

[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]

7. Discussion

Quel sens donner à tout ce patrimoine?
Pour quoi? Pour qui? Et comment?

P.U. Calzolari, Rector of the University of Bologna, 2004

How can we convince the university [that a museum is important]?
How will the university achieve its objectives – two of which focus on outreach and one is to connect the [...] students with their heritage?
How can this be done if there is no real interest in the material evidence of this heritage? [...] There is only a theoretical book, no use of objects, only lectio-disputatio methods [...] we have many students from [primary and secondary] schools every day, but there is no place to take them to, let alone the general public.

Y.A.B.

Archaeologist concerned with the uncertain fate of several collections at his university. Email dated 6 April 2005 (edited for clarity and length).

There are possibly 5,000 university museums and collections in the 25 EU countries. Although the exact figure is hard to come by, it is clear that European universities hold a significant proportion of our scientific, artistic and cultural heritage. For various reasons this important heritage has not received the attention and recognition it deserves and has remained largely unknown and inaccessible to the broader public.

This study, carried out between 2000 and 2004, comprised 236 university museums and collections from 50 European universities in 10 countries. In this chapter, its main results are summarized, areas for further research outlined and some concluding remarks about the cultural role of universities made.

7.1 Conclusions and main results

The prime objective of this study was to obtain a comprehensive overview of the present state of knowledge of European university museums and collections, leading to a better understanding of the role and significance of university collections today. Sources were bibliographical and data collected in the field. Three syntheses resulted from the study: history of university collections (chapter 4), 20th century literature (chapter 5) and present situation (chapter 6).

Two major difficulties faced were the the volatility of the present situation of university museums and collections and their diversity. The rapid pace of events in the field makes objective analysis difficult. The diversity of university museums and collections is overwhelming, and traditional – e.g. disciplinary – approaches make them difficult, if not impossible, to study as a group. Additionally, because the majority of collections are not organised in museums and differences in size between institutions are also considerable, large and high profile university museums tend to be under-emphasised when generalisations are made (Merriman 2002).

One way to overcome the obstacles raised by the diversity of university collections and museums is an approach at collection level and a focus on common features. One important contribution of this study was the development of a typology of university collections that

enabled their study as a group. The typology comprised four types of university collections: i) teaching collections, ii) research collections, iii) historical teaching and research collections, and iv) collections of university history. Throughout this dissertation, the former two types were designated first generation collections and the latter two types were designated second generation collections. In itself, the typology is not new and can be found even in the earliest literature on the subject – it is simple and intuitive. In this study, however, it was formalised and developed.

The main criterion of the typology was the collecting process: through purposeful collecting for the needs of teaching and research in the case of first generation collections and through historical accumulation in the case of second generation collections. The criterion is epistemological because it reflects two distinct methods of acquiring knowledge – comparative and experimental – and, by implication, two distinct roles of objects in processes of inquiry: comparing in order to know (first generation) and experimenting in order to know (second generation). The epistemological approach to university collections has enabled the second major contribution of this study, namely further reflection on the distinct nature of university collections. I have argued that these are material evidence of the history of knowledge, an argument I will take further in the Closing Remarks below.

The epistemological approach leads to two distinct origins and therefore two diverse pathways of development of first and second generation university collections. The history of university museums and collections is more closely linked to the progress of science and education and the institutional development of universities than to the development of general museums (whose influence became visible especially in the past decades).

First generation university collections are the older and among these, with a recorded history of almost 500 years, teaching collections are the oldest. It is however likely that collections or proto-collections have been longer in use for teaching. Today, teaching collections are still used in a wide range of disciplines and the role of the object has remained unaltered: it facilitates an explanation or a comparison, it illustrates an idea, it serves as an example, or it demonstrates a principle or a phenomenon. Research collections emerged in the late 18th century, although they were preceded by study collections since at least the late 16th century. Research collections continue to be assembled today, both in more recently developed disciplines (microbiology, genetics) and traditional ones (zoology, botany). First generation collections are dynamic entities. This dynamism is difficult to apprehend and is often misunderstood. Collections too easily leave the impression that they are fixed in eternity perhaps because they fix individual items within a larger system (Hamm 2001).

