatively showing the work of disabled artists. But this is only the beginning.

Our campaign has broken the generally accepted norm of showing only 'perfect' artists' bodies. As a result of our work, society was able to raise awareness about us and our existence. The fact that the campaign featured artists who often go unnoticed, but have a large portfolio, is hugely significant.

No limitations have kept me from pursuing my passion. I think we face problems in every area of life, but they can't stop us. I believe it is crucial to develop every talent that's within us, even if circumstances are challenging.'

What advice do I have for people thinking of entering the art world?

'You need to believe in yourself. Do what will make you happy – it will help you overcome any barriers. Good luck!'



Exploring neuroscience and advocate mental health in today's everchanging society

Lioba Berndt is the winner of the [British Council IELTS Award](#) in Germany. The prize money supports Lioba financially during her first year of a master's degree in Clinical Neuroscience at the University College London (UCL). Neuroscience seeks to help us better understand ourselves and our consciousness. Studying the subject, Lioba wants to detect significant implications for the improvement of human health.

'In a world in which the pace of life is increasing, in which optimisation has become standard, supporting mental and physical health is fundamental. To the untrained eye, neuroscience might be considered theoretical and steps away from reality and any practical application. This assumption, however, could not be further from the truth. Neuroscience can be found in a wide range of daily situations. For instance, neuroscientific research outcomes are applied in businesses, schools and clinical treatments.

Clinical and translational neuroscience promote a healthy society, which has become increasingly urgent during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In recent decades, there has been growth in the diagnosis of neurological disorders, further emphasising the necessity of neuroscientific research about the underlying mechanisms and dysfunctions and possible treatment options.

For these reasons, I decided to pursue my MSc in Clinical Neuroscience at the University College London (UCL) and, thus, lay the basis for a career in translational clinical research to promote (mental) health, among other things, with my research.

The British Council has been assisting me in accomplishing this goal by awarding me the IELTS Award. This award has covered a substantial amount of my tuition fees, and I would not have been able to undertake my MSc at UCL without this support. In addition, the British Council has enabled me to interact and connect with like-minded individuals worldwide and participate in various additional projects. I am thankful for all the support and connections I have received and built by winning the IELTS Award 2022. If you are looking for a network of ambitious people who actively contribute to society and are considering studying in the UK or another country, I highly recommend applying for the IELTS Award.'



Building safer schools and a protective environment for children

Almudena Olaguibel Echeverría-Torres, Child Protection Officer at UNICEF, was always convinced that the Spanish Law for the Protection of Children from Violence (LOPIVI) was a crucial piece of legislation that required a lot of hard work and expertise. 'When we heard Sonja Uhlmann (Safeguarding Manager, British Council Spain) talking about her work at the organisation and the existing commitment to child protection, we knew that the British Council was the perfect partner for this journey', says Almudena.

The passing of the LOPIVI law in 2021 was a big milestone in Spain and spoke in favour of the rights of children and teenagers. UNICEF, British Council's partner in the country, has played a crucial role in promoting the law in Spain, alongside many other civil society organisations. According to Almudena, getting the law took some doing. 'It has coincided with a period of government changes, but looking at it with perspective, this has reinforced its character as a consensual law.' Three governments have worked on it, she says.

This law aims at offering children and young people the greatest possible protection against any type of harm and violence; starting in the educational sphere. 'The biggest challenge we face once the law is published is that it is an ambitious legal text that requires a firm commitment from institutions.'

According to Almudena, the current focus of the collaboration with the British Council is strengthening both, the figure of the wellbeing coordinator, and the protection in schools, as established by LOPIVI. 'Spanish schools face many doubts, difficulties and a lack of precedents. That is why we are building a Toolbox with all the information that we think might help them in their day-to-day work.'

Almudena concludes that 'to achieve their objective, people need to understand how necessary child protection is. It is not just the responsibility of a few, but of society as a whole.'

What do architecture, urban planning and gaming have in common?

Cemre Gokpinar and the British Council have crossed paths more than once. Cemre attended the [Supporting the Creative Economy](#) online learning programme and was selected as one of 21 grant winners of the [Creative Collaborations](#) programme in Turkey. His background in art history is now combined with his entrepreneurial skills, which led him to initiate [Ankara Aks](#), a strategic design studio in creative industries. And now he has broken new Europe, combining architecture, urban planning, creativity and gaming.

