

UNIVERSEUM: European University Heritage Network

UNIVERSEUM: Rede do Patrimônio Universitário Europeu

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Abstract: Universeum is the European Network aiming at the preservation, study, access and promotion of university heritage in its broadest sense. But why a network to deal with European University Heritage? And what has Universeum been doing as of now? The present paper will discuss these questions and, through several examples, it will try to outline some of the main problems and potentialities of European universities' cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural heritage. University heritage. Universeum.

Resumo: Universeum é a Rede Européia que tem por objetivo a preservação, estudo, acesso e promoção do patrimônio universitário, considerado em seu senso mais amplo. Mas porque uma rede que trata do patrimônio universitário europeu? E o que o Universeum tem realizado até o momento? Esse texto discutirá essas questões e, através de vários exemplos, tentará destacar alguns dos problemas e potencialidades principais do patrimônio cultural das universidades européias.

Palabras-chave: Patrimônio cultural. Patrimônio universitário. Universeum.

1. Introduction

In the last years, the heritage kept in universities has been raising an increasing and diffused interest, marked in particular by the creation of two organisations working at an international level, UMAC and Universeum. UMAC (University Museums and Collections Committee) is a committee that was set up in 2000 within ICOM to deal with university museums and collections¹, while Universeum is an European network concerned with academic heritage, which was founded in 2000. Interested into university heritage in its broad sense, tangible and intangible, Universeum aims at the preservation, study, access and promotion of university museums, collections, archives, libraries, botanical gardens, astronomical observatories, laboratories, buildings, etc...i.e. heritage as a whole. It was originally created by twelve universities in a very informal way and it was formally transformed into an European association under the French Law in 2010.

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¹ <http://publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/umac/>. Accessed: 29 Jan. 2015.

According to its statutes, Universeum consists of individual and institutional members, as well as of supporting, honorary and student members. The members compose the Ordinary General Assembly, which is the supreme authority of Universeum. All the necessary decisions to ensure the day to day management of Universeum are made by an Executive Committee, which supervises the development of Universeum's strategy and policies, as well as the implementation of the activities plan and of all decisions made by the Ordinary General Assembly. A Scientific Committee supports and advises the Executive Committee in the development of Universeum's objectives, strategy, policies and activities. The members of both the Executive and the Scientific Committees are elected for three years by the General Assembly².

In this paper, we will try to see why it makes sense to have a network dealing with European university heritage. We will then examine what Universeum has been doing as of now and, from this, what are the problems and potentialities of European universities' cultural heritage that emerged in the last years. We will finally shortly discuss the issues Universeum should deal with in the next future.

2. Why a network to deal with European university heritage?

As there is already UMAC dealing with university heritage at an international level, we can wonder what the point of Universeum is. There are actually some substantial differences between Universeum and UMAC: 1) According to ICOM website, UMAC deals with "academic museums, galleries and collections (including herbaria and botanical gardens)"³, while Universeum also deals with university buildings, archives, libraries, etc..., ie. heritage in its broadest sense, as we already said; 2) UMAC is subjected to ICOM rules and is thus mainly a forum for museum professionals, while Universeum is also open to researchers, students, librarians, archivists, university administrators, and all those involved in university heritage.

Moreover, we think it is particularly important to work at an European level because, as for their heritage, European universities share many problems and potentialities, due to their common roots and history and to the current organization of universities at an European level. Let me spend a few words about some of the common roots of European university heritage. I will give only a few flashes about them.

² More information is available on the website <http://universeum.it>. Accessed: 14 Apr. 2015.

³ <http://icom.museum/the-committees/international-committees/international-committee/international-committee-for-university-museums-and-collections/>. Accessed: 24 Apr. 2015.

Let us remind for instance that, with the birth of the new anatomy in the sixteenth century, permanent anatomical theaters were established in universities throughout Europe - in Padua in 1594, in Leiden in 1597 and, in the seventeenth century, in places like Bologna, Ferrara, Montpellier and many others. The first university botanical gardens were set up in Pisa in 1544 and in Padua in 1545 and, quite soon, botanical gardens were established in universities in the whole Europe - in Leiden in 1590, Montpellier in 1593, Oxford in 1621, only to give a few examples. The spread out of cabinets of physics in universities in the eighteenth century was mainly an European phenomenon as well⁴: the new lectures of experimental philosophy based on experiments and demonstrations, that were proposed in the early 1700s to a broad public in London, were “exported” at first in the Netherlands and then in the whole Europe; as a result, in a few decades, chairs of experimental physics were created and cabinets of physics were set up in a large number of European universities – it happened for instance in Padua and Uppsala at the end of the 1730s and in Coimbra in 1772.

