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PRESERVING THE LEGACY

EXPLORING THE HERITAGE OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ITSELF AS A CULTURAL INHERITANCE¹

ABSTRACT The article aims to highlight the essential contribution of university museums in commemorating and facilitating the learning of European university heritage. The article underscores the pivotal role of university museums as dynamic spaces for commemoration and dialogue. The article advocates for the recognition of university museums as key actors in preserving and disseminating European heritage. By fulfilling their tasks of commemorating, discussing, and learning from European university heritage, these institutions significantly contribute to the ongoing construction of a cohesive European identity grounded in shared history, values, and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Heritage, Europeanness, University Museums

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THE HERITAGE OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY AS A HERITAGE

The university, a cornerstone of contemporary civilisation with roots tracing back to medieval times, plays a pivotal role in shaping European identity and heritage. In an era of both integration and division, universities bear the responsibility of fostering awareness of common values and roots amid societal complexities. As crucial institutions entrusted with preserving European identity, universities translate and transmit knowledge while nurturing social competence. Historically fostering cross-border collaboration and knowledge dissemination, universities uniquely contribute to the development of a united European consciousness.

Despite enduring since the Middle Ages, there is less recognition of the heritage of universities and how it shapes the historical continuum. This heritage, operational rather than nostalgic, involves retrospective scrutiny with a forward-looking perspective. From the transformative forces of medieval universities to the Enlightenment and 20th century adaptations, these institutions have been crucibles for intellectual movements, contributing to the evolution of science and knowledge.

UNESCO recognises the significance of university heritage, reflecting in the World Heritage List. Universities, often housed in architecturally and historically significant structures, contribute not only to intellectual pursuits but also to the broader urban landscape. Universities' intrinsic value and symbiotic relationship with cities underscore their role in place-making, influencing local dynamics, employment, innovation, and societal development.

University heritage is multidimensional, encompassing architectural, material, natural, and intangible aspects. The intellectual dimension, rooted in values, scientific achievements, and contributions to European identity, is central. University heritage involves traditions, such as disputation, fostering global intellectual exchange, and upholding European values like democracy and human rights. It also reflects a transnational perspective, emphasising interaction among European universities.

The university heritage is a dynamic and integral part of European identity, fostering awareness, intellectual exchange, and the preservation of values across generations. Its significance is acknowledged annually on European University Heritage Day, marking its enduring legacy and ongoing contribution to global intellectual discourse.

INNOVATING TRADITION AND TRADITIONALISING INNOVATION: UNRAVELLING THE NARRATIVE OF UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS IN PRESERVING UNIVERSITY HERITAGE²

European universities house exceptional libraries, archives, museums, collections, and monuments possessing historical, scientific, and artistic significance. Among these, university museums emerge as dynamic spaces where the realms of academia and culture converge, presenting diverse educational opportunities beyond conventional classroom settings. Notably, they serve as crucial instruments for conveying the heritage encapsulated within European museums.

Science museums, commonly identified as such, constitute a captivating domain within museology. University and science museums, as entities within this field, present a compelling objective beyond the mere preservation and exhibition of valuable artifacts; they endeavour to foster scientific knowledge and disseminate education to the public. These institutions serve as a nexus where the heritage of bygone eras converges with contemporary technology, concurrently establishing an arena wherein science is rendered accessible and comprehensible to a broad audience.

The inception of science museums traces back to the 17th century, witnessing the metamorphosis of private collections into establishments accessible to the public. An early exemplar of such institutions is the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, established in 1683. Since this nascent period, science museums have undergone substantial evolution, transitioning into meticulously organised educational entities with a global outreach. Functioning not solely as repositories for exhibits, these museums have transcended their initial roles, assuming the mantle of educational, research, and cultural hubs.

Since the inauguration of the Ashmolean Museum, universities worldwide have embarked on the establishment of their own museums. Nevertheless, the collections curated by European universities trace their origins much further back in history. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, the values of the Enlightenment era spurred European universities to develop collections of diverse natures. However, the landscape shifted in the 19th century as universities opted to compartmentalise their collections in alignment with emerging academic disciplines. While this segmentation facilitated the creation of focused collections, it concurrently presented challenges in identifying connections between distinct categories of artifacts.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, specialised collections played a pivotal role in advancing scientific knowledge. Nonetheless, with the evolution of experimental research methodologies and the increasing significance of intangible factors in the 20th century, universities and their collections gradually appeared to diminish in importance in the realm of scientific research.

² Paraphrase of the motto of the University of Gothenburg: "Innovate tradition and traditionalise innovation" (tradita innovate tradere).