Many university collections were organised in museums, although collections existed before museums and in many cases continue to develop independently of museums. The first records of collections more or less permanently assembled in a single location for teaching purposes – teaching ‘museums’ – date from the late 16th century (adjunct to anatomical theatres and botanical gardens). The first records of collections assembled in a single location for the public are from the early to mid 17th century. The first record of a university museum in the modern sense is from the late 17th century. However, university museums would only flourish in the 19th century, partly due to the development of the different sciences and partly due to the consolidation of research as the institutional vocation of the university. 19th century science placed collections at the heart of research, while at the same time the Humboldt model placed research at the heart of the university – it was the Golden Age of first generation museums and collections.

Second generation collections appeared in the 20th century, although they possibly existed before. Because they result from the historical accumulation of objects, once assembled second generation collections are supposed to be preserved for posterity. They are less dynamic than first generation collections and less used as primary sources for teaching and research.

In the 20th century, the landscape of university museums and collections became more complex. Second generation museums multiplied, but not in significant numbers until the 1960s. This late development is due to four reasons: prolonged collecting processes, the lack of internal drive, the absence of formal structures in universities to accommodate historical museums and the rather celebratory concept universities have of their heritage. Second generation university museums also benefited greatly from the post-1960s worldwide expansion of the museum sector. Presenting exclusively historical and artistic collections, second generation museums were more likely to attract broader audiences. Possibly for the first time, new and more diverse audiences induced first generation university museums to contemplate on their public role, especially in view of the decline in their traditional audiences (students and researchers) since World War II.

During the same period, the number of universities increased markedly and higher education systems across the world faced major reforms. Between the 1960s and the present-day, the university underwent dramatic changes. Today, it is facing enormous social and political pressure, identity challenges, and economic crisis. Inevitably, the crisis of universities caused instability for university museums and collections.

Lacking a clearly formulated mission and status within the university – the majority of university collections and museums in Europe are not inscribed in the statutes of the university or in its strategic plans – and after at least two decades of instability, reorganisations, closures and losses, university museums and collections today are facing the greatest challenges in their history. A major result of the study, based on insight gained from study visits and interviews, is that these challenges can be grouped into two closely related kinds: challenges of identity and challenges of recognition. Challenges of identity comprise the 'divide' between the academic world and the museum world, in particular issues related to the difficulty in combining traditional and new audiences, roles and uses. Internal challenges of recognition encompass use of collections for education and research, legal and statutory framing, status and management issues, sustainable funding, and autonomy issues. External challenges of recognition comprise raising of standards and professional qualifications of staff, as well as improving public accessibility. Undoubtedly, some universities have taken positive steps, but on the one hand many of these challenges are too complex, if not impossible, to overcome without a coordinated approach at the national (or even international) level. They also require a clarification of the role of museums and collections in the university and society. To resolve the latter, the significance of collections is cornerstone.

During recent years, across Europe and the world, there has been more action and coordination from the university museums community than ever before. The recent rise in the number of articles, policy and advocacy documents, professional associations and conferences is illustrative of the vitality of the field. The past five years have also witnessed a growing interest in university collections from the museum sector. This growing interest, however, has not been accompanied by concrete partnerships to assist university museum professionals or to strongly advocate the importance of university heritage. Neither has the growing interest been accompanied by in-depth research into university collections and museums.

7.2 Further research

Before research into university museums and collections can be developed, researchers need to have access to basic information, presently unavailable, in particular which university collections exist and where. For most countries, there are not even simple, reliable lists. Universities need to make basic information regarding their museums and collections available to the scientific community and each country has the responsibility to survey its university heritage and keep the information up to date. Research into university collections

as a distinct group is barely starting and much remains to be done. This study has identified three main areas where research is most needed at present.

The first concerns recent reorganisations of first and second generation university collections. The volatility of the situation requires a follow-up. Thorough evaluation and case-studies are crucial, particularly in relation to the impact on teaching, research and public accessibility.

The second area in need of research is that of governance, from management to profiles and career paths of staff and from the positioning of the museum within the university hierarchy to autonomy. Although research on the impact of governance (Humphrey 1992a,b, Cato 1993, 1994, Birney 1994, Genoways 1999), strategic planning and leadership (Tirrell 1994, 2001, 2003) on the performance of university museums has been done, this is limited to university museums of natural history. More in-depth studies are needed to encompass second generation university museums, as well as comparative studies between first and second generation university museums and between large and small university museums. In-depth systematic surveys and comparative studies in this area, coupled with thorough evaluation of current reorganisations, would provide much needed information. Many universities are implementing new management and governance models for university museums and collections without well-founded knowledge of future implications.

