

## **UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS AS NETWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD: SHAPING NARRATIVES OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**

UNIVERSEUM is concerned with academic heritage in its broadest sense, including university collections, museums, archives, libraries, botanical gardens, astronomical observatories, and university buildings of historical, artistic and scientific significance.

This year the conference is hosted by the Mendel Museum of the Masaryk University in Brno, Charles University in Prague and Comenius University Bratislava and it is going to take place in Brno. Its main theme focuses on how the university perceives the role of university museums and how new interpretative approaches in sociology, museology, heritage management studies, history and the sciences etc., define and shape the relationship between universities and their museums.

Universities have always been generators of new knowledge, constant innovators for re-discovering the world with new eyes through multiple prisms shaped by research and independent critical thinking. Objects, both *artificialia* and *naturalia*, have been key factors in this quest for understanding and interpreting our cosmos (and beyond). The long history of university museums and collections around Europe represents a very important part of the development of the sciences and humanities themselves, clearly illustrating through time how European societies understood the world and constructed knowledge. They have also been an important part of the history of museology as the science that studies the function and roles of museums in society.

In this long span, universities and their museums have shaped and followed different disciplinary traditions. Some approached the world as a machine and others saw the world as a network for the creation of knowledge. Could/should we thus rethink, under such prisms, university museum collections and their role in the process of creating knowledge today?

Under the main theme of "University Museums & Collections as Networks for Understanding the World", we invite proposals for a 5 or 15-minute talk on one of the following two sub-themes or for a poster session addressing the overall theme:

### **Subtheme 1: Difference makes the difference: University museums, Museology and the value of interdisciplinary interpretation of museum collections**

Museology, with its different disciplinary theories and practices in Europe, helps us re-discover and re-assess the role of university museums as constant gardeners of new seeds of knowledge that nourish new social needs. The conference will try to address several questions that deal with how the changing contours of Museology or other academic disciplines affect the making of university museums and collections across time.

These are some of questions that this subtheme will explore:

- Are the epistemological boundaries and classifications of university museums rigidly defined or should/could they be more flexible and porous, allowing interdisciplinary approaches to the interpretation and management of academic heritage?
- Are university museums and collections approached primarily as knowledge repositories of past achievements and as showcases of academic histories and past cultures? Or can they also be perceived as prolific grounds to test experimental processes and projects for pushing innovation forward? Furthermore, can they involve different social players as co-designers in this process of innovation and experimentation?
- How can the shifting metaphors of "the world as machine" or "the world as network" be perceived and materialized across different university museums today and the way they organise their collections and plan their interpretation strategies? Are university museum collections still acting as the material traces of pendulum swings and idea movements in the history of knowledge and is it useful for them to more manifestly adopt this interpretation angle?

- Are university museums nowadays going through a paradigm shift threshold or have already passed through it? Can we map and assess such trends through a systematic analysis of new museological and epistemological patterns? Can this mapping reveal an emerging new era to help us shape [or guide] the identity and role of university museums in contemporary societies?

## **Subtheme 2: New media and their role in the participatory curation and interpretation of academic heritage**

Last year during our annual conference, we focused on the value of co-curating academic collections within and beyond the campus. Extending that dialogue and taking it further, this year we would like to reflect on the key role of new media and digital technology in the co-curation process. The following questions can provide some starting points for discussion:

- Are there any particular characteristics or trends in how university museums are employing digital tools to organise and communicate their collections?
- Has the nature of the technology and the recent shift to more participatory co-creation and co-curation approaches affected university museum practice and thinking?
- How do university museums employ digital technology to record different academic and other disciplinary voices and expertise related to their collections and to communicate their multiple meanings and interpretations?
- Are there good practices and examples in this area that we can draw new knowledge and experiences from?
- In search of the holy grail? Do we expect too much from new media? We have been experimenting with the virtual and the digital in and outside museums for over a decade now. Could we draw some conclusions about its effectiveness? Is it only suitable for well-resourced museums? Or can simple applications add something to the experience that traditional interpretative media cannot?

### **Abstracts for sub-theme session 1 and 2 need to include:**

- i) introduction / problematisation / context
- ii) main arguments / methods
- iii) results or discussion

### **Poster session**

For Universeum 2019 Poster Session, we encourage the presentation of posters on any projects (collection management, exhibition, web design, social media, etc.) that relate to any of the above themes. Abstracts for posters need to focus on the context and process of the selected projects and their outcomes.

Please send abstract proposals (max. 200 words), with an indication of the session you are submitting to (sub-theme 1, sub-theme 2, or poster session), plus a short biographical note highlighting main research interests and/or field of professional experience (max. 50 words) to the following email address using the abstract template by **Friday 1 February 2019:** [universeum2019@muni.cz](mailto:universeum2019@muni.cz)

As is the tradition of Universeum, the conference offers different ways of encouraging discussion and debate around the main themes outlined above, as well as invites as many voices from the community to be heard as possible. For this reason, it combines short papers with longer in-depth contributions that reflect more broadly on these themes rather than present specific projects, as well as invites dialogue and discussions from all participants. When submitting your abstract, please indicate if you would prefer to give a poster, a 5-minute, or a 15-minute presentation.

The conference language is English. We welcome contributions from cultural heritage professionals and academics at all stages in their career, including post-graduate students who are encouraged to present.

### **Programme Committee**

Ondřej Dostál, Mendel Museum, Masaryk University (CZK), Chair  
Lucie Vychodilová, Mendel Museum, Masaryk University (CZK), Vice-Chair  
Martina Galetová, Hrdlička Museum of Man, Charles University (CZK)  
Jan Dolák, Comenius University (SK)  
Frédérique Andry-Cazin, Sorbonne University (F)  
Esther Boeles, University of Amsterdam (NL)  
Maria Economou, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (UK)  
Marlen Mouliou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece)  
Sébastien Soubiran, Jardin des sciences, University of Strasbourg (France)  
Michal Stehlík, Národní museum (CZK)  
Pavol Tišliár, Ethnology and museology, Masaryk University (CZK)