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The overarching mission of science museums extends beyond the mere exhibition of scientific discoveries; it encapsulates a commitment to involving the public in the captivating realms of scientific exploration. These institutions, therefore, operate as dynamic platforms that not only safeguard historical achievements but also act as conduits for public engagement with the enthralling and ever-evolving world of science.

Utilising the typology introduced by Lara Bergers and Didi van Trijp,³ and considering the historical evolution of museums as outlined, it becomes feasible to delineate three categories of university museums. First, there are collections that have become 'fossilised', surviving virtually unchanged in their original form and surroundings. Initially, they were not intended to collect objects for their historical significance, nor – in most cases - did they offer a wide audience beyond the circle of nobility or scholars. Over time, however, they became a storehouse of many artifacts – telling about many aspects of university life, from scientific to didactic. The exemplar illustrating this category is the University Museum in Praha⁴ situated within the subterranean vaults of the historic Carolinum building. The museum houses a permanent exhibition entitled "The History of Charles University", as showcased in the accompanying video from its inauguration. Within this exhibition, visitors encounter artifacts such as the founding charter of the university, replicas of the university seals, and historical sceptres. The exhibition is organised into distinct sections that delineate the university's evolutionary trajectory, encompassing epochs ranging from the Utraquist University and Charles-Ferdinand University to its contemporary manifestation. Additionally, the exhibition pays homage to distinguished figures associated with the university, including the biologist and physiologist Jan Evangelista Purkyně, the renowned physicist Albert Einstein, and the Nobel Prize laureate in Chemistry, Jaroslav Heyrovský.

The second archetype of university museums, which may be denominated as conservatories, is established explicitly to foster public understanding and admiration of science. In contrast to their counterparts, these museums engage in fewer collaborations with individual entities or institutes and instead underscore the significance of science and technology at the national level, while concurrently recognising the international context of scientific endeavours. Characteristically, these museums place a strong emphasis on audience interaction. An exemplar of this category is The Science Museum of the University of Coimbra, an interactive science museum designed to provide a captivating environment for visitors of diverse ages to explore the realms of science. The museum showcases the university's collections of scientific objects and instruments, complemented by a series of engaging exhibits and hands-on experiments. The institution offers a myriad of activities, including temporary exhibits, guided tours, workshops, and informal sessions with scientists, garnering notable success and popularity among the public. The ongoing reclassification of the Laboratorio Chimico,

³ L. Bergers, D. van Trijp, "Science Museums: A Panoramic View," *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society*, vol. 108, no. 2 (2017), pp. 366-370.

⁴ While writing this, the University Museum in Prague is renovating the museum and changing the exhibition.

a landmark structure in the annals of Chemistry, marks the initial phase of a project aspiring to establish itself as a pivotal hub for the advancement of science and scientific museology in Portugal. Visitors are encouraged to explore the permanent exhibition, "Secrets of Light and Matter", which illuminates the history of science in Coimbra and Portugal. This immersive experience invites participants to delve into various scientific themes through interactive experiments and multimedia presentations.

The final and third category of museums has evolved in response to dialogues addressing concerns over the preservation of scientific heritage. Scientists from various countries, apprehensive about the neglect of instrument collections, collaboratively established museums dedicated to safeguarding their scientific legacy. These museums fall under the classification of heritage institutions. An illustrative instance is the Oxford History of Science Museum, where Robert T. Gunther, a zoologist and lecturer at the University of Oxford, fervently advocated for the preservation of the university's material scientific heritage. His endeavours led to the creation of a museum housing objects discovered on the university grounds. Similarly, at Harvard University, David P. Wheatland, working in the physics department, actively sought and preserved instruments acquired by the university for research and teaching purposes spanning approximately 250 years. Collections in these museums often encompass objects of significance beyond local contexts.⁵

The museum of the Jagiellonian University serves as an exemplar, featuring research devices, narratives of professors and students' lives, and reconstructed professors' rooms. The permanent exhibition comprises historical interiors such as the Libraria (library), Stuba Communis (former dining room), treasury, professors' rooms, and the Aula (housing a valuable painting collection). Additionally, thematic rooms showcase material remnants of European scientific heritage, including paintings, portraits, tapestries, works from medieval woodcarving workshops, memorabilia of notable figures (e.g., Fryderyk Chopin), equipment from Karol Olszewski's scientific laboratory, astronomical and physical instruments, a collection of globes, telescopes, instruments for measuring length, mass, temperature, atmospheric pressure, early devices for testing electricity, and a diverse array of optical analytical instruments (spectrographs, refractometers, polarimeters), microscopes, 18th-century distillation vessels, and early analytical instruments. This multidimensional approach not only captures the historical essence but also provides a comprehensive understanding of the scientific progress encapsulated in these artifacts.

