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University museums: where to from now? Reculer pour mieux sauter

> "University museums must become a revolving light, highly visible on top of or at the centre of the academic tower, highlighting the values, the traditions, and the role of our Alma Mater".
>
> Pierre de Maret, 2006, Rector of the Université Libre de Bruxelles[1]

Introduction

"The importance and value of your collections has been convincingly demonstrated; time has now come to formulate ambitions and draw up a strategy for the next 30 years". Such were the encouraging, challenging and thought provoking words of António Nóvoa, Rector of the University of Lisbon, during the closing session of the UNIVERSEUM Meeting in Lisbon (July 2007)[2]. University museums and collections function on the triple point between the academic world, the museum world and society at large. These three elements – universities, the way they position themselves in society and how they perform and organise research and teaching (and the role therein of collections); the world of museums, to which university museums and collections belong ever since the Ashmolean Museum was established as the first official museum at the University of Oxford in 1683 with its triple mission: teaching, research and public display; and the society to which we belong – make out the three mayor elements determining and affecting the life and functioning of university museums. These worlds are in a process of transition, if not in a state of crisis. These transitions have a severe impact on what is expected from university museums and by consequence on their traditional roles: collections, research

[1] P. de Maret, *Exposing the Ivory Tower*, „Opuscula Musealia" 2006, 15, p. 77–83.

[2] UNIVERSEUM is an European Network created in 2000 and devoted to the preservation and promotion of university heritage.

and teaching and public. Finally, the scope and range of what is generally understood as 'academic heritage' is broadening whilst university museums themselves are in a process of transition and re-orientation.

Over the past decade, university museums and collections have witnessed an unprecedented attention. This is illustrated by the establishment of a growing number of advocacy groups, each with their own activities, conferences, workshops and publications, both at the national and the international level; at the latter level, UMAC[3] and UNIVERSEUM are of particular significance. The Council of Europe adopted two important documents concerning university collections. The first document (1998––1375, Document 8111) focuses on the vulnerable position of 'incidental collections'[4] and recommends member countries to establish legislation and a general scheme to give assistance '[...]. when there is a demonstrated need for this'. The second document was a Recommendation, unanimously adopted by member-states (REC13–2005), addressing governments and university administrations on their responsibility regarding the governance and management of university heritage[5]; 'heritage of universities' is understood to encompass all tangible and intangible heritage related to higher education institutions.

These activities definitely contributed to a wider awareness and recognition of the scope and importance of the academic heritage. Simultaneously, those that are responsible for u-museums and collections become increasingly aware that they need to find answers on a range of questions related to the future of the basic missions of u-museums: care for collections, collection-based research and teaching and public display. These questions need to be dealt with taking into account the transitions within the professional world in which university museums perform their activities.

The aim of this paper is to identify these elements and to discuss the processes of change and adaptation to new requirements they are facing, leading to often purposely bleak, provocative and simplified, but essentially realistic assessments of their effects, as well as the possible consequences thereof for university museums and collections. I finally accept the challenge put forward by António Nóvoa, to point out some challenges and ambitions both universities and their museums may wish to develop.

Universities in transition

Today, many universities are suffering an identity crisis, as they are under pressure due to the diffusion of clear borders between long-time established scientific disciplines, the integration of ICT, drastic budget cuts, reform of research programmes and an aggressive market-oriented international competition. Universities are also faced with a strong competition for students of increasingly heterogeneous composition and background, both in age, socio-cultural background, demands and expectations. Finally, universities

[3] The establishment of UMAC as ICOM's International Committee for University Museums and Collections, during ICOM's Barcelona–2001 General Conference, marked the formal recognition of university museums.

[4] These are *'... owned by persons or bodies (like universities) whose main or major activities are in areas other than collecting or caring for collections.'*

[5] The full text can be downloaded from: http://publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/umac/guidelines.html

are undergoing a mayor educational reform, probably the most important and far-reaching since the Humboldt reform in the early nineteenth century[6].