'This adventure I have been on since 2019 has given me many varied experiences. The British Council has supported me along the way and always made inspiring contributions. When chasing your dreams, you want to seize all opportunities that come your way. When I heard about the British Council's Supporting the Creative Economy programme, I immediately applied. I didn't want to miss the chance to make my cultural industry and the creative economy more meaningful. I took the possibility to enhance a process I created with my learning effort. This programme has helped me learn to think more globally and create new ways of thinking in my creative industry.

Later, the British Council announced the Creative Collaborations grant fund. This time, we had the opportunity to turn an idea we had been preparing for in digital games into reality. We got together with our partner in the UK, Kods Design Studio, and tried something new for the first time in the digital gaming space. As a first, both in Europe and Turkey, we designed a game jam that brought together architecture, urbanism and existing game technologies. We obtained important information and comparisons within the game ecosystem in London and Ankara and included the results in our project.

We have revealed that inspiring results can occur when architecture and urbanism are combined with game technologies. We have shown that those who transition from the field of architecture to the game sector are not alone and that transitions between creative sectors are possible.

Being part of both programmes taught me that thinking globally is a unique experience in terms of removing creativity's limits. At times, I struggled with obstacles, but these opportunities showed me that many people working in the same field have overcome similar problems and been successful.'





A prize to celebrate accessibility in theatre

Basca Theatre is a Romanian collective trailblazer and makes cultural spaces accessible to all. Their work was rewarded with the UNITER (Romanian Association of Theatre Artists) Prize offered by the British Council. Ana-Maria Ursu, actress and co-founder of Basca Theatre, shares the award's impact on her work.

'In 2017, I co-founded Basca Theatre with Andrei Ursu, playwright and storyteller, and Victor Dragoş, activist, actor and director. We realised how vital access to culture is, not only for us, but for all different kinds of people, too.

In Romania, there wasn't much information or artists talking about accessibility in that sector, so I wanted to lead in bringing this into the theatre world. I wanted to promote mutual respect and allow everyone to be part of the cultural life in our city. I tried to find the right resources to offer people with disabilities this accessibility.

My latest directed show, *Butterflies are free* by Leonard Gershe, was awarded the UNITER prize for independent theatre offered by the British Council in 2021. This prize and experience were unexpected, overwhelming and touching. We gained a lot of visibility, but the most significant benefit was to see other cultural operators reach out so that we could help them making their projects more accessible.

Developing an accessible cultural project can be easy! A lot of information about it is available. However, from our experience, the crucial part is to include the people you are making your project accessible for.'

Exploring the power of AI to address forest fires and gender inequality in STEM

We spoke to Zoi Stamoulaki following her participation in the [Stronger Together | Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good](#) hackathons, powered by Microsoft Hellas and hosted at the Serafio City of Athens. Zoi and her teammates learnt more about and showcased the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address the ‘clean air’ global challenge as part of their winning project, Powair. She shares her views on gender inequality in STEM and the main outputs of her experience in the first part of the programme, just before travelling to London to connect and exchange new ideas with the winners from other countries in new AI seminars and activities.

‘The objective of Powair is to quickly and efficiently detect and respond to forest fires by leveraging data from a network of cameras and sensors. This is accomplished by implementing advanced data analysis techniques, which provide insights to inform the fire-fighting strategy.

I needed to employ and cultivate my creativity and teamwork skills while showing respect and using my imagination as I participated in the three-day Stronger Together programme. I learned it was necessary to collaborate effectively with my team members and other participants, generate innovative ideas, and devise practical solutions.

Digital education is not only essential but also imperative. Providing access to technology education offers a pathway for greater gender diversity in the technical sector. It empowers women to showcase their abilities, share their perspectives, and have their voices heard.

I firmly believe greater diversity in the technology sector [...] holds tremendous potential to drive innovative problem-solving. Women have multifaceted perspectives and qualities that can enhance and contribute to existing views, leading to more comprehensive and impactful solutions.

Upon completing my studies and obtaining a master's degree in Economics and IT, I envision a career that aligns with my academic background. Additionally, I strive to gather many experiences over time, allowing me to continually develop and become the best version of myself in the professional realm.’





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