

Pieter Dhondt (1976) is attached as a postdoctoral researcher to the University of Helsinki. He studied modern history at the K.U.Leuven (Belgium) and specialised in university history in Berlin and Edinburgh. In 2005, he obtained his doctoral degree at his home university. His current research focuses on Finnish and Swedish universities as international institutions in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

Literature:

FRIEDMAN, Robert Marc: *Integration and Visibility: Historiographic Challenges to University History*. University of Oslo. Oslo 2000.

History of Universities 1-22, 1981-2007.

ROTHBLATT, Sheldon: The writing of university history at the end of another century. *Oxford Review of Education* 23, No. 2, 1997. 151-167.

OUR WORLD IN TRANSITION NEW CHALLENGES FOR UNIVER- SITY MUSEUMS AND THEIR PARENT ORGANISATIONS

Steven W.G. de Clercq

From the late sixteenth century onwards, object-based research and teaching spread over the European universities, leading to the establishment of botanical gardens, anatomical theatres and astronomical observatories.¹ As Vesalius' and Bacon's methods for research, enquiry and teaching were widely adapted, and the travels of discovery and exploration brought in numerous hitherto unknown objects from remote areas of the globe, collections of naturalia and artificialia emerged, both private and at the universities. The donation of such collections to the University of Oxford led, in 1683, to the establishment of the Ashmolean Museum, Europe's first purpose built museum open to the public. The Ashmolean Museum accommodated not only space for the collections of geology, zoology, ethnography and antiquarian objects, but also space for teaching and demonstration and even a chemical laboratory.

This kind of "mini academy", bringing together collections, staff and teaching, proved to be an extremely successful model that has been copied by hundreds of universities all over the world. As the collections accumulated, the museums became the keepers of the material archive for academic research and teaching. The fame of the collections could be such that they were used to attract the best professors, travelling scholars and students. Object-based research and teaching reached its high point

in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

From the 1960s onwards, we see a marked decline in the use and appreciation of the collections. This can be contributed to a number of factors, including the introduction of new, often non-destructive research methods and techniques, a shift in research from descriptive to analytic, new curricula and reorganisations of the university structure and management. This development coincided with an explosive growth of students and subsequent need for space, resulting in the collections having been marginalised, banned to the remotest corners of the building or altogether disposed of.

Although some collections remain in use for research and teaching, most university museums – once closely integrated within their disciplinary department as the guardians of the material evidence of academic research and teaching – find themselves today, by consequence, detached from their scholarly roots and in a process of re-orientation, adjusting themselves to new demands and circumstances, exploring new opportunities.²

OUR WORLD IN TRANSITION

So what is a university museum? University museums belong to three worlds: the academic world, the museum world and society at large. Each of these worlds is in transition, if not in a state of crisis. These developments have direct consequences on what is expected from the museum, each in its particular way, and as a response to local or national culture and political situation.³

Universities themselves are in transition and even in an identity crisis, as age-old academic traditions and values are under pressure due to disappearance of borders between disciplines, internationalisation and

the integration of ICT; drastic budget cuts and aggressive market-oriented international competition. Universities are experiencing probably the most important educational reform since the gradual introduction of the Humboldtian idea (as it was later called, after Wilhelm von Humboldt, founder of the University of Berlin) of the research university at the end of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, a drastic change in the composition of the student population was taking place, with other demands and expectations, and new concepts were introduced, such as the ideal of life-long learning. Many universities find themselves in a process of re-orientation on their position in society.

Society itself is also very much in transition, not least due to the effects of internationalisation and related demographic developments, in particular the effects of globalisation on composition, behaviour and expectations of the population. These developments, in combination with “Web 2.0”, have an unmistakable impact on the traditional European culture and identity, which in turn triggers a variety of reactions. This is not the place to go deeper in this subject, as it is sufficient to note that these developments differ tremendously from location to location and require a tailor-made solution.