In response to these developments and challenges, an increasing number of universities are in a period of re-orientation on their ambitions, on their position in society, and on their desired profile. They are looking for new audiences, seeking strategic alliances with market partners, considering privatisation, or the setting up of specialised institutions. These developments left their mark on the core business of universities: research and teaching and particularly on the traditional role therein of the object as source of information. Collection-based research and teaching had its hay day in the latter part of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. The shift away from descriptive to more analytic research, the introduction of new research techniques and new fields of research, the space occupied by collections and the cost of collection maintenance caused a marked decline in the use of collections and by consequence of their appreciation, particular from WW II onwards. Although the object as such preserves its unique character as primary source of information, the introduction of new techniques – often non-destructive, and/or without the need to take a sample of the object into the laboratory – allowed different ways of obtaining information directly from the object, and hence the need to use already existing collections, or to add fresh material. These factors combined have direct consequences on what universities expect from their museums: once keepers of the source-material for object-based research and teaching, u-museums are increasingly expected to act as the university's interface with society.

European culture and identity in transition

Globalisation and in particular the recent massive worldwide migration of both peoples, cultures and religions triggered an increasing public awareness of belonging to the European culture, based on Jewish-Christian traditions. Discussions on the common European Constitution reveal strong emotions of threat and loss of regional habits and identity; and the idea that the European culture may one far-off day be based on not only Jewish-Christian, but also Islamic traditions, gives rise to heated political discussions[7]. Universities – in their origin a typical European invention[8], totally integrated in the European culture, values and traditions – are also becoming aware of their European identity and the need to include the 'identity question' in their re-orientation process.

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[6] M. Lourenço, pers. comm. 2007.

[7] C. van de Laan, *Help de islam zich te wortelen in Nederland*, Interview with Ella Vogelaar, minister of Integration and Housing, „Trouw", 14–07–2007.

[8] S. Talas, M. Lourenço, *From Europe to the World: Common characteristics and 'strong points' of European university museums*, this volume.

Museums in transition

Judging by their annual reports one gets the impression that the museum world is doing just fine. Of course there are the obligatory complaints about shortage of money for high quality acquisitions, a lack of time for decent research, concerns about the wearing out of the house resulting from the countless parties and dinners to supply the budget, too much time to be spent on fundraising. But what counts, are the numbers; the numbers are good and rising: a higher percentage own income, better profits from the shop, a larger collection, more volunteers and more people entering the museum. A closer look at the museum sector as a whole reveals a definitely less positive, even grim picture. Precious time is spent to supply the budget, research is outsourced or altogether cut, no replacement for skilled staff after retirement, loss of knowledge and (technical) skills, storages are overcrowded and the public is often disappointed. Like universities, museums are under pressure due to ongoing budget cuts and tough competition; rivalry among themselves (for the same public, the same sponsor, the same representative masterpiece of the same artists) and above all competition against an increasing range of alternative attractions. The answers are sought in privatisation, hiring managers as directors, contracting glamorous external exhibition makers, reorganisations and the introduction of time writing. New, beautiful buildings with high profile 'landmark architecture' are supposed to boost the number of visitors, but once the honeymoon is over, the number of visitors lags behind and the buildings prove inefficient and expensive, requiring an even greater part of the budget to be spent on running and maintenance. Although the 'landmark' may boost the image of the town, the budget of the museum is not compensated to take care of investment costs, useless spaces, extra heating, etc, pushing the museum further in its downward spiral.

Museums are not static institutions, but change through time, expressing the intellectual, cultural and sociological environment of that time and adopting themselves to contemporary fashion, want and requirements. A brief look at the history of museums from Cabinets of Curiosity of the Renaissance to the *Kunsthalle* and science centre of today immediately demonstrates that museums are no longer the holistic institutions they used to be. Whereas the owner of the *Kunstkammera* was at the same time the scholar, the collector, the keeper, and the host for the happy few he graciously allowed a guided tour through his collections, the museum of today is increasingly fragmented along the three basic tasks: collections, research and exhibitions. Today, research is outsourced and museums are supposed to attract the largest and most diverse possible audiences (where only numbers count), is run by a director appointed by an anonymous Board of Trustees and is supposed to 'earn' a substantial part of its budget by renting the place for weddings, to boost the image of its town and to raise the number of tourists. Museums are trapped in conventions, expectations, regulations, long-term performance contracts, etc. The traditional, formal ICOM definition describing the museum as a permanent institution in charge of collections, no longer fits; worse, it frustrates developments, experimentation and urgently needed flexibility and modernisations. A growing number of museum professionals is turning away from the formal definition of museums as repositories of collections, and rather insist on the functional approach: the essence of a mu-

seum is 'in being 'a place' that stores memories and presents and organizes meaning in some sensory form'[9].

