

# EDITORIAL

## Conceptualising and effecting change in university museums; functionality, projects and audiences.

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After the publication of ‘Pedagogy Hub’ (1), our most recent edition (vol. 13, no. 2), we believe there is value in delivering scholarship and thought leadership through the medium of a thematic edition. The selection of articles that embraced different types of teaching strategies, methods and pedagogic uses of university museums and collections has struck a note with some readers. We realise, however, that the diversity of content in that edition is but a fraction of the ‘on-the-ground’ reality in higher education. As a result we are planning a second edition, ‘Pedagogy Hub’ (2) that will help us develop a discourse with a more extended perspective on the creative utilisation of museums and collections for teaching and learning in higher education. We hope that some of the organisational narratives detailed in both volumes may inspire other universities to try their hand at pedagogic experimentation via the materiality of collections and the technology of the museum.

The papers in this non-thematic edition of the University Museums and Collection Journal also capture some interesting examples of creativity and experimentation in higher education. The article by Melzer & Sloggett gives an institution-wide perspective on the development of a conservation program that connects the materiality of a diverse set of individual museums and collections across campus. It has led to new research and teaching articulations and is an enterprise that includes a commercial arm. Here is a university outcome that could be described as the ‘Grimwade model’ and possibly adopted by other universities with a similar range of material collections.

The article by Macha-Bizoumi & Tranta examines the emergence of folkloric collections in the higher education sector of Greece and the emergence of folklore studies. It also examines ways of conceptualising their future. There are some great insights into the nature of the higher education sector in Greece. One of the key opportunities for folkloric collections it seems, is using these for the training of those who seek a career in museums and/or heritage. This was a common theme in a few of the case studies presented in ‘Pedagogy Hub’ (1), and it is fairly safe to say it will also be seen with our next venture into this theme.

The article by Thogersen et al., in contrast, steps away from the institutional and national foci of the preceding papers to deal specifically with audiences. In this case it involves the creative use of two campus collections to develop an engagement program for a specific, marginalised audience group, those that are suffering from dementia. This story is a great example of how far university museums have come from only being of interest and relevance to campus communities. Interestingly, however, the new functionality that comes from the process of engaging this marginalised group has developed a range of new interesting and valuable on-campus synergies that support the primary university missions of teaching and research.

The article by Schulz, in contrast to the new functionality of Thogersen et al., speaks of changing practices within the university museum by welcoming Indigenous voices into university museum programs. This is the front-line of museum practice where the old stories that are traditionally told about objects from Indigenous cultures are progressively being reinterpreted by new stories from source communities

themselves. This paper is a reminder that museums are changing from being points of cultural authority to being networks of cultural agency. There is a tsunami of change in museum practice coming down the pipeline and, unsurprisingly, in many cases it is university museums that are leading the way.

As you may recall from the recently completed UMAC project, we have released our guidance document<sup>1</sup> for universities on the issue of ‘Restitution and Return of Items from University Museums and Collections’. This was the result of extensive collaboration between many organisations and individuals aimed at providing a set of guidelines on dealing appropriately with collections and the past collecting practices of higher education. We currently have authors working on papers for a special thematic issue on restitution and repatriation from university museums. Universities should be the places where multiple epistemologies can be experienced and understood. In fact some commentators (e.g. PATERSON & LUESCHER 2022) have even argued that universities need to evolve into a new type of knowledge organisation, the ‘pluriversity’ to enable this. In a world of cascading and escalating crises, there is continuous disruptive pressure on universities to change (ECONOMOU et al. 2021).

The paper by Zhao and Wang gives some insights into the contemporary collection of science and technology in China. There is also a novel interpretation of the functionality of the university museum. Here the university museum, because of its institutional position, is a bridge between the academy and civic society. This is a good reminder that the positionality of the university museum gives it significant responsibility in ensuring that new ideas that develop within the university are translated into the public arena in a way that has impact and causes positive social outcomes such as the development of a scientific and technologically literate civic society. This paper also has some interesting sources from Chinese literature on university museums.

A final reminder that, apart from covering the diverse world of theory and practice in university museums and collections by publishing academic articles such as those found herein, we are also interested in sharing a more detailed focus on individual aspects of this work. In a recent decision of the UMAC Board, the pages of the journal will also be open for short reviews (1000 to 2500 words) on recent projects. We welcome reviews of new museums, new exhibitions, books, programs etc., as long as it provides insights into the museology of higher education we will consider it for publication.

If you would like to discuss a possible contribution to our reviews section, we welcome your correspondence.

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## Notes

1. <http://umac.icom.museum/release-umac-guidance-on-restitution>

## Literature cited

- ECONOMOU, M., LOURENÇO, M., NYST, N., SIMPSON, A., & SOUBIRAN, S. 2021. Universities, museums, collections and heritage: a time of challenge and change. *University Museums and Collections Journal*, 13(1), 5-7.
- PATERSON, M & LUESCHER, T. 2022. Africa needs ‘pluriversities’ to respect more ways of knowing. *University World News*, February 24, 2022. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2022022112360035>