A third area in which research is paramount is the history of university collections, including early university collections and proto-collections. We need to know more about the development of university collections against the background of and in synchrony with the history of higher education. Developments during the 20th century are also relevant given that higher education systems across the world underwent dramatic expansion and reform. A better insight into the recent history of university collections would be most valuable for an understanding of their present dilemmas.

In addition, three groups of issues stemming directly from the present study would benefit from further research: the typology, ethics, and the concept of university heritage.

7.2.1 The typology

The typology of university collections presented in this study requires further development in a number of areas. Firstly, collections of university history were only briefly addressed. These collections of university memorabilia or institutional history – portraits, seals, busts, solemn and formal clothing – are not directly related to the education and research missions of the university. However, if adequately interpreted, they may fall within the ‘third mission’ of universities (i.e. their cultural role). Together with other university collections, they can participate in an integrated interpretation of the role of the university in the history of knowledge and university heritage. This is certainly an area deserving further development. Secondly, this study only briefly considered new forms of university collections. New types of teaching collections in mathematics were studied and presented, but there is a vast range of new areas – often interdisciplinary – that have assembled collections for teaching and research. It would be valuable to investigate the epistemological relationships between recent fields – for example biophysics, biotechnology, molecular parasitology – and the development of new types of teaching and research collections, as well as their articulation with more traditional types of first generation collections. Reversibly, new types of research and teaching collections from physics, astronomy, and other ‘traditional’ subjects – e.g. data from satellite imagery, accelerators, new telescopes – also deserve further study.

7.2.2 Ethics

In any profession, the perception of what is ‘ethical’ changes with time. Due to their vast dynamics and change, ethics would always be a stimulating topic of research in relation to

university collections, particularly when it comes to first generation collections. Ethics were not a core-subject of this study, but ethical issues related to the care for university collections emerged and field data were gathered for future research.

The issue of ethics in relation to university collections can be approached on two different levels. On the one hand, they are subject to the same issues that affect all museums – including human remains¹⁷⁹, free trade, provenance of objects, etc. On the other hand, there are more specific issues deriving from the practices of collection-based teaching and research, such as the integrity of the object and de-accession in teaching and research collections, dubious ownership of collections, etc. These issues are presently covered by the new version of the ICOM Code of Ethics (ICOM 2004), although more research would be valuable to circumscribe and clarify them more precisely.

In practice, however, matters are different and seem to be more serious in some countries than others. Many university collections are not cared for by any staff or by staff with only limited training and preparation. Many are unfamiliar with ICOM's Code of Ethics or even unaware of the ethical issues involved at all. Responsibility for all issues regarding collections – including malpractice and neglect – may not be clearly attributed (although ultimately resting with the university administration). There are collections that simply do not exist in official records. Successive restructuring, extinction and renaming of departments, faculties and museums, including moving collections from one building to another without documenting the process or keeping track of collections, makes ownership often difficult to attribute. There are also issues related to the overlap between personal and institutional collecting. In short, the ethics of university collections raise serious concerns and deserve a study in their own right. It is a topic that cannot be discussed without considering professional training and standards, as well as institutional responsibility¹⁸⁰.

7.2.3 University heritage

Another topic that deserves more investigation is that of 'university heritage' or 'academic heritage'. The expression is increasingly employed, but the precise meaning remains unclear.

When applied to the university context, the term 'heritage' not only encompasses collections and museums, but also monuments, astronomical observatories, laboratories, greenhouses, libraries and archives. It is not only about science, but also about arts, humanities and engineering. It is not only tangible heritage, but also a set of distinct "scientific and technical discoveries [...] forgotten and 'reinvented'" (Van-Praët 2004: 113), *savoir faire*s and values associated with teaching and research. It is about academic and student life traditions, often so deeply embedded in towns' daily life and traditions that it becomes hard to tell which came first. It is in the identity of an imagined and trans-national community of scholars and students (Sanz & Bergan 2002). University heritage is a complex and intricate concept directly associated with the history of knowledge and with implications for the European identity. More research should be done to clarify and further develop the concept.

Two universities have been classified as UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, USA, and the University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain. These classifications are directly linked to the legacies of Thomas Jefferson and Miguel de

¹⁷⁹ The issue of human remains is mostly likely to be more poignant in universities. There are literally thousands of physical anthropology collections in European universities and because they are little used for research and some reorganisations affecting them are on the way, many raise serious concerns.