These constraints – combined with the egos of directors – make that museums find it difficult, if not impossible to work more effectively. Collaboration is not 'sexy'. The museum world as a whole is inefficient in the way it uses its limited resources, as they compete – for example – to get their 'own' representative masterpiece of the same 'famous' artist, pushing up the prices and filling their storages with objects of which it is mathematically clear that the chance of ever being seen is inversely to the growth of the collection. Collaboration, specialisation and allocation of tasks could lead to a much more efficient use of the scarce available time, money and expertise, and hence to a better over-all performance, in other words: "How to do more with less?"

'Academic' vs. 'scientific' vs. 'institutional' heritage in transition

University collections are as divers as their parent institutions and cover almost every imaginable subject. In an attempt to get into grips, Lourenço[10] proposed a typology (fig. 1) that accounts for the two major processes of collecting in universities: either by purposeful and selective collecting driven by internal need [a) Research collections and b) Teaching collections] or by historic accumulation [c) Historical research and teaching collections and d) Collections of university history].

The term 'academic heritage' was introduced to the literature in 1996 in the Dutch report *Om het Academisch Erfgoed*[11], and was perhaps first used at the international level in 2000 by *Universeum* in the 'Declaration of Halle'. With no clear definition, 'academic heritage' was generally perceived as '... the material archive of the history of research and teaching, and of the scientific and technological developments that shaped our world'[12]. This interpretation, which for practical reasons excluded buildings, archives and libraries, regarded 'scientific' or 'academic' heritage as the material evidence of research and teaching after the distributed departmental museums and collections had ceased to be actively used for their original purpose. Today, the interpretation of 'academic heritage' is more all-inclusive, comprising at least[13]: historical research and teaching collections, botanical gardens, historical scientific and medical instruments & apparatus and teaching

[9] G.E. Heumann, 1999, *What is the object of this exercise? A meandering exploration of the many meanings of objects in museums*, as cited by Jonaitis, A. Jonaitis, Joining the 21st century while remaining honest to our mission as university museums (in press).

[10] M.C. Lourenço, *Between two worlds: The distinct nature and contemporary significance of university museums and collections*, PhD thesis, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris 2005 (available online at http://correio.fc.ul.pt/~martal/).

[11] 'Om het Academisch Erfgoed', 1996, Report and inventory of the Dutch academic heritage made on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science by the Adviesgroep Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst. The concept 'academisch erfgoed' (= academic heritage) in stead of 'universitaire collecties' (university collections) was deliberately introduced in the LOCUC report to make sure that all Dutch collections related to scholarly research and teaching and academic tradition were included, as the intention was to address the entire 'scientific collection Netherlands'.

[12] S.W.G. de Clercq, 2001, *Uniting forces: the European network and national collaborative projects* [in:] M. Kelly (ed.), 2001. *Managing university museums: education and skills*, p. 85–102, OECD, Paris.

[13] This is in line with Recommendation 2005–13, see note 3.

	Type	Process of collecting	Examples
First generation	**Research collection**	Purposefully for research or as a result of research	Herbaria, palaeontology and zoology collections, bioacoustics collections, collections of microbiology, pathology and embryology, anthropology collections, archaeology collections, etc.
	Teaching collections	Purposefully for teaching	Collections of surface models in mathematics, models in engineering and architecture, sculpture casts in art, etc.
Second generation	**Historical research and teaching collections**	Historical accumulations	Historical instruments in physics, astronomy, medicine or other disciplines; historical collections of mathematical models, etc.
	Collections of university history		Portraits and sculptures related to the university, biographical collections, memorabilia

Fig. 1 – Typology of university collections according to collecting processes, after Lourenço[14].

equipment & models; university memorabilia, portraits, ceremonial & decorative objects and student life; university buildings, including observatories; 'spaces' (*aula magna*, anatomical theatre, laboratory, auditorium); special collections of university libraries; university archives; university art galleries & sculpture parks; intangible heritage (academic freedom, tradition, ritual).

Heritage in itself has no particular meaning, but derives its relevance from a specific context, from being part of a historic, scientific or cultural process, from having a biography. This approach allows us to make a practical distinction between two aspects of academic heritage that are of relevance for two distinctive, sometimes-overlapping academic environments: the first is 'scientific heritage': the greater scientific community; and the second is 'institutional heritage': the university and its immediate environment, including alumni.

Scientific heritage

The term 'scientific heritage' is generally used (de Clercq 2003[15]) for those elements from the academic heritage – including archives and special collections from the university libraries – that are of contemporary or future relevance for (historic) academic

[14] Lourenço, *ibidem*, p. 40.

[15] See S.W.G de Clercq, *The 'Dutch approach', or how to achieve a second life for abandoned geological collections*, „Museologia" 2003, 3, p. 27–36.

research and teaching purposes and/or relevance for the global scientific community, transcending the individual university. As much of our present knowledge is based on research on these collections, they can be considered as the global material archive of scientific research. Many of these collections are under severe pressure, since they are no longer of direct use for research and teaching programmes of their own university – which is on top of that not funded to keep such collections.

Institutional heritage

In her doctoral thesis Kozak proposes a new typology for the heritage found within universities: 'Institutional heritage' (Fig. 2) encompasses both disparate and parallel forms of (both tangible and intangible) heritage, i.e. university heritage (including 'university history'), academic, scientific and intellectual, to form a more conceptually cohesive and inclusive definition[16]. The proposed typological consideration allows individual institutions to recognise a more complete view of their own heritage by adopting a more inclusive approach, focused on individual institutional identity, rather than those standards set by other universities.

The split between 'scientific' and 'institutional' heritage is not always self-evident, nor 'absolute', as it depends on the relative weight given to a particular aspect from the biography of the object or the collection, which may be subject to changes through time. The biography of objects and collections that were once purposely collected for their assumed contribution to research and teaching, is made up by the layers of added scientific, historic and cultural value that have accumulated over the years through the way they were built up, organised, kept, used, published and finally ended up where they now are. These values change over time as a result of progress in research leading to new, hitherto unthought-of questions, new techniques allowing further exploration, or new cultural values and political situations, etc.

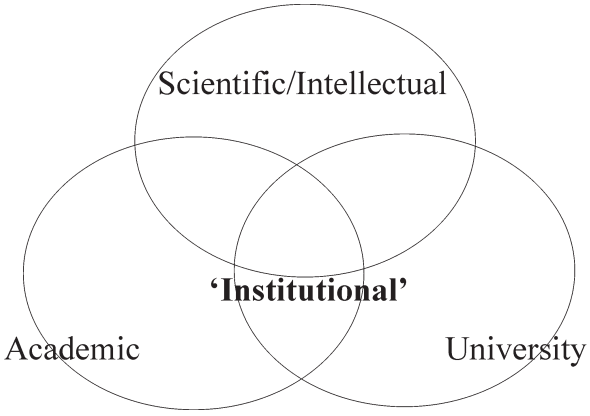

Fig. 2 – 'Institutional Heritage' after Kozak[17].

[16] Z.R. Kozak, *Promoting the past, preserving the future: British university heritage collections and identity marketing*, PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, Scotland 2007.

[17] Kozak, *ibidem*.

University museums in transition

Confronted with the question, which are the leading university museums in Europe in terms of their practice, not in terms of the greatness of their collections, I felt embarrassed that I could not think of one single museum that could meet those requirements. What then is the cause for this humiliating conclusion? First of all, the majority of the – European – university museums are hampered to such an extent by cuts in staff, time and budget, and by the lack of a clear vision on their mission, that I would not call any of those 'leading'. This is no criticism on the staff of those museums, as they work hard and make the best of it within their limited means and instructions. But that is not enough to be leading! Apparently, the overwhelming majority of European university museums is simply too small and too limited in its scope to be able to perform well over the full range of roles and tasks to be performed. Some are very good in public display, others develop exemplary models for collections-based teaching, and together they have developed a wealth of best practices. But that again is not sufficient, because in all cases some aspects of their mission do not receive appropriate attention. In other words, today most university museums spend less and less time on collections-based research, which is increasingly outsourced; play a marginal role in collections-based teaching and largely neglect the scientific heritage (storage, selection, care, accessibility, use).

How to explain that these aspects receive insufficient attention or are even altogether neglected? Is it realistic to expect from today's university museums to perform equally well on all four basic elements of their traditional mission: collections, research, teaching and public display?

Above we have seen that what universities expect from their museums has shifted from the guardian of the object as primary source of information to being the university's interface with society: the 'third generation' university museum[18]. This shift towards the museums' public role is in line with the already mentioned fragmentation and split of tasks in collections & research and in exhibitions for the public at large. These observations combined lead me to the conclusion that the current generation of university museums will continue to focus on its role as the university's interpreter and advocate. That is what universities need, that is what universities expect from museums (after all, they conceive and compare their museums with 'normal' museums) and that is what universities are prepared to pay for.

This shift towards a predominantly public-oriented university museum irrevocably introduces a watershed between the 'scientific', and what Kozak has defined as 'institutional' heritage. Whereas the university museum (and their governing bodies) will take care of the institutional heritage (as this part of their collections gives them prestige and contributes to their identity), the fate of the scientific heritage is uncertain, even at risk. It is understandable that universities – not being funded for keeping collections – rather dispose of their largely unknown and unused collections, that occupy expensive space and for which they see no purpose in the foreseeable future; furthermore, there is – to

[18] Lourenço, *ibidem*.

the best of my knowledge – no structure or procedure to keep the material and the paper archive of scientific research; either at the national or at the European level[19].

The watershed between 'public' and 'collections' is not new. Already in 1889 Sir Henry Flower, director of the Natural History Museum, London, analysed that "[...] the majority of museums were failing in their public duty by confusing their two completely separate functions: to provide facilities for research, which might well be highly specialised, and to organise displays for the general public, which should put objects into a much wider context"[20]. Whereas large museums can solve the tension following from the fact that '...exhibitions were not for experts, and study collections were not for the general public'[21] by organising the museum into two separate departments, small museums usually cannot afford to split their limited resources of two so fundamentally different tasks and therefore must choose between either 'exhibitions' or 'study collections'.

The inevitable consequence of the choice of most university museums to focus on public oriented activities is that there is no obvious solution for the scientific heritage. Without a proper model for decision-making, large proportions of the material evidence of scientific work will be lost. Disposal of one collection may not lead to a disaster, but the accumulative effect of ongoing 'silent disposals' will '... result in the loss of a considerable proportion of the global scientific heritage without any vision or idea of its importance and potential value.' As this is unacceptable in terms of professional museum management and in violation with ICOM's Code of Ethics, an action plan is needed, leading to the establishment of 'collections centres' charged with the care of the *'scientific material archive'*[22]. Experiences from *ad hoc* actions in the Netherlands may serve as example to tackle this problem.

The Dutch Approach[23] describes how – sponsored by the government – the five oldest Dutch universities engaged between 1999 and 2002 '... in a collaborative action to tackle their geological collections (> 2 million samples, grouped into 842 sub-collections) with the aim to improve their overall quality and accessibility, as well as to intensify their present and future use through selection, de-accession, collection mobility and disposal.' Collections of scientific importance, but no longer relevant to the faculty, were donated to new users, notably to Naturalis, the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden. This action is followed by the initiative – due to be formalised on January 1st 2008 – to establish the *Nederlands Centrum voor Biodiversiteit, NCB*[24], bringing together functions, staff, collections and budgets of Naturalis, the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam University, the National Herbarium (with herbaria from Leiden, Utrecht and Wageningen) and the Leiden Hortus botanicus into one research-centre for biodiversity.

While the establishment of the Nederlands Centrum voor Biodiversiteit, NCB – that is modelled after the London-based Darwin Centre – guarantees the future of Dutch natural history scientific heritage, it also provides a model to reflect on ways to keep what should be kept for future use, particularly on the role and function of *'scientific material*

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[19] S.W.G. de Clercq, *Keeping for the future*, „Opuscula Musealia" 2006, 15, p. 23–30.

[20] Sir H. Flower, 1889, Presidential Address to the British Association, as summarised by: Kenneth Hudson, 1987. *Museums of influence*, Cambridge, p. 70–72.

[21] K. Hudson, 1987. *Museums of influence.* p 72.

[22] S.W.G. de Clercq, 2006. *Keeping for the future*, „Opuscula Musealia", 15, p. 23–30.

[23] De Clercq, 2003, *op.cit*.

[24] See http://www.biodiversiteitonderzoek.nl/

archives' and on the process leading to their possible establishment[25]. With a distinct disciplinary focus – natural history – the NCB clearly demonstrates that scientific heritage maintains its value for the scientific community, provided it is organised, kept and accessible as *'scientific material archive'*, and it came about as a result of external pressure: the awareness that 'For the sake of the planet the biodiversity science community has to create a way to get organized, to coordinate its work across disciplines...'[26].

António Nóvoa Revisited

At this point, I take up the challenge put forward by António Nóvoa, during the Universeum meeting in July 2007: what should be done to avoid embarrassment when we will be confronted in 30 years time with the same question: which are the leading university museums in Europe in terms of their practice? What will university museums look like, how did they respond to the transitions in their world, how will they relate to the university as organisation, how will they relate to the academic community and which are the basic requirements?

Watershed between 'public' and 'collections'

My assumption – based on the above-mentioned developments, and taking into account the size of most European university museums – is a broadening of the watershed between public-oriented, 'third generation' university museums and 'collections centres' charged with the care of the *'scientific material archive'*. I do not applaud this split, as I am well aware that outsourcing of collections implies an amputation of part of the identity of its institution of origin. My assumption, however, is pragmatic and primarily focussed on the best conditions to keep the scientific heritage available for the scientific community. As using collections is the best way of keeping them, and by consequence also in the best public interest, collections should be kept where such conditions are best met. That requires unconditioned accessibility for academic activities, which implies – apart from adequate staffing, housing and budget – a whole range of professional skills and requirements. In my judgement – and with the exception of some larger university museums, notably in the UK – the majority of university museums do not have, and will not have the required size, staff, skills, space and budget, or the inclination to meet those requirements. Hence, the divide between public oriented 'third generation' university museums and 'scientific material archives' is a reality.

'Collection centres'

The question what should be kept for the future and for what purpose is pivotal for any discussion on the future of the scientific heritage and should be tackled in the broader context of the accumulated value and relevance of the information contained

[25] See also de Clercq, 2006, *Keeping for the future …* and (in press) *Bewaren om te gebruiken.*
[26] Robert T. Watson, *Director for Environment*, World Bank, July 2006.

in the collections[27]. This implies national or even international collaboration with other topic-related museums, archives and libraries, universities, research institutions and related partners. Keeping the collections within the academic realm is the best guarantee for their future life: research and teaching, public display, and increasingly important, public accountability and participation in the public debate. Such a research-programme based approach will specify the scope of the collections brought together.

It is desirable that decision-making on the material archive is brought to the highest level, that is the (inter-) national Rectors conference, based on a government mandate following Recommendation 2005–13 of the Council of Europe.

The material archive of our scientific endeavours should be regarded, used, staffed and financed in the same way as we regard our 'paper' archives. Selection, de-accessioning, keeping and providing access, are genuine archival functions. I can see no reason why the material archive should not be treated in such professional fashion. This requires a permanent structure with acknowledged professional standards, including criteria for object selection and disposal. This *'scientific material archive'* could have the characteristics of the '*collection centre'* as described by Spalding[28] and adapted for the purpose of scientific heritage (Fig. 3)[29] and its set-up could be quite similar to that of the Nederlands Centrum voor Biodiversiteit.

'Scientific Material Archive'		
Scope	**Uses**	**Context**
Encompassing all aspects of heritage: – core tasks research and teaching; by discipline, international context; – collecting, selection, disposal, preservation, conservation, etc – digitisation, access and use of research documentation	For the use of: – research & teaching; – presentation to academic & general public; – public accountability, public understanding of research, participation in public debate	Should be: – firmly based within the university and other scientific institutions; – be part of a national and international network

Fig. 3 – 'Scientific Material Archive' adapted here for the purposes of scientific heritage archives from the 'Collection Centre' as proposed by Spalding.

Museums at the university

Once public-oriented university museums are no longer responsible for scientific heritage, they can concentrate on their public mission and become 'less university museums and more museums at universities. This is not necessary bad, but it does provide chal-

[27] See: K.S. Thomson, *Treasures on Earth, museums, collections and paradoxes*, London, Faber and Faber, 2002.

[28] J. Spalding, *The Poetic Museum. Reviving Historic Collections*, Prestel, Munich–London–New York 2002.

[29] De Clercq 2006, *op.cit.*

lenges as we try to define what makes museums at universities different from other kinds of museums in the next decades'[30].

What the museum will finally look like is to a large extent determined by the relationship between university and museum, and by their respective ambitions. A caricature of the present situation is that universities tolerate their museums, regard them as a plaything, instead of seeing them as a real asset. This implies that there is a lot to improve; and that will be a long tough way to go, as it implies hard competition against the university's primary functions of research and teaching, and above all the challenge to prove the added value of the museum to the university.

Whereas the university museum derives its intrinsic identity from keeping the university's collection, the museum at the university has to redefine its identity and purpose. In either case the museum benefits from its position in the university, in having easy access to a wide range of authentic objects and a sheer endless number of highly specialised staff, students and facilities. More importantly, it belongs to an environment with a set of distinct values, such as freedom of expression, universality of knowledge, internationalism and pluralism, in short an invaluable intangible heritage that is at the basis of the European identity. Working in that environment, the museum is *par excellence* in the position to address potentially controversial subjects in the context of an academic dispute[31]. A further challenge and privilege of working in an academic environment is the possibility of experimentation with new forms of interdisciplinary approach and juxtaposition of topics and media, new techniques, and not least, new interpretations of both museology and the public.

These aspects already allow museums at universities to work different from other kinds of museums. They can however go much further in exploring these assets to the mutual benefit of themselves and their parent institution. So far, for example, universities have only just started to explore the potential of their heritage in 'identity marketing'[32], an option that may well be of increasing importance both in the competition with other institutes for higher education, and more broadly, in relation to the 'identity-discussion'. Museums have the option to experiment and to explore the possibilities of wider interpretations of the concept 'museum', in no longer being 'just' a repository, but in 'being a *place* that stores memories and presents and organizes meaning in some sensory form'[33]. They can go a step further by abandoning the safe walls and interpreting the museum as 'an environment where the public is in active visual contact with (objects in) that environment'[34]. This approach can be of particular interest for the museographic approach of authentic spaces or buildings where science was once performed and objects are still in context, like laboratories, anatomical theatres or observatories. Such a 'museums without walls'-approach also allows the museum to meet the public where it is: on

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[30] L. King, *University Museums in the 21st century*. OECD 2001 19–28, [in:] M. Kelly (ed.), 2001, *Managing University Museums: Education and Skills*. OECD, Paris 2002.

[31] See for a recent example the exhibition *A Visible Difference, Skin, race and identity 1720–1820*, at the Royal College of Surgeons of England www.rcseng.ac.uk

[32] Kozak, *idem*.

[33] Gurian, E. Heumann, 1999, *What is the object of this exercise? A meandering exploration of the many meanings of objects in museums*, as cited by Jonaitis, A. Jonaitis, Joining the 21st century while remaining honest to our mission as university museums (in press).