Finally, also museums are in transition. Although they maintain their three core tasks (care for the collections, scholarly research and exhibitions), they are no longer the holistic places they used to be. An increasing split can be seen between on the one hand collection maintenance and research, and on the other hand the public. This finds its expression among other examples in the acceptance of the *Kunsthallen* and *Science Centres* as full members of the museum family – even though the latter make exhibitions without a single real object. The most remarkable change however, concerns the public itself. Whereas in the early days

of the museum, the public belonged to the elite, the museums of today cater for the largest and broadest possible representation of the public, whilst many of tomorrow's visitors will belong to the global virtual audience as they come through the internet.

UNIVERSITY MUSEUM, WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As we have seen, most university museums have ceased to function as custodians of the object as primary source of knowledge for the scholarly activities of a select academic audience. This role is increasingly giving way for a new challenge: to perform as the university's showcase for the public at large. This coincides with the move of the museum from within the heart of the academic community to a position, academically speaking, at the margin of the university, as its interface with society at large.

Taking into account the transitions both universities and their local and regional communities are currently experiencing, the new role of university museums opens the way to explore the opportunities of acting as a two-way bridge between the academic world and its surrounding communities. As the university's representative and door to the community to which the university belongs, the museum can play an active role in community development (including: public engagement with academic research, outreach, tourism, economic development, city development, etc).

IVORY TOWER OR WELCOMING NEIGHBOUR, SLEEPING BEAUTY VERSUS IDENTITY MARKETING

University administrators tend to compare their museums with "normal" public and private museums and hence expect them to

function accordingly. In fact, it is true that university museums in recent years "[...] consciously began emulating municipal and private museums, especially in terms of impressive building campaigns and emphasis on so-called blockbuster exhibitions".⁴ This trend of renouncing themselves and copying non-academic museums is a lost opportunity, both for the museum and for its parent organisation as it ignores the potential advantages of belonging to the university; and more in general towards the academic world with its traditions of freedom of expression, innovation, experiment, and not least its direct access to a huge and diverse reservoir of resources, knowledge, skills, creativity and manpower. The university's open mind for students, scholars and ideas from other parts of the world may well contribute to a more liberal and experimental orientation.

Universities were the first to establish a museum; not only in Europe – the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University (1683) – but also in the United States – Dartmouth's Natural History Museum, which dates back to 1772, prior to American independence. Also America's first art museum originated in an academic institution, at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1805), and opened to the public in 1832. University museums have a long tradition in innovation and experimentation, as they were understood by their parent organisations as a type of laboratory where research and learning took place. Kelm's study reveals that during the Interbellum, university museums in the United States generally were much more free, more experimental, and both inter- and multi-disciplinary in their development of exhibitions and programmes, compared to their non-academic counterparts. Many of the "progressive ideas" advocated to public and private museums over the last twenty-five years appeared in the exhibitions and

programmes of university museums already decades earlier.⁵

The current period of transition offers fresh opportunities for innovation and experimentation and for finding new, contemporary ways of shaping the dual role of university museums in serving both town and gown. This, after all, is what might be expected, given the governing university principle of academic freedom. New, or perhaps additional, compared to the traditional role of the university museum, is the way it can contribute to “identity marketing”, to the branding of its parent institution. The extent to which this way of experimenting, interpreting and implementing the new role can be achieved, depends on the specific ingredients of the university, its history and above all on its ambition to reach out and to participate in the life of its surrounding community and to actively contribute to the society at large.

UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS AS A TWO-WAY BRIDGE BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC WORLD AND ITS SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Assuming that the university has the ambition to actively use the museum as a two-way bridge towards its local and regional communities, it has a number of options. First of all, universities can use the museum as a gateway to the university, as the place where the university presents itself through exhibitions on research carried out within the various departments, or on topics related to its heritage, both tangible and intangible. Universities can stimulate this approach and use the date of their foundation, the fame of their alumnae, the number of Nobel laureates, the quality of their libraries and collections or the splendour of the premises, in other words, use their “institutional heritage” for institutional promotion

and recruitment.⁶ A good example of how the fame of a scientist can be used as a tool for identity marketing is the way in which Uppsala University and the Gustavianum Museum use Carolus Linnaeus for branding. Also Arppeanum at the University of Helsinki and Utrecht University Museum combine in their displays historical material from across the university’s disciplines with the results of contemporary research.

Universities can also deliberately act as a platform for public debate by using their staff and museums to address controversial topics, in combination with a series of public lectures, also on topics that would otherwise not easily be addressed outside the academic environment.