In contemporary discourse concerning university museums, two additional categories merit inclusion, supplementing the existing triad. These newly identified categories pertain to the evolution of the museum institution and the muse's quest for innovative modes of storytelling, coupled with a concerted effort to broaden its audience base. Patrick J. Boylan⁶ pays attention to the fact that many of the university museums persist

⁵ L. Bergers, D. van Trijp, "Science Museums...," p. 369.

⁶ P.J. Boylan, "Museums and Collections in the Relation to the Heritage of the University," in N. Sanz, S. Bergan (eds), *The Heritage of European Universities*, Strasbourg 2006.

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in providing an extensive range of academic and cultural services, extending beyond the traditional audience of university students, faculty, and researchers to encompass the broader public. The historical focus on supporting undergraduate and postgraduate teaching has evolved to embrace education at all levels, spanning from early childhood to informal adult education, and extending support to elderly and disabled community groups. The increased utilisation of university museums by the general public prompts substantial inquiries into the evolving role of these institutions in the long term.

While universities must adopt a more comprehensive perspective on their heritage, there is a critical need for strategic promotion of this heritage to gain a competitive edge in the museum sector. Museums, as storytelling entities, play a crucial role in narrating the origins and evolution of the university, delving into the history of renowned alumni, and establishing permanent exhibitions on aspects like student life and the distinctive traditions of student fraternities.

Nevertheless, university museums face the challenge of proving their ongoing relevance in the face of significant transformations in academic fields that were historically but are no longer, heavily reliant on museums and collections for teaching and research. Hence, they must seek innovative approaches to demonstrate their continued significance and adapt to the changing landscape of academia. An interactive approach to heritage storytelling inherently acknowledges, as articulated by Gregory Ashworth,⁷ that heritage is actively constructed in the present to fulfil current perceived needs. Consequently, the narrative must undergo adaptation to align with contemporary language and perceptions concerning heritage and its multifaceted functions. Furthermore, in line with insights from scholars such as David G. Mandelbaum,⁸ it is aptly emphasised that a university museum should impart knowledge about contemporary humanity – illuminating who individuals are presently and how they have been influenced. Consequently, the narrative language should be familiar and accessible to the audience it seeks to engage.

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⁷ G. Ashworth, "Heritage, Tourism and Europe? A European Future for a European Past?," in D. Herbert (ed.), *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London 1995, p. 73.

⁸ D.G. Mandelbaum, "University Museums," American Anthropologist, vol. 55, no. 5 (1953), pp. 755-759.

An example of a contemporary narrative university museum is the institution located in Pécs, which comprises two distinct branches. The first branch is dedicated to showcasing artifacts pertaining to the lives and residences of the university's professors. In contrast, the second branch, characterised by a modern and narrative approach, illustrates the European heritage associated with the University of Pécs.

The curator of the interactive exhibition in Pécs alludes to the concept of storytelling within the context of a narrative museum, also referred to as a fictional museum. This museum genre concentrates on a specific storyline, conveying, explaining, and commenting on it through the use of both original objects, primarily of an architectural nature, and contemporary audiovisual mediums. This type of museum liberates itself from the traditional constraints of musealia, wherein existing artifacts, such as sculptures, wall fragments, and the building itself, coexist in symbiosis with multimedia settings – specifically, films narrating the city and university's story.

The narrative approach adopted by the University of Pécs museum is framed as an educational project, presenting historical stories that convey selected content aligned with the museum's overarching message. According to Tomasz Merta,⁹ storytelling within this museum is designed to communicate with both the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the audience, providing an experiential encounter rather than merely facilitating knowledge acquisition. The intention is for the narrative to profoundly impact visitors, aiding in their comprehension of the significance and relevance of heritage to contemporary life.

Responding to societal demands, the narrative museums in Pécs advocate for a global historical perspective through the local lens, emphasising global heritage, shaping European civic identity, and strengthening social ties between universities with an emphasis on shared values. The primary objective of storytelling in this context is heritage preservation. The narrative functions as an educational tool that directly engages the audience, sparking interest and fostering dialogue while fulfilling social and ethical roles.

The museum's concise story unfolds in the basement of a medieval building, commencing with a list of the oldest European universities, their founding dates, and brief historical information. The exhibition authors then delve into the history of medieval university research, tracing its roots back to the late 18th century. The narrative is woven around the convergence of two traditions and value systems in Pécs: the Muslims and the Catholic bishopric. The story encompasses the city's medieval name, 'Quinque Ecclesiae' and 'Fünfkirchen' (both meaning 'five churches'), possibly alluding to surviving early Christian buildings. Under Ottoman rule, Pécs became a significant city in Ottoman Hungary, acquiring a distinctive Balkan character. Despite the destruction of many Ottoman and Turkish buildings, Pécs retains rich Ottoman architectural monuments, including the ruins of a steam bath, and the türbe (tomb, mansoleum) of Idris Baba.

The narrative expands to encompass the societal aspect of material heritage, discussing the population changes in Pécs during the Ottoman period, as well as the

⁹ T. Merta, "Pamięć i nadzieja," in R. Kostro, T. Merta (eds), *Pamięć i odpowiedzialność*, Kraków– Wrocław 2005.

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replacement of the German bourgeoisie and clergy by Hungarians and South Slavic people. The museum narrative also explores the activities of the medieval University of Pécs, its professors, students, and the deficiencies in the state of the art. Modelled on the Bologna example, the university's organisation involved the bishop of Pécs as the rector, conferring doctoral degrees upon successful completion of studies. The museum's storytelling highlights the association between the university, the city, and historical events. By combining tangible and intangible heritage elements from diverse cultures and religions, the Pécs Museum narrates a tale of origins, emphasising the relationship between the university, the city, and the broader history. It underscores the trans-cultural character of Europe and, in doing so, narrates the destiny of Europe.

The evolution of heritology has been a captivating journey, marked by dynamic adaptations to the evolving landscapes of society, technology, and scholarly inquiry. As societies progressively acknowledged the inherent value of their cultural heritage, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed a surge in cultural heritage studies. This paradigm shift signified a more expansive comprehension of heritage, transcending the confines of tangible artifacts to encompass intangible facets such as traditions, languages, and rituals.

The consequential development of heritology has exerted a profound and transformative influence on the museum sector. This transformative trajectory has led museums to reconsider their approaches to collection management, exhibition design, community engagement, and the overarching narratives communicated to the public. Consequently, museums have been prompted to diversify their collections and narratives to better align with the expanded scope of cultural heritage.

The advent of technological advancements, propelled by heritological practices, has revolutionised museums. Digital documentation, 3D modelling, virtual reality, and augmented reality have emerged as indispensable tools for preservation, education, and exhibition design within museum contexts. Museums adeptly employ these technologies to craft immersive experiences, generate virtual replicas of artifacts, and curate interactive exhibits, thereby enriching accessibility and engagement for a diverse audience.

The influence of heritology is conspicuous in the narrative innovations observed in contemporary museum exhibitions. Museums now aspire to articulate more nuanced and context-aware narratives that challenge historical constructs, celebrate diversity, and present a more inclusive and equitable representation of cultures. This narrative evolution mirrors a broader societal paradigm shift, acknowledging the intricate and interconnected nature of global heritage. Moreover, heritology positions heritage itself as a subject of study, elevating its significance within academic discourse.

The exemplary case of museum awareness and commitment to documenting and researching university heritage is demonstrated by the Helsinki University Museum.¹⁰ Their approach to heritage preservation is both comprehensive and nuanced, encom-

¹⁰ K. Heinämies, "The Helsinki University Museum and its Responsibility to Preserve the Heritage of University History," University Museums and Collections Journal, vol. 1 (2008), pp. 33-36.

passing tangible and intangible facets of university history. A key aspect of their strategy lies in a meticulous collections policy that prioritises items directly linked to the University of Helsinki's history, research, tuition, or staff. This policy ensures a focused and purposeful acquisition of artifacts, redirecting others to more suitable collections.

A noteworthy dimension of their heritage preservation efforts involves adapting to changes in university facilities, often necessitated by relocations and renovations. Instead of discarding or overlooking these alterations, the museum actively documents them. This commitment extends to the preservation of original interiors, exteriors, and furniture, underscoring the museum's dedication to maintaining historical authenticity.

The museum's use of extensive documentation techniques, such as photography and archival records, is a pivotal aspect of their approach. By capturing the transformation of university buildings through building fragments, inventory reports, and restoration plans, they create a comprehensive record of the evolving campus landscape. Additionally, salvaging and storing valuable furniture further contributes to the preservation of the university's cultural and historical richness.

Beyond tangible artifacts, the Helsinki University Museum recognises and actively engages with intangible heritage. The documentation of Finnish university customs and traditions, including conferment ceremonies and disputations, reflects a commitment to recording and transmitting practices that have endured across generations. Their dual strategy of making information accessible through their website while preserving detailed records in collections and archives showcases a forward-thinking approach to heritage dissemination.

