

NEW ROADS FOR THE UNIVERSITY HERITAGE: MUSEUMS

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The University heritage follows several pathways, which are mostly determined by institutional policies and different academic requirements. The best introduction to the University are its environment, its architectural originality and magnificence, its works of art, its scientific equipping, its collections, its research and educational products (books, articles, visual and virtual programs, etc.), its institutional tradition and its generation of pecuniary income. The universal character of almost every university around the world makes them follow similar pathways and promote a global culture based on knowledge.

Generally, all museums have similar vocations. They cherish and foster the cultural heritage in order to transmit civic and social values in their universal sense.¹ **The simultaneity of functions among universities, collections and university museums grant the latter an additional value, which must be highlighted and exploited in a sustainable manner.**

Tangible goods give considerable economical and social value to universities; however, nowadays, it is important not to take interest merely in cultural goods, as it is traditionally done, since this is only a part of a university's richness. Thus, we suggest a focus on the other part (a part which opposes to, but also complements the other) with a patrimonial perspective, that is to say, a focus on the intangible part; a part which both students and professors built up day by day, creating characteristic and unique "**spaces for interaction**" that revitalize the university and, at the same time, become its emblems.

When it comes to museums, these spaces for interaction become *museals*². In the case of university collections and museums, it is important to mention that

¹ Universal heritage as a whole. In Viereg, Hildegard K., "El patrimonio universal del ICOM", **Noticias del ICOM**, 60, 2007,1, *Museos y Patrimonio Universal*, ICOM-UNESCO, 2007.

² Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience*.

the university itself supplies the physical and conceptual platform. Spaces for interaction can develop even more and in different directions.

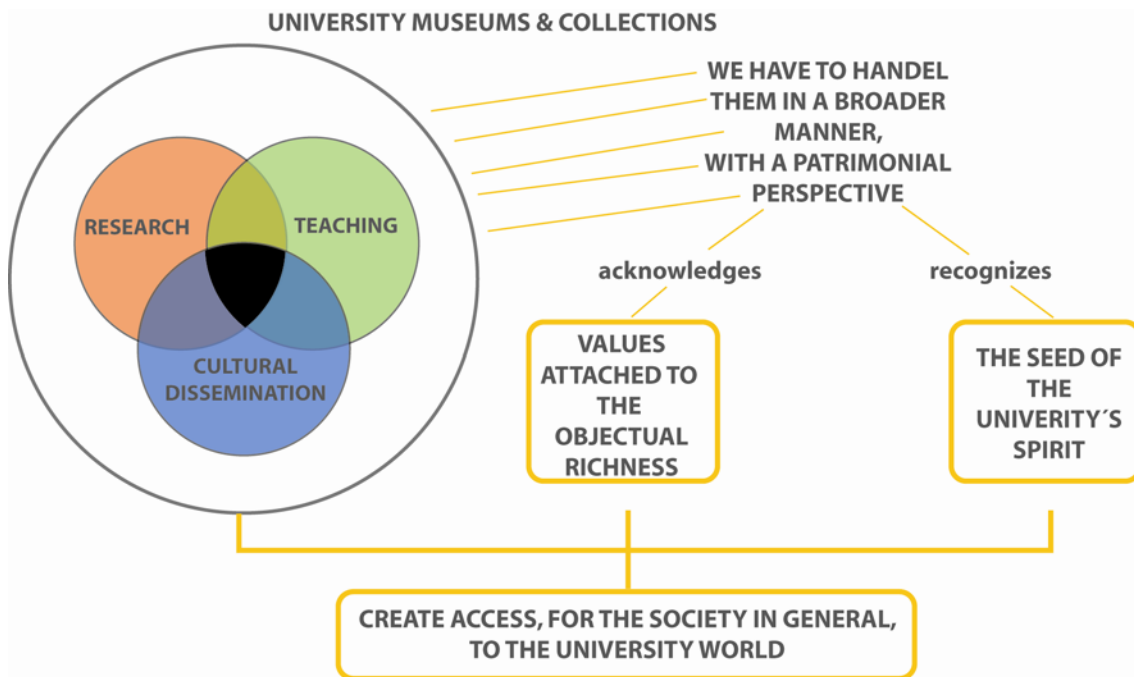
In my opinion, the patrimonial dimension should be viewed from a holistic perspective. Only by knowing those university collections and museums that concern us as a whole, will we be able to understand their parts and constituents. This leads us to discover the ways in which the values and actions, concerning the university heritage that has been collected and musealized, are interwoven, which allows us to project such heritage into the future. In order to do that, we take into account five aspects:

1. To what extent is the traditional university modern and the modern university traditional?

Today's university was intended to be “universal”, as the *Universitas studii* from the Middle Ages, which had to embrace everything and everybody. Although, at that time, the knowledge of the world was limited, as universities made progress in the new fields of knowledge, they made it their own knowledge, increased it and incorporated it into their academic activities, which gave rise to what we know today as the respect for and promotion of *cultural diversity*.

Both, individual and musealized collections have always been part of this process; they are the tangible evidence of such “universality”. Notwithstanding the fact that, initially, university collectionism had research, teaching, and culture spreading purposes; today, cultural and technological developments, as well as the processes of cultural globalization make us handle them in a broader manner, under a patrimonial perspective that both acknowledges the values attached to its objectual richness and recognizes in it the seed of the university's spirit.

Thus, collections are no longer mere cultural goods nor are museums traditional university repositories, instead, besides being working instruments, they have become both **the media that identify and distinguish each university and the access, for the society in general, to the university world.**



2. To what extent do these university collections and museums represent the interests of the university's community?

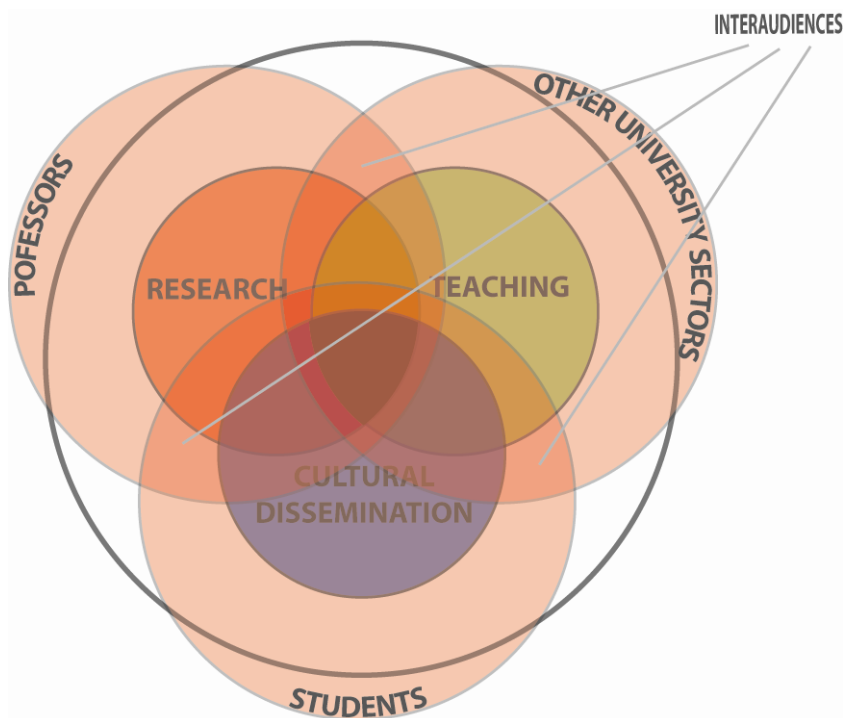
In general, inherited collections do not take part in the life of a university as such; only the groups directly related to such collections are the ones who express interest in them. Only spectacular or considerably original exhibitions call the attention of different sectors of a university's community.

In order to prevent this "divorce", it is necessary, on the one hand, that both professors and students get actively involved in the musealization process and the "staging" of objects, thus, creating **spaces for** physical, intellectual, emotional and social **interaction**, so that apart from knowing, interpreting and giving the works of art other ways of expression, they develop, through this process, a sense of institutional and regional identity and belonging.

On the other hand, it is important to change the concept of museography provided by the university's *thesaurus*, into one that promotes **spaces for** intellectual interaction, one that entails thought processes that foster the construction and deconstruction of the exhibition's content (art, science, history, anthropology, etc) among both the community and the audience through the objects and their musealization as a learning alternative. **Creating spaces for**

museal interaction in which every sector of the university's community gets involved, brings the different audiences closer, and generates "interaudiences" interested in the appreciation and protection of the university heritage.

Such spaces for museal interaction may turn into exceptional knowledge and experiences, that is to say, into an intangible and wealthy heritage to the university members.

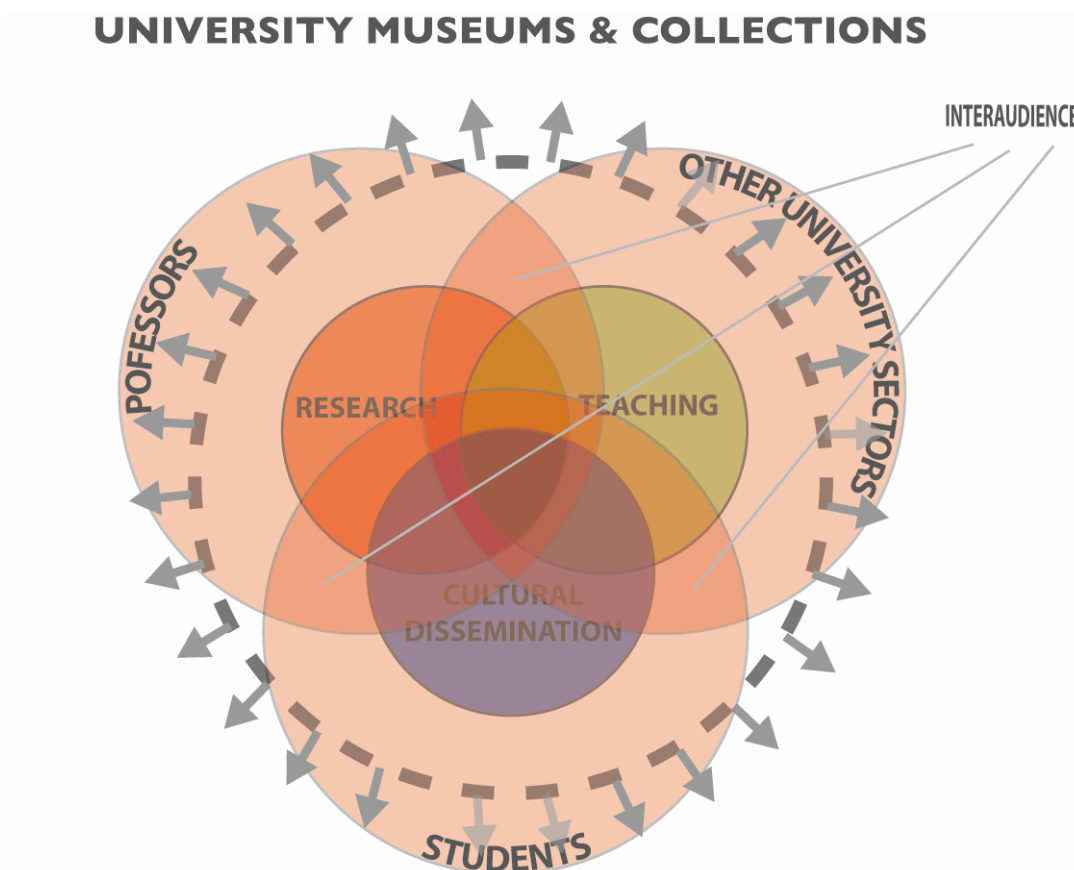


3. Which other uses does the heritage of university museums have nowadays?

The incorporation of new technologies into everyday life and the globalization of knowledge everywhere around the world demand going beyond academic research, education and dissemination in order to promote its "appropriation" or "consumption" by wide sectors of the society. The latter implies thinking of different audiences, and providing them, at the least, with the museum services common to other museums. Exploiting the distinctive value of university collections and museums, as a unique and worth visiting attraction, means opening new "**spaces for social interaction**" in university museums to

disregarded audiences such as that of made up of scientists, business people, tourists or cybervisitors.

The fact of giving a social use to university museums widens de range of activities and reactivates museums considerably. **University collections and museums shall cross the physical and academic “borders” for the sake of a wider variety of activities and audiences.**



4. Taking into account the commitment with cultural modernization that today's university has made, is it possible for university collections and museums to promote local values?

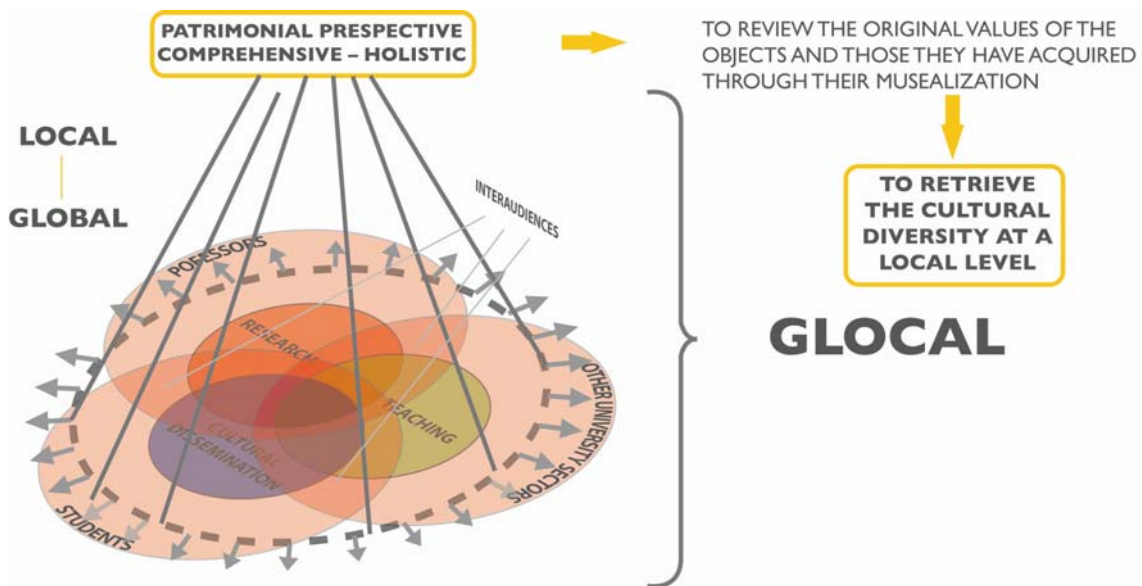
Both universities and museums are globalizing institutions that have settled and prevailed within the different local societies. Therefore, collectionism and university museums follow globally standardized models.

On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that collectionism is based on the peculiarity and originality of its works of art as the irrefutable evidence of the

otherness. Probing the existence of “the other”, in time and space, categorized those pieces of art as museable pieces.

That is why, and despite the fact that university collectionism has had to adapt to rigid and universal scientific-academic models; today, it is important to review pieces of art and collections from a comprehensive and holistic perspective, so that both the original values of the objects and those they have acquired through their musealization, are thoroughly understood and the components of the *cultural diversity* are retrieved at a local level.

Looking for a balance between global and local influences, in other words, assuming a “glocal”³ dimension, using the university as a physical and conceptual platform, is having the possibility of retrieving the social aspects of a lost past in order to offer them to the societies of the future.



5. New paradigms of museology give rise to new fields of knowledge, is this a good time to develop a specialized museology, a university museology that tackles specific aspects concerning university collections and museums?

As the institutions that have largely determined the pathways collectionism and museums have followed, I think universities should develop a specialized museology that tackles the aspects concerning them. This will allow them to

³ Robertson, Blanco, Reynoso, González.

generate their own conceptual corpus and support museology concepts and theories in general.

They should develop a university museology in permanent evolution, committed to the university members, the environment and the society which created it. Such museology should foster a respectful physical, intellectual, emotional and social integration that generates spaces where different audiences may meet and communicate, thus shaping “interaudiences” in the museums.

Finally, such museology shall acknowledge that a good museal experience may significantly enhance the intangible heritage of university members and visitors in general, providing them not only with the knowledge, but also with the necessary elements to develop a sense of social belonging and identity.

It is essential to develop a museology based on the university as a fundamental aspect of analysis, in order to tackle each and every one of the museal issues concerning universities to achieve an strategic positioning for the future.

UNIVERSITY MUSEOLOGY WITH A PATRIMONIAL PERSPECTIVE