Thirdly, the museum can serve as the university’s gateway to the community, as its instrument to reach out and to address specific interest groups. Mayer describes a good example of the role museums can play in public education and in facilitating conversation between multi-cultural citizens, by reporting how the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (Canada) interacted with the Muslim communities on the development of an exhibition and programme about Islam and Muslim life.⁷

Involvement with tourism is another way in which universities and their museums can contribute to the economy and life of their communities. Tartu University Museums, for instance, play an active role in developing culture, education and tourism in the city. Tartu University and its museums are housed in a series of remarkable buildings, which in themselves represent important tourist sights and which are regarded as Tartu’s symbols, notably the academy building and the observatory. The Autonomous National University of Mexico took the initiative to link and integrate university museums to specialized tourist programmes and cultural tourism.

The move, in 1996, of Utrecht University Museum to its new premises around the Old Botanical Gardens in the heart of the medieval part of the city of Utrecht, triggered the development of the Utrecht Museum Quarter, which in turn was a major factor of the improvement of that part of the city. This illustrates how a deliberate choice for the location of a museum can contribute, fifthly, to city development.

Utrecht University's recent decision to install one central unit as its "cultural interface", reporting directly to the governing body of the university, is heralding a new phase of active and co-ordinated participation in the cultural life of the community to which it belongs. The new unit will co-ordinate all cultural activities, including those of the University Museum, Sonnenborgh Observatory, the Botanical Gardens, *Studium Generale* (public lectures on topics of general interest), facilities for music and dance and the university's main ceremonial building. This development is part of the preparations for the celebration of the tercentenary of the Treaty of Utrecht (2013) and a steppingstone in the ambition of the city and province of Utrecht to become Cultural Capital in 2018.

Steven W.G. de Clercq (1941) is educated at the University of Amsterdam as a geologist. As educational co-ordinator at the Faculty of Earth Sciences at the University of Utrecht, he became involved in the question what should happen with the historical, scientific geological and zoological collections of the university, what resulted in his appointment as Director of the Utrecht University Museum from 1982 to 1998. Under his management, the museum moved in 1996 to the centre of the Utrecht museum quarter, where the old botanical garden of the university became an integral part of the new museum. De Clercq is co-founder and vice-chair of UMAC, the International Committee on University Museums and Collections.

¹ Boylan 1999, Taub 2001, Lourenço, 2005.

² De Clercq 2003, De Clercq 2006.

³ De Clercq in press.

⁴ Kelm 2004.

⁵ Kelm 2004.

⁶ Kozak 2007.

⁷ Mayer 2003.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

BOYLAN, Patrick J.: Universities and Museums: Past, Present and Future. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 18, No. 1, 1999. 43-56.

DE CLERCQ, Steven W.G.: The Dutch approach, or how to achieve a second life for abandoned geological collections. *Museologia* 3, 2003. 27-36.

DE CLERCQ, Steven W.G.: Keeping for the future. *Opuscula Musealia* 15, 2006. 23-30.

DE CLERCQ, Steven W.G.: University museums: where to from now? *Reculer pour mieux sauter. Opuscula Musealia* in press.

KELM, Bonnie G.: *Moving Forward by Looking Back: How reviewing the History of University Museums can Help Chart Plans for the Future*. Unpublished paper read at UMAC-ICOM Conference, October 1-8, Seoul, Korea 2004.

KOZAK, Zenobia R.: *Promoting the past, preserving the future: British university collections and identity marketing*. Unpublished PhD thesis. St Andrews University. St Andrews 2007 (<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/408>).

LOURENÇO, Marta C.: *Between two worlds; the distinct nature and contemporary significance of university museums and collections in Europe*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Conservatoire national des arts et metiers. Paris 2005 (<http://correo.cc.fc.ul.pt/~martal>).

MAYER, Carol E.: University museums: distinct sites of intersection for diverse communities. *Museologia* 3, 2003. 101-106.

TAUB, Liba: Introduction: universities in Europe – the circulation of ideas. In: T. Bremer and P. Wegener (eds.): *Alligators and Astrolabes: treasures of university collections in Europe*. Druckwerk. Halle 2001. 9-14.