

Re-Evaluating the discourse on University Museums

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University Museums and Collections (UMAC) was founded in 2001 as an international committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). From the start, UMAC has organized one conference a year and published a series of topical papers based on the proceedings of each of these meetings.

The initial proceedings from the 2001 meeting in Barcelona and the 2002 meeting in Sydney were carried by the journal *Museologia* based at the Museum of Natural History and Science at the University of Lisbon. The following 2003 conference was published independently by the conference host, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma. Proceedings from the UMAC conference in 2004, part of the triennial ICOM conference in Seoul, were combined with the proceedings from the 2005 Uppsala meeting and published as volume 15 of *Opuscula Musealia* by the Jagiellonian University Museum Collegium Maius in Krakow. The 2006 meeting in Mexico City produced a volume of thematically arranged papers published in Spanish and English by the host university for the meeting, the National Autonomous University of Mexico under the title “New Roads for University Museums”.

It is fair to say that during this period, not much literature about university museums and collections was published in academic journals. Apart from the occasional exception, much of the writings on this seemingly specialised subject matter were found in what is generally referred to as the ‘grey literature’. This included reports and commissioned studies, reviews and the unpublished studies of higher education staff and student researchers. So while these early UMAC conferences were producing a diverse cohort of presentation offerings on many wide-ranging topics, the UMAC Board and more specifically, the UMAC Publications Working Group were simply glad to find some outlets willing to support their ventures by producing printed conference proceedings as output. The disciplinary and geographic diversity of the early conference proceedings not only showed the unique international perspective of the UMAC