Furthermore, let us mention that the emergence in the eighteenth century of new disciplines such as mineralogy, archaeology and palaeontology, led in the nineteenth century to the creation of new collections in universities and to the reorganisation of existing ones. Art and archeology museums were founded, as well as geology, palaeontology, mineralogy, zoology and anthropology/ethnography museums. Here again, it happened in the universities of the whole Europe at similar dates and, for instance, museums of art and/or archaeology were founded in Tartu in 1803, in Padua in 1805, in Cambridge in 1816 or in Halle-Wittenberg in 1820, while zoology museums were set up for instance in Tartu in 1802, in Wrocław in 1814 or in Cambridge in 1814.⁵

Let me also underline that in the whole Europe, the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century were marked in many universities by the dispersion of scientific instruments collections - this happened for instance in Coimbra in the early 1900s and in Padua in the 1930s – and by the decline of the teaching and research role of natural history collections. Then, especially after the 1960s, the concept of “historical heritage” emerged and a “second generation” of university museums – museums of historical nature - was set up (LOURENCO, 2005).

⁴ Though there were of course effects in the colonies.

⁵ Paper “Museums as mirrors of society”, given by Steven W.G. de Clercq at the XII Congress EAMHMS, Vienna, 1-4- September 2004.

Of course, what we just presented is only a very quick outline, but it may help to understand why European universities share lots of issues as for their heritage and why it makes sense to have a network at an European level.

3. Universeum's activities

What has Universeum been doing as of now? First of all, annual network meetings are organised every year in a different town. We try to have them organised from the North to the South of Europe, from the East to the West. In the last years, we had for instance meetings held in Lisbon, Padua, Trondheim, Valencia, Hamburg and, in June 2015, we will meet in Athens. The meetings are free from fees and open also to non-members. Different themes are proposed every year, such as public engagement, research, etc... Proceedings of these meetings were regularly published in the last years (the more recent publications are TALAS; LOURENCO, 2012; MAISON; TALAS; WITTJE, 2013; RUIZ-CASTELL, 2015).

Universeum also promotes every year, on 18 November, the European Academic Heritage Day. On this day, universities are invited to celebrate their heritage through exhibitions, conferences and other events, which are collected and presented on Universeum website.

Furthermore, Universeum encourages the creation of Working Groups dealing with specific issues. A first Working Group, chaired by Roland Wittje (University of Regensburg), was launched in 2012 to deal with the study, conservation and interpretation of the heritage of science, technology and medicine produced after WWII. Three workshops of the Working Group were held during Universeum annual meetings and lots of discussions took place through e-mails and through a "Google Group". Not only Universeum members but all interested people from Europe and outside were invited to participate to the discussions, which are still ongoing. Two documents have been produced as of now, providing "Selection criteria for recent material heritage of science at Universities" and "Minimum Requirements for Preservation and Access of Recent Heritage of Science", both available online. A new Working Group, chaired by Esther Boeles (Dutch Foundation for Academic Heritage) and Delphine Issenman (University of Strasbourg), will be launched at the next meeting in Athens to deal with data-bases and internet portals. Reflections will focus on possible target audiences, international standards, and the need and possibility to set up an European portal of university heritage.

Finally, let's point out that Universeum has established links with other networks dealing with university heritage: besides its collaboration with UMAC, Universeum encourages and promotes the creation in Europe of Regional and National networks concerned with university heritage, and it supports already existing networks as well.

What are the results of the activities carried out by Universeum in the last years? Undoubtedly, Universeum is more and more well-known, as it now has members from twenty-one European countries, but I think the main result is that a community of people dealing with university heritage has emerged throughout Europe: people have started knowing each other, sharing experiences and knowledge. I would add that, through Universeum's annual meetings, Working Groups and other activities, we have been provided with an outline of the problems and potentialities of European universities' cultural heritage, which I would like to share with you now. In particular, we will see that this heritage is often still unknown, but that there are many efforts currently carried out throughout Europe to make it emerge. We'll see its fragility and its difficulties, but also the extraordinary richness of information it contains and thus its potential importance as for research, teaching and dissemination of culture inside and outside universities.

4. Problems and potentialities of European University heritage

First of all, as we just mentioned, we have to remind that part of European university heritage is very often unknown, even in universities who have well organized museums and collections. The University of Padua, for instance, has eleven museums and several collections coordinated by the CAM, *Centro di Ateneo per i Musei*⁶, but we only recently discovered an amazing collection of scientific instruments from the sixteenth century kept at one of the engineering departments of the university.

