

[M. C. Lourenço, 2005. *Between two worlds: the distinct nature and contemporary significance of university museums and collections in Europe*. PhD dissertation, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris]

Appendix A9: A note on funding

If existing at all, annual budgets – excluding staff – provided by the university for museums and collections are typically low and possibly less than 10% of the budget of a non-university museum of similar size and type, with several important collections having to survive on € 500-700 annually¹⁹⁴.

Funding of many university collections is at crisis point, yet the issue is rarely properly formulated. The low regard and lack of voice of university museums in university executive bodies accentuates the problem.

Typically, university museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum, Musée des Arts et Métiers, the Oxford University Museum, the Ashmolean Museum, the Manchester Museum, run by museum professionals and holding collections of international importance, have more autonomy and easier access to external funding. Consequently, they may not feel the problem of funding as acutely as more specialised, smaller or less well-known university museums or collections.

Funding mechanisms of public higher education systems across Europe are heterogeneous. Countries like the UK and the Netherlands have substantial tuition fees, whereas in Sweden and Germany access is free. Some countries have a stronger tradition of private donations to universities than others, while almost all universities presently establish business partnerships with the private sector, particularly in applied science, industry and new technologies. Funding of universities is a complex matter and is intensely debated today. Nevertheless, one aspect seems consensual: the present public funding mechanism is not favourable to the cultural and scientific heritage of universities – including museums, collections, botanical gardens, manuscript collections of university libraries, and monuments and buildings of

¹⁹⁴ For instance, the Museum at the Department of Geology, University of Bristol survives on £ 300 from the University budget per annum (L. Loeffler, *in litt.* 9 Dec. 2000), the Musée de Zoologie, Université Libre de Bruxelles on c. € 4,000 yearly (M. Jangoux, *in litt.* 11 Dec. 2000), and the Chirurgical and medical instruments collection at the Université Catholique de Louvain on “absolutely nothing!” (G. Aubert, *in litt.* 1 Dec. 2000).

historic significance. Universities are funded by governments by way of mathematical formulae the parameters of which vary from country to country, but basically depend on teaching and research output (number of students, scientific papers published, researchers, research institutes, etc.). As a result, museums have much less potential for adequate funding than other university units¹⁹⁵. Typically, the general guidelines and policies for higher education public funding are discussed between the national conferences of rectors (Conférence des Présidents d'Université in France, Conferência de Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas in Portugal) and local or central governments.

Consequently, universities fund their museums and collections in a rather *ad hoc* manner, which often means irregularly and insufficiently. Assured funding for at least three to five years at a time is essential for proper planning. When university museum collections are used for teaching and research, they are eligible for funds from research projects (either national or European) and may eventually even fit the conditions of the formulae. In some countries (e.g. UK), there is a strong tradition of private funding. Many university museums apply for funds from national, regional or local governments on a project basis. However, there are only three solutions if indeed universities are to fund their collections in a structural and long-term way: a) university museums and collections become not only relevant but indispensable for teaching and research, thus eligible to formula-funding; b) the present parameters of the usual formula are changed in order to explicitly include collections; and/or c) sustainable public funding is sought outside the formula, but with an emphasis on 'sustainable'. From a current perspective, option a) seems rather unrealistic, although university collection could indeed be used much more for teaching and research (cf. chapter 6); b) would signify that the third mission (cultural role and community service) of universities is taken seriously, but for a variety of reasons is unlikely to happen at any time soon¹⁹⁶. Therefore, in the short- to middle-term and regardless of

¹⁹⁵ This is why they are often considered 'financial burdens'. 'Formula funding' was recognised by all my interviewees as a system that is adverse for museums, collections, and heritage in general. It may create paradoxical situations: two universities, one from 1350 with substantial heritage and the other founded in 1985 receiving the same amount of money if they have comparable teaching and research outputs.

¹⁹⁶ Changing their concept of 'culture' and repositioning their social role would require a major mentality leap for contemporary universities and signs actually point in a rather different direction. Additionally, if this leap were to happen at all, synchronous and adequate funding by governments is equally unlikely to happen – today, governments seem to be eager to restrict funding of universities rather than giving them more.

other occasional funding sources, universities need to seek funding for their collections outside their 'normal' budget (option c).

In fact, this is already common practice in many universities today. New university museums, especially those established since 2000 and other major investments (see chapter 6), are not funded from within the university's annual budget and funds have usually been provided by the private sector, the Ministry of Culture or an equivalent agency, the European Union, or local governments.

Some of these new projects raise concerns for two reasons. In the first place, some do not seem to be sustainable in the long-term. Permanent funding for operational costs, staff and collections care after the inauguration are insufficiently guaranteed. A museum does not and cannot sustain itself financially and neither should it be supposed to be so. Universities may not yet have realized that museums are not and most likely will never be sources of income. The opening of a new museum (or the renovation of an old one) is a major and serious decision, requiring a long-lasting commitment by the university. Secondly, many collections are being left behind, particularly those most 'difficult' to display to the public – e.g. research collections in a variety of disciplines (e.g. herbaria), geology physical anthropology and other natural history and medical research collections. Who is going to pay for the proper care and housing conditions of university collections that have limited display appeal, yet are of significant scientific interest? The right answer to this question has as yet to be found – and is in fact rarely even asked.

The UK has managed to achieve stable funding for some (32 at present) of its museums and this number appears to grow. In Italy not only have rectors become interested in university collections, but they have also begun to lobby for them and to create legislation especially for university museums. The Netherlands has succeeded in transforming three stagnated herbaria into one of the most important herbaria for contemporary science in the world – successful in terms of research, teaching and obtaining funds. More examples of good practice can be found and they all have one thing in common: they resulted from engaged and fruitful collaboration.

For sustainable funding, vision, coordination and collaboration between universities at a national level is essential. Sustainable funding for collections comes for all

universities in a country or for none at all. It requires a) a common position from universities (i.e. at national conferences of rectors) and its negotiation at the highest level (i.e. with governments); b) curators who are aware of the special significance of university collections and who publicly and strongly advocate; c) engaged rectors with sensitivity and vision; d) the collaboration of all universities (old and new) in a given country and e) governments that are concerned with the advancement of societies. As long as university museums continue to act in isolation, seeking external funds for this or that building, staff member or exhibition, mostly without support from university administrations and ignoring other universities, funding will not be stable and university heritage will continue to be at risk.