In essence, the Helsinki University Museum serves as an exemplary model of museum awareness, illustrating how a thoughtful and multifaceted approach to heritage preservation can contribute significantly to the understanding and appreciation of university history.

It is crucial to recognise that the structure of these institutions has been continually influenced by social, economic, political, and scientific factors. Initially, private collections, originating in a period when the concept of 'science' had not yet materialised, and the notion of a museum lacked roots, have now evolved into modern museums accessible to a broader audience. Likewise, museums initially conceived to educate diverse audiences about the marvels of science have adapted to changes in their target audiences. The University and Science Museum has consistently endeavoured to strike and sustain a balance, accommodating the diverse needs of its visitor groups.

European university museums play an integral role in preserving and conveying cultural heritage. These institutions, born out of the transformation of private collections into public establishments, have evolved into dynamic spaces where academia and culture intersect. The focus is on science museums within universities, which go beyond artifact preservation, aiming to foster scientific knowledge and public education. The historical development of university museums into organised educational entities with global outreach can be observed, serving as not just repositories but also as hubs for education, research, and culture. Presently, an exploration of diverse methodologies for elucidating the intricate and multifaceted heritage inherent to European universities is warranted. The 'fossilized' museums maintain their original form and surroundings, reflecting aspects of university life. 'Conservatories' focus on public understanding of science, emphasising audience interaction. The 'heritage institutions' are born from collaborative efforts to preserve scientific legacy.

Contemporary challenges are faced by university museums, particularly regarding their relevance amid changes in treating the academic heritage and in the prestige of academic knowledge and tradition. Innovative approaches, like storytelling and interactive exhibits, become essential to adapt to evolving academic landscapes. The evolution of heritology also has influenced museum practices, pushing for a more inclusive representation of cultures. Technological advancements, including digital documentation and virtual reality, enhance preservation, education, and exhibition design.

CONCLUSION

The importance of European heritage is highlighted by its pivotal role in shaping a collective identity and fostering shared values across the continent. This emphasis is particularly notable in the context of unifying nations and communities, with a specific focus on the diverse cultural, historical, and societal elements embedded in European heritage. The central theme of this academic discourse revolves around the critical responsibility ascribed to university museums, emphasising their role in commemorating, deliberating upon, and facilitating the educational exploration of European heritage. Furthermore, university museums are crucial in commemorating, discussing, and facilitating the learning of European heritage, contributing significantly to the preservation and dissemination of the rich cultural legacy-defining the European collective identity.

The multifaceted dimensions of both European heritage and the heritage of European universities are examined through a combination of historical perspectives and contemporary discourse. The study reveals that shared values are instrumental in fostering cohesion among European nations. The pivotal role of university museums as key actors in preserving and disseminating this multifaceted heritage is reiterated, underlining their importance in the ongoing construction of a cohesive European identity. By facilitating meaningful engagements with European heritage, university museums play a vital role in fostering unity amidst diversity. Beyond being repositories of artifacts, university museums are depicted as dynamic spaces for commemoration, education, cross-cultural understanding, and the cultivation of a shared European consciousness. Their significance lies not only in preserving the past but also in actively contributing to the ongoing narrative of European identity through vibrant spaces for discourse, reflection, and learning.

Amidst the evolution of museology and the emergence of participatory culture and heritology as academic disciplines, museums confronted the imperative decision of altering their narrative structures. Some museums, choosing not to change, narrate a multidimensional heritage, transforming themselves into artifacts of heritage and subjects of research, both as physical entities and as embodiments of modernist narratives. Conversely, certain museums have opted to position themselves as cultural and educational institutions, opening avenues for public engagement, debates, and participatory initiatives. By doing so, they actively contribute to the ongoing discourse on university identity and engage in participatory processes in the construction and continuation of heritage.

Another subset of museums has embraced a paradigm shift by adopting interactive storytelling methods, relying minimally on physical artifacts and leveraging cuttingedge technological advancements. This transformation often entails the adoption of perfunctory, piecemeal, and symbolic storytelling, with the burden of narration transferred to screens. Concurrently, a distinct group of museums has aligned their narratives with an awareness of what constitutes 'unheritage heritage', making it a central theme and task. These institutions prioritise the documentation, memorialisation, recording, and preservation of heritage.

It remains challenging to definitively assert which form of museum storytelling is more intriguing or effective. However, what does seem certain is that acquainting oneself with each approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding and awareness of heritage. Each narrative strategy contributes uniquely to the comprehension of heritage, offering diverse perspectives and methodologies that collectively enrich the exploration of historical and cultural legacies.

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