To face situations of this kind, efforts are currently carried out in several places in Europe, as for instance at the University of Uppsala. The latter boasts five museums, among which the beautiful Museum Gustavianum, where the "treasures" of the University are displayed. A few years ago, the staff of the Gustavianum launched a project to survey the collections that were scattered throughout the university: thirty (!) new collections emerged in different departments. Temporary exhibitions were organized to present them within the university and to the external public - let's mention for instance the exhibition *Hidden and Forgotten: 500 years of collecting at Uppsala University*, inaugurated in June 2010 -, but a main problem was left: how to study and

⁶ <http://www.musei.unipd.it/>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

catalogue, without adequate funds and staff, the tens of thousands of items that had emerged? Formed and directed by the Gustavianum's staff, students from the *Archive Library and Museum studies* were involved to study the new collections. They worked in tight collaboration with the scientists and technicians of the various departments. A lot of work has already been achieved and the project, which is still ongoing, provides the students with precious knowledge, working experiences and skills (WORLEY, 2015).

Other examples of “emerging” university collections are currently provided in Germany where, in 2011, the National Council for Research in Science and Humanities delivered a document recommending to German universities to take care of their collections as “research infrastructures”⁷. The document stimulated the interest of universities towards their heritage, with the creation of new job opportunities and new funds. Moreover, a centralized data-base on University collections was launched a few years ago under the direction of Cornelia Weber⁸. Finally, in 2012, a National *Coordination Center for Scientific University Collections in Germany* was also set up⁹. One of the first results of this effervescent activity is that many new collections are regularly announced in German universities. It is not surprising at all: a national coordination not only facilitates contacts and collaboration between the people involved in university heritage matters, but it also provides visibility and accessibility to the collections, two keystones for the preservation and promotion of heritage.

Making collections emerge is actually only one single issue. The point is that, even when it is known, university heritage is extremely fragile - its destiny often depends on a rector or even on a single professor. As a matter of fact, heritage is generally not easily dealt with by universities. They often see it as a burden, they sometimes regard it as out of their tasks or simply don't know exactly how to deal with it - what missions? what possible outcomes? There are also very classical and shared problems, even when universities are interested: lack of funds, collections not accessible, lack of staff, research not regarded as part of the tasks of university heritage staff, while of course research is crucial to extract the richness of information we will discuss in a minute. Finally, in some cases, the staff dealing with heritage is not trained enough: university heritage community is actually quite heterogeneous and fragmented. It is mainly because of these difficulties that the potentialities of university heritage are still not or not fully explored.

⁷ http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/10464-11-11_engl.pdf. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

⁸ <http://www.universitaetssammlungen.de/?setLocale=en>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

⁹ <http://wissenschaftliche-sammlungen.de/en/>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

But what are the actual potentialities of university heritage with regard to the three main missions of universities, i.e. research, teaching and dissemination of culture? I think we all agree that universities' heritage constitutes a precious primary source of information for an amazing variety of fields and, first of all, for cutting-edge research: historical herbaria are for instance crucial to study biodiversity, as well as historical thermometers are indispensable to study climatic changes. Moreover, universities' heritage conveys crucial information for the history of art, history of architecture, history of science, history of teaching, history of institutions, history of the territory, etc... As a matter of fact, if you examine an university object, like for instance a scientific instrument, you have plenty of possible questions around it: Who invented it? Who made it? Who used it? Why and when? What role did it play in research or teaching? What role did it play in the history of science? In the history of technology? What role did it play in the history of the University or in the history of the country? Who were the following users or owners? Was it transformed, why and when? And so on. Single objects and collections are thus not only at the heart of history but also at the heart of thousands of stories.

We have for instance at the University of Padua a model of pile-driver, i.e. a machine to build bridges, which was part of the eighteenth-century Cabinet of Physics of the University. We know from our eighteenth-century inventories that it was used by Bartolomeo Ferracina. Who was Ferracina? A clock-maker, mechanic, who restored San Marco clock in Venice and the thirteenth-century Palazzo della Ragione in Padua. He was also asked in the 1750s to reconstruct the bridge of Bassano, which had been designed by Palladio in the Renaissance and, to do so, he designed a special model of pile-driver moved by water and particularly effective for that time. He then made for the Cabinet of Physics of the University of Padua a smaller-scale model of this pile-driver. Such a model, which we still own, tells us of course about the history of physics teaching in the eighteenth century, but also about the history of architecture and the history of the Republic of Venice and its territory; furthermore, it tells us about the way experimental philosophers felt interested and involved in the practical, territorial and social questions of their time.