¹⁸⁰ It is in the context of ethics and professional standards that differences between university collections become more evident. There are basically two types of university collections: a) those under the care of professionals, and b) those under the care of ill-prepared individuals – regardless of how well-intended they may be – or under no care at all.

Cervantes, respectively, and not to a broader and all-encompassing concept of university heritage as put forward above¹⁸¹.

In 1997, the Botanical Garden at the University of Padua, Italy, was classified as World Heritage. The UNESCO Committee explains the decision “to inscribe this property [...] considering that the Botanical Garden of Padua is the original of all botanical gardens throughout the world, and represents the birth of science, of scientific exchanges, and understanding of the relationship between nature and culture. It has made a profound contribution to the development of many modern scientific disciplines, notably botany, medicine, chemistry, ecology, and pharmacy”¹⁸². On 15 July 2005, UNESCO classified the Struve Geodetic Arc as World Heritage¹⁸³, of which one of the 34 marking points is located at the Astronomical Observatory of the University of Tartu, Estonia (fig. 7.1). These two classifications are more in tune with the recognition of the contribution of universities to the advancement of knowledge. Also on these premises, the University of Coimbra, Portugal, is preparing an application for World Heritage.



Fig. 7.1 – Mark indicating the Struve Geodetic Arc at the Astronomical Observatory, University of Tartu. The arc stretches across 10 countries from Norway to the Black Sea. It constituted the first accurate measurement of a long segment of a meridian. The survey was carried out between 1816 and 1855 by the astronomer Friedrich Georg Wilhelm von Struve (1793-1864). Struve supervised the survey from the University of Tartu, where he worked from 1813 to 1839.

What is the significance of the overall legacy of universities to Europe and the world? How do collections fit in this legacy? How do collections articulate with other tangible and intangible elements of this legacy? These are matters that would certainly benefit from further study. Some preliminary reflections are put forward in the following Closing Remarks.

¹⁸¹ Other universities, such as the University of Évora in Portugal and the Universities of Santiago de Compostela and Salamanca in Spain, are part of historical town centres that are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

¹⁸² See UNESCO World Heritage List at http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=824, accessed 30 April 2004.

¹⁸³ See UNESCO World Heritage List at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1187>, accessed 22 July 2005. See also University of Tartu Press-release *Struve's Geodetic Arc inscribed in UNESCO World Heritage List*, 20 July 2005, <http://www.ut.ee/111584>, accessed 22 July 2005.

7.3 Closing remarks: Collections and the cultural role of universities

Higher education legislation across Europe attributes two main missions to universities – education and research – in addition to the ‘third mission’. The precise formula varies from country to country, and the ‘third mission’ may assume the form of public dissemination of research (Sweden), science communication (the Netherlands), contribution to the development of societies (Sweden), culture (Finland, Estonia, France, Portugal, Italy), service to mankind (Finland) or some other form of social role. For example, the Danish Act on Universities describes the three missions as follows:

“Article 2.1 The university shall conduct research and offer research-based education to the highest international level within the disciplines covered by the university. The university shall ensure a balanced relationship between research and education, make regular, strategic selection, prioritise and develop the disciplines it covers in relation to research and education and disseminate knowledge of scientific methods and results” (Danish Act on Universities, May 2003).

The *Magna Charta Universitatum*, the most important recent document setting the stage for the European university of the future (and a notable text by itself), not only considers the third mission, but takes it one step further than national laws. In its first principle, the Charta states that “the university [...] produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching” (cf. appendix A10). The Charta does not say that universities are to provide culture *apart from* education and research, as if the three were mutually exclusive entities. Instead, it embodies a synthesis between education, research and culture, and at the same time places culture at the very core of what universities are and do. If taken literally, the Magna Charta has extraordinary implications for university collections.

Reality is quite different from the Magna Charta. The third mission is rarely understood or explored. Although universities often use history as a basis for social and academic legitimacy, they tend to underestimate the importance of their own history and heritage. Typically, they only mobilise resources for the study and preservation of heritage – through publications or exhibitions – at times of special commemorations. Second generation university museums are mostly created on such occasions.

