

DR. ÁGNES FISCHER-DÁRDAI AND ANDREA PÁSZTOR

University of Pécs

University History Exhibition

ABSTRACT

The University History Exhibition of the University of Pécs, Hungary, opened to the public in 2010. The exhibition spans the history of higher education of the city from the Middle Ages up until the today, with references to Hungarian and European history of education. In this article the creators of the exhibition describe the circumstances of the birth of the exhibition and the conditions which influenced the way in which it was planned and executed.

Key words: Klimo Library, Vasváry House, Janus Pannonius Museum

After almost five years of preparatory work and the continuous furnishing of the rooms, the University Exhibition of the University of Pécs opened to the public on 17 November 2010 in the centre of Pécs, located in the building of the Klimo Library, which was donated to the university. In the following pages we will describe the circumstances of the birth of this exhibition and the conditions which influenced the way in which it was planned and executed.

The premises of the University History Collection, which forms the basis of the exhibition, date back to 1992. The collection of the Medical University of Pécs opened in that year on the 625th anniversary of the foundation of the medieval university¹ and exhibits the history of medical science in Pécs. In addition to this, between 2000 and 2006 the exhibition of the history of the university was on display in Vasváry House, one of the grandest buildings in the city centre of Pécs. It was furnished by the staff of the collection under the leadership of József Benke.

¹ The medieval university of Pécs was founded in 1367 and existed until the beginning of the 15th century.

The concept of the exhibition

Dr. Antal Bókay, Vice-Rector, and Dr. Ágnes Fischer-Dárdai, Director General of the University Library approached the Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs at the beginning of 2006 with the concept of a new permanent exhibition. According to their idea, the scenario of the new exhibition had to embed the history of higher education in Pécs into a comprehensive intellectual-historical background, and would therefore touch upon the history of higher education in Europe. Within this – by reflecting on the famous Klimo Library located in the building of the exhibition – it would also encompass the European history of books and libraries. Since the first university of Hungary was founded in Pécs, the exhibition had to start in chronological order from the depths of the Middle Ages going through the different periods of higher education, until it reached the university with its ten faculties as it stands today. Emphasis was placed on the issue that the exhibition should answer the museological challenges of the 21st century, that it should be object-centred and at the same time interactive. The exhibition was put on display in a relatively small area, in five rooms, one of which – in line with the concept – is suitable for holding receptions and university presentations.

The planning of the exhibition and its direction was undertaken by a museologist from the Janus Pannonius Museum who specialises in educational history. The harmonisation of the above-mentioned three factors – the already existing collection, the demands formulated by the management of the university, and the available space – made up the first tasks. We tried to turn the disadvantages into advantages in the following way.

The existing collection of the history of the university mainly consists of documents and photographs, but contains only a few objects. In order to realise the goal that the exhibition would be object-centred, we initiated a collection process covering all the faculties of the university, but material was only collected for the last room – showing the second half of the 20th century. For the earlier periods, we borrowed from public collections of the Archaeological and Historical Department of Janus Pannonius Museum and the Semmelweis Medical History Museum. However, the borrowed objects were insufficient. We also made copies of objects made available by the National Technical Museum, and acquired some facsimiles that visitors can read for themselves. One of the outstanding examples of the fact that the permanent exhibition was realised by university-level teamwork, is the cooperation of the Faculty of Music and Visual Arts, the students of which made copies of the objects. To further enrich the experiential aspect of the exhibition for visitors, interactive elements were created at several points. In addition to this, several areas were made suitable for pedagogical lessons at the museum for groups of different sizes.

Target audience

Being a permanent exhibition, we have aimed at a wide audience. Our primary target audience is, of course, university students for whom lectures and seminars may be held at the museum, but the exhibition is also a suitable practice place for museological and

museum-pedagogical training sessions. Bearing in mind the elementary and secondary school students who would soon be of university age, we formed a museum-pedagogical section in the room displaying the medieval university, and when wording the descriptions we were careful to ensure that the texts would also be understandable for them. The citizens of Pécs and tourists thus acquire a picture of Pécs and the role of the university in the city. They can recognise the former and the present-day university buildings, and they can learn what their original functions were at the time of their construction. The complexity of the target audience made a multi-level presentation necessary: those who get inspired by the exhibition can immerse themselves in the contents of multimedia stands, where in addition to texts and photographs, they can find a 3D reconstruction of the ecclesiastic buildings from the Middle Ages. Foreigners can read the full text material of the exhibition and the touch-screen stands in English.

The rooms of the exhibition

Since the exhibition covers a period of several centuries, when designing the exhibition and choosing the forms we attempted to place the visitor into the context, meaning that we used the colours, forms and decorative elements typical for the period introduced in each room. We were not aiming at a uniform appearance, thus each room gives a different feeling and in this way we could avoid monotonousness.

The first room is entitled *On the trail of the medieval university of Pécs*. As the title shows, we were not able to aim at an objective introduction of the history of the first university of Hungary as we possess very little data, and there are a number of open questions related to this topic among researchers even today. But what we could follow precisely is the history of research on the short-lived university of the Middle Ages dating from the 19th century. By putting the sources and the researchers' opinions next to each other it gives the visitor the opportunity to critically form his/her own opinion, and for students to see the realisation and development of the different methods of research history and resource critique. In addition to the above, in this Gothic styled room, we get a picture of the circumstances of the foundation of the local university and its faculties.

The next room is called *Studiolo* where the development of education, the formation of universities in Europe, and the local and European history of books and libraries is presented. This room gives a comprehensive picture of the interaction between higher education and the development of the sciences from the first universities in the Middle Ages to the Age of Enlightenment. For this we found the most suitable form to be the common root of museums and libraries, the studiolos of the Renaissance of Northern Italy, which were the treasury of literacy. The room evokes the atmosphere of a silent scientific study.

The third room introduces the history of *Higher education in Pécs from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century*. The background to this topic is the birth of modern European universities. Here we can learn what initiatives had been taken since the first half of the 19th century with the aim of making Pécs a university town once more. It is where the faculty of philosophy and the period of the lyceum of law founded

by the bishopric of Pécs are situated. Finally, we are introduced to the predecessor of the University of Pécs of today, the Royal Hungarian Elizabeth University founded in Bratislava exactly one century ago, which was forced to flee after the First World War and transferred to Pécs. No campus was built for this suddenly and originally only temporarily transferred university. The city and the bishopric granted significant buildings to the university all over Pécs, and this way the university was built organically into the life of Pécs. For this reason, when forming this room we were aiming at representing the streets of Pécs and the internal space of the buildings.

The fourth room shows *The history of the University of Pécs and its former institutes from the 1950s up to the present day*. In this room we concentrated thematically on the institutional and organisational changes which occurred in the second half of the 20th century, as well as on the lives of the students. We display the relics and publications of the ten faculties, the practice schools of the University of Pécs and the lives of the students within each faculty. When evoking the intellectuality of the present day university we took the image and picture that the university has formed of itself as a basis, the most important source of which is the university website and its publicity guidelines.

Since emphasis was placed on the history of the institution and the lives of the students when writing the scenario for the exhibition and we endeavoured not to highlight any particular people especially in the parts introducing the recent past and the present, as this selection would have hardly been objective, we wanted to represent the faculties of the university and their representative rector in the fifth room. On arriving at the symbolic *Rector's Room* at the end of the exhibition, the visitor can sit down and think over his/her impressions on the exhibition by watching films and listening to audio materials relating to higher education.

The creation of the University History Collection was embraced and supported by the management of the university from the very beginning, and as a result of which we applied for the status of being a public collection.

In November 2010 the University History Collection of the University of Pécs was awarded the status of being a public collection, which not only showed the Ministry's appreciation of the years of professional preparatory work, but also served as encouragement for us to continuously develop both the collection and the exhibition.