[34] S. de Clercq, (in press) *What Stories can Traces Tell?*

the street, or in the market. And once the museum takes interaction with the public on matters related to the university's core tasks and their effects on society as a quintessential mission, it can develop into a laboratory, a meeting place between the university with its staff and students and its environment, to get actively engaged in the public debate, to be the place where the public can hold the university accountable. One step further, the museum can play, in close collaboration with its parent institution, an active role in urban regeneration of its hometown, in the way Lisbon is currently considering[35].

The introduction of ICT is not only blurring traditional borders between disciplines and between objects, libraries and paper-archival documents; the web also introduces a totally new kind of visitor, and hence of visits to the museum, as deep-linking allows the virtual visitor to conduct his own, tailor-made in depth exploration of the museums holdings in a way that was previously impossible and inconceivable. This development requires that the museums website changes from a one-dimensional on-line brochure to a portal for sophisticated search facilities and adds an intriguing chapter to the copyright debate, as I assume that museums that have spent huge amounts of public money to digitise their collections will not be allowed to deny these new visitors in-depth access to their holdings, but instead continue to cater for the hordes that can just peek at a fraction of the collection.

Conclusion

University museums have achieved much in the past decades, particularly regarding their role as the university's recognised showroom for the public and their care for the 'institutional' heritage. However, they remain halfway as long as the position of the 'scientific' heritage has not been secured in a structural way. The possibility for the average European university museum of becoming leading in terms of practice, depends on the realisation of a durable solution for the scientific heritage, which – probably depending on national conditions – may imply a balanced split between public oriented university museums and collection centres. The ambition of both the individual university museum and its parent institution determines to which extent they will explore and develop their possibilities. All university museums should be simultaneously in charge of the 'institutional heritage' and act as the university's interface with society. As the university's centre of expertise on heritage matters, the museum should respond directly to the highest level and oversee the distributed departmental museums and collections.

One main requirement remains: recognition. The establishment of UMAC as ICOM's International Committee for University Museums and Collections marked the formal recognition of university museums by their peers from the museum world. The above-described professional approach will prove essential in acquiring a comparable recognition from the academic world, preferably through the European Rectors Conference. This implies recognition of the responsibility for the academic heritage, research as integral part of the museum's profession and hence of its staff as academics. A valuable instrument to achieve recognition is the Council of Europe's 'Recommendation on Gov-

[35] A. Nóvoa, pers. comm., July 8, 2007.

ernance and Management of University Heritage', encompassing specific recommendations on policies, legislation, governance and management, finance, access, professional training, research, awareness raising, relations with local communities, and international cooperation[36]. The Recommendation provides arguments and political legitimacy for university museums and collections worldwide. It asks university administrations "to consider all parts of the heritage of a higher education institution as falling under their ultimate legal, administrative and moral responsibility" and calls for dedicated funding of university heritage in the budget of higher education institutions.

STRESZCZENIE

Muzea uniwersyteckie: dokąd teraz? Cofnąć się, aby dalej skoczyć

Podobnie jak uniwersytety, również ich muzea i ogólnie wszystkie muzea stoją przed kryzysem tożsamości, a celem tego artykułu jest określenie kluczowych elementów tego procesu. Sugeruje się, że zbiory nie odgrywają już podstawowej roli głównego źródła z powodu rozwoju badań i metod nauczania. W konsekwencji muzea uniwersyteckie tracą swą tradycyjną rolę strażnika zbiorów i stają wobec pytania, jak najlepiej przystosować się do nowych wyzwań i wymagań. Muzea uniwersyteckie muszą rozważyć, czy chcą działać, jak dawniej, jako archiwiści dla materialnych dowodów badań uczelni i dydaktyki, czy też skierują się ku roli bardziej nastawianej na społeczność odbiorców. To zakłada, że będą musiały przedefiniować swą tożsamość jako „muzeum na uniwersytecie" na korzyść pośrednika między uniwersytetem a – społeczeństwem, przyczyniając się do publicznej dyskusji na tematy naukowe i ich konsekwencji dla społeczeństwa szeroko pojętego.

[36] The Recommendation was adopted unanimously on 7 December 2005. The full text is available at http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=946661&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75.