I would say that, as a whole, an eighteenth-century Cabinet of Physics like the one kept in Padua, which was set up by Giovanni Poleni in the mid-eighteenth century, is a primary source of information as for the connections between science and society, the history of teaching, the connections between scientists and between scientists and instrument-makers, the history of scientific instruments trade, and so on (SALANDIN; PANCINO, 1987; TALAS, 2013). But there is even more: the place where the Cabinet of Physics was housed and where the lectures of experimental philosophy were held

was the Palazzo del Bo, the fourteenth-century building that hosted the University of Padua from the sixteenth century. The Cabinet of Physics was moved from there to a new building in the 1930s, but its history is naturally connected with its historical seat, and thus with part of the art and architecture heritage of the University. Due to such interconnections, we clearly have to regard university heritage as a whole entity related to the university and to its territory. University buildings and works of art can themselves be regarded as mirrors of - or even as “tools to understand”¹⁰ - the history of the university, its ideology, its confessional and political intents, as well as its teaching and research activities. All these interconnections between different parts of University heritage constitute an extraordinary added value and, of course, we have to deal with university heritage in a transversal way.

Moreover, if you examine an object, be it for instance an object of art, science or archeology, you can examine it with the eyes of a contemporary historian of art, historian of science or archeologist, but you can also analyze how the object was studied in the previous decades or centuries and see the successive views that were held about it. You will thus extract information on the history of the related research field and see how history of art, history of science or archeology changed throughout time. There are thus what we could call “layers” of information around cultural heritage, a kind of “*stratification*” of information, and this is particularly relevant for university heritage, as objects have usually kept memory of their history, which is not always the case in other museums.

It then appears, from what we have said, that university heritage contains an amazingly rich and varied information, and its potential importance for research, teaching and dissemination of culture emerges as well. But let's go further into the dissemination of culture issue and, in particular, what about the “public” of university heritage? We have to underline that university heritage does not have one but several publics: there is the external broad public, of course, but it is our duty to stimulate and involve the public internal to the university as well, for cultural reasons above all, but also because knowledge brings respect, and the respect of university staff and authorities is crucial to make university heritage survive and flourish. This internal audience is made of 1) the scholars who have “generated” this heritage – of course different for every part of university heritage -, 2) the students and 3) the “rest” of the university.

¹⁰ This was suggested by Bjørn Vidar Johansen, University of Oslo, in his paper “Venerable University Architecture. Management, Use and Public Access”, given at the conference *Raising Awareness of Universities' Heritage: a Focus on Art and Architecture. Academic Cultural Heritage as a Teaching Tool and as a Research Field*, held in Genova, 20 November 2014.

Let's examine at first the "generators" of heritage, who may often be quite a difficult public. Astronomers or physicists, for instance, are often not interested in what they should regard as their own heritage. As James Caplan underlined during the 2014 Universeum meeting in Hamburg¹¹, it is particularly difficult to preserve and promote astronomical heritage in France (observatories, instruments, etc), mainly because of the diffused lack of interest of the astronomers themselves. Of course, this may be different according to the kind of collection and, for instance, university art or archeological heritage is probably quite well regarded respectively by art historians or archeologists, but only a minority of them are usually seriously involved in the preservation and promotion of such heritage. So, how to stimulate the interest of this specific internal audience made of the "generators" of heritage? Specific events may be organized. At the University of Padua, for instance, the Museum of the History of Physics regularly sets up small low-cost exhibitions on recent physics specifically designed for the physicists and technicians of the Department of Physics. The aim of such exhibitions is to make scientists think about the instruments they currently handle, to make them aware that they are generators of heritage themselves, and make them more sensitive to the historical instruments housed in their department, as such instruments are but the result of the teaching and research activities of their predecessors (TALAS, 2015).

As for the students (of all fields), it is not easy to raise their interest towards heritage either, but there are very good ideas proposed in this sense throughout Europe. In April 2014, for instance, to launch the Course in the History and Philosophy of Science at the University *Pierre et Marie Curie* in Paris, an exhibition of objects from the university collections was organized with the title "Sur les traces de la science". The exhibition was spread out throughout the campus. From 2015, the students themselves will choose a theme and organize every year a new exhibition with the collections. Students will bring friends to visit their exhibition, and this should hopefully stimulate the interest of other students for university heritage and contribute to make young people feel this heritage as part of their own identity¹².

Now, how to stimulate the interest of the "rest" of the university? An interesting project is currently carried out at University College, in London - it was presented by

¹¹ Paper given with the title "*Research as a line of defence of historic astronomical instrumentation*", see <http://www.hs.uni-hamburg.de/DE/GNT/events/pdf/Universeum-Abstract-Booklet-2014.pdf>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

¹² The project was presented by Frédérique Andry-Cazin and Santiago Aragon in a paper entitled "*In the footsteps of science: An example of interaction between research and heritage*" at the 2014 Universeum meeting in Hamburg, see <http://www.hs.uni-hamburg.de/DE/GNT/events/pdf/Universeum-Abstract-Booklet-2014.pdf>. Accessed: 15 Apr. 2015.

Nina Pearlman at the 2011 Universeum meeting in Padua¹³. UCL Art Museum houses a beautiful collection of drawings, from the Renaissance onwards, and its staff has started inviting as “guest curators” professors from other faculties (scientists, lawyers, doctors, etc): the invited “curators” have to choose a theme and select a series of drawings according to the theme. This gives birth to what they call “pop-up displays”, which are proposed at lunchtime for a few days and provide new views, often totally unexpected, on the collection¹⁴. Of course, the guest curators bring with them their “own” public made of friends and colleagues, and there are thus scientists, lawyers, etc, who come and often “discover” the art collection of their university.

The other way round may be more difficult: how to arouse the interest of art historians for a physics collection for instance? Only to give an example, a few years ago, the Museum of the History of Science of Oxford University carried out a project to study and catalogue its collection of microscopes and of microscopical specimens. But then, how to present the project to the broad public? How to present to the public tens of thousands of microscopical objects which could not even be seen with the naked eye? Contemporary artists were involved and, from the specimens, they designed furniture, curtains, wall papers, photographs, drawings, etc. Scientific objects were transformed into works of art and gave birth to the exhibition *Small Worlds / the art of the invisible*¹⁵. The public was thus invited to “look” at scientific specimens with the artists’ eyes but detailed scientific details were provided as well. Such an exhibition was not only a way to attribute new possible meanings to the objects and to the collection, but it also provided the opportunity of broadening the possibly interested public inside and, of course, also outside the University.

Finally, what about the external audience of university museums? I think that university museums should not try to play the role of national, regional or civic museums. Our collections are different, we should use this difference and keep in mind that it is in universities that researches have been and are currently carried out: by extracting information from our objects, collections, buildings, etc..., we can go to the heart of research processes of the past and of the present in all kind of fields. In a similar way, we can go to the heart of the developments of teaching and show how teaching changed throughout time. Furthermore, our collections can contribute to the construction of a cultural and/or territorial identity both within and outside universities. Finally, due to the privileged position of universities as for research, I think it is also our

¹³ Paper entitled “Increasing access: Revisiting curating in University Art Collections”, see http://universeum.it/docs/UNIVERSEUM_Program.pdf. Accessed: 24 Apr. 2015.

¹⁴ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/uclart/visit/exhibitions/popups>. Accessed: 24 Apr. 2015.

¹⁵ <http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/smallworlds/>. Accessed: 24 Apr. 2015.

duty to use the collections in order to make the public think about and discuss controversial issues related to cutting-edge research (climatic changes, ethic issues, etc). As a matter of fact, at a time when the cultural role of universities in communities and in society receives increasing attention, university heritage may play an increasingly strategic role for universities.

5. Universeum's current and future issues

All in all, the situation of European university heritage is thus characterized by problems, potentialities and many ongoing projects as well. But what are the main issues Universeum should deal with at the European scale from now on?

One of Universeum's first aims is to enlarge the European university heritage community to countries still under-represented or non-represented within Universeum. As we said, the network has an increasing number of members, but there are still no members at all, for instance, from some of the Balkanic and Eastern countries such as Bulgaria, Slovenia or Croatia. Visits and meetings should be organised in loco, in order to raise interest and involve in Universeum university new heritage professionals and interested people. We also aim at consolidating the European university heritage community by increasing communication, sharing knowledge and training opportunities.

Furthermore, Universeum should provide the community with tools and resources that are still missing, and in particular assemble and organise data about European university heritage and compile a picture of the community itself: who are the professionals? who are the audiences? who are the stakeholders in the culture, academic and economic sectors?

Finally, it would be crucial to improve sustainable uses of European university heritage and, in order to so, we should compile and disseminate best practices about this heritage itself.

These are some of the quite ambitious challenges Universeum should face in the next future. It will take time, but we hope we will be able to answer some of these expectations in the next years.

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