The way the ‘third mission’ is ordinarily implemented seems to confirm the limited view that many universities have of ‘culture’ or ‘social role’ or ‘dissemination of science’. Universities regularly develop ‘cultural’ programmes that comprise a variety of activities for students and the general public (sports, theatre, concerts) and services ranging from conferences to exhibitions, open days, workshops, publications and so-called e-learning and lifelong learning (although these can technically be perceived to fit in the first mission, i.e. education). Regardless of how well-intended and meritorious these activities may be when considered in isolation, the general picture is one of fragmentation and inconsistency. Cultural activities and community service are developed in almost complete isolation from education and research, as if on the one hand the university was a scientific institution and on the other hand a cultural centre. University collections and museums do not fit in this particular vision of ‘culture’. When reorganised in order to fit, they become displaced and their real meaning is perverted. Given that European universities spent considerable amounts of money each year to support the ‘third mission’, it is not merely a matter of funding.

The long-term challenge for university collections does not primarily lie in the first and second missions. Collections *are* relevant for present-day teaching and research and can be used more – it is often a matter of individual initiative. The real long-term challenge for university collections lies in the ‘third mission’: how to fit collections into the rather limited view that universities have of culture and their cultural role without undermining their

distinctiveness? Indeed, how to broaden the narrow perception universities have of their cultural role *through* collections? This is the real challenge – making objects relevant for teaching and research is easy compared with this.

What is the meaning of the collections universities have? Quel sens donner à tout ce patrimoine? The answer requires subtle ways of seeing. Despite being possibly known by one French citizen in every 20, the Atger Collection at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Montpellier 1 is the second largest collection of drawings in France, after the one at the Louvre. It is not just an extraordinary collection of drawings by Tiepolo, Caravaggio and Fragonard (fig. 7.2). When Jean-François Atger donated the collection in the early 1800s, the purpose was clear: the drawings were meant to be used in the study of human physiognomy and body (Lorblanchet 2002). The collection shows a remarkable coherence: it is about human faces, limbs, bodies – in all possible expressions and positions. Students at the Faculty of Medicine used and studied these drawings for decades. This is what makes the Atger collection so special, intimately linking it to both the Jardin des Plantes, 20 m away, and for example to the collections of anatomical wax models at the University of Utrecht, almost 1,000 km north. The fact that the drawings are Tiepolos and Fragonards only makes the collection all the more valuable¹⁸⁴.



Fig. 7.2 – Old man and youngster, by Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Musée Atger, University of Montpellier 1 (reproduced with the kind permission of the BIU de Montpellier, Atelier photo).

Time passes, uses change and memories are lost. Today, the Atger collection is an art collection in a faculty of medicine – possibly undervalued by the art world because it is in a university and undervalued by the university because it is art. It *is* indeed an art collection, but it is also so much more – its true meaning only shining in full splendour when we learn about its history and let the drawings tell their real story.

¹⁸⁴ This is not by chance. Hélène Lorblanchet, curator of the Musée Atger, explained: “[...] ainsi les étudiants pourraient contempler des représentations du corps humain alliant à l’intérêt anatomique les qualités de l’artiste” (Lorblanchet 2002: 60).

In the early 1920s, Guido Horn-d'Arturo, professor of astronomy at the University of Bologna, was investigating the relation between the distribution of nebulae in the sky, the shape of our galaxy and the real nature of nebulae (Clercq & Lourenço 2002). Presumably with the 1888 *New General Catalogue of Nebulae and Clusters of Stars* by his side, he grabbed a 1792 Cassini celestial globe, wrote down the catalogue numbers of the nebulae on some confetti and glued these to the globe (fig. 7.3). The fact that the globe was almost 150 years old and therefore 'historical' was of no concern to him – he glued the confetti because he was studying the distribution of nebulae and this is how one studies distributions normally. Horn-d'Arturo merely 'updated' the old Globe with the results of new observations, of new knowledge. Fortunately, the confetti still adorns the Cassini globe in the Museo La Specola of the University of Bologna (cf. Baicada *et al.* 1995).



Fig. 7.3 – Celestial globe by G.M. Cassini (Rome, 1792 Inv. MdS-69), with confetti glued to it by Prof. Horn-d'Arturo, today preserved at the Museo della Specola (courtesy Museo della Specola, University of Bologna).



Researchers and teachers use objects and collections as tools to understand and explain the world we live in. More often than not, objects bear the tangible marks of this quest. The processes and *savoir faire*s of research and teaching are consolidated through and materialised in university collections.

Documenting, researching and interpreting university collections as *just* historical or artistic heritage, as mere documents in the history of science, medicine, pharmacy or art, is possible, but it is not good enough. It is not good enough to say that the Atger collection is an art collection (although it is, and a magnificent one). It is not good enough to detach an early 20th century thermometer from decades of use and re-use in multiple experiments and say it documents the evolution of the concept of temperature (although it does). It is not good enough to say that humans are more closely related to mushrooms than to spinaches (although they are). It is not good enough to present and interpret detached results and sublimated ideas as if ideas were central and collections were there merely to illustrate them. It can be done, but on the one hand it has already been done for ages by other museums that have better 'examples' to illustrate the evolution of ideas. On the other hand, it amounts to detaching university collections from a long and meaningful epistemological chain of processes – it is not the real story objects have to tell¹⁸⁵.

The present-day museum sector is a crowded one. There are museums of all sizes, covering all possible subjects from arts to science, from the history of horse shoes to linen, from radio museums to farm museums. New museums are opening and existing ones grow bigger and

¹⁸⁵ Interpreting processes is not an easy task. Other museums and science centres have tried and most have failed – interpreting ideas through objects is simpler.

bigger. University museums need to step back for a moment and reflect on what they have to offer that makes them distinct and meaningful. University collections can evoke the gradual, slow, hard, determined, persistent, intuitive, patient, trial and error, mistake-driven, erroneous, go-fix-that-part-of-the-spectrograph-and-let's-try-again, boring, processes that researchers have gone through in their quest for knowledge. Still today, technologies evolve, collections assume different forms and acquire new objects, yet the processes are essentially the same: questioning, comparing, learning, experimenting, rejecting, re-experimenting, sharing results and ideas, innovating, thinking creatively. In the sciences as in the humanities and the arts.

For centuries, globes like that of Cassini, drawings like that of Tiepolo, together with Huyghens' lens, the Oxford astrolabes, countless drawers of bird skins and boxes of tibias and skulls, paintings done by young artists developing their personal artistic style, unglamorous equipment that was used in a condensed matter physics laboratory and saved from ending in the nearest metal dump, indistinct cannibalised instruments, cast replicas of Greek columns and Aphrodites used for the teaching of comparative art, unattractive wood and plaster models used to teach topology and surface theory long before the Internet was invented – they have all contributed to our knowledge about the universe, the world we live in and ourselves. Because many are being used for present-day and future research and teaching, they will continue to contribute to the enhancement of our understanding. This articulation between past, present and future knowledge is a cornerstone of university collections and should not be forgotten or underestimated when interpreted to the public.

Universities have collections that can tell the story of knowledge – how it is created and how it is passed on from generation to generation. University collections are actual and tangible *facts* of intangible past, present and future knowledge. At first glance, this may seem overwhelming, but in reality it is liberating – the new possibilities it opens are boundless.

The core idea of the university as we know it today began in medieval Europe. During 900 years of history, the university has survived wars, pillages, revolutions, changes in sovereignty, plagues, and political and social turmoil. Only 66 institutions worldwide survived without interruption since the Reformation until the present day: the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, the parliaments of Iceland and the Isle of Man and 62 universities (Rüegg 2002). The longevity of the university and its role in highly complex societies have been discussed before (e.g. Ridder-Symoens 2002, Rüegg 2002). One of the reasons put forward for the university's long history of success is its capacity to adapt to political, economical and social circumstances in an ongoing process of change, yet at the same time maintaining its structural identity and the universal nature of its social role. However, possibly the main single reason for the university's long history of success is that societies believe in its importance. What the university is, what it does and what it stands for, resonates with the ideals, dreams and hopes of people from all over the world. Whether in Denmark, Kenya, India, or the Philippines, the university is perceived as *the* place of knowledge and, as it did 900 years ago, continues to capture the splendid world of human imagination.

It does not matter if these ideals are partly symbolic. It does not matter if today's university is not that of Newman¹⁸⁶ and Humboldt. Citizens all over the world continue to trust and respect universities, granting them the right of unorthodoxy as no other institution, and expecting great achievements from them – expecting them to play a major role in the advancement of society through the progress of knowledge. This is the university's most important legacy to the world. Their cultural and social role, their 'third mission' is to explain this legacy to society. Collections are the single and most important resource universities have to do so in a tangible and meaningful way.

¹⁸⁶ John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Rector of the Catholic University of Dublin. In a famous lecture entitled 'The idea of a university' (1854), Newman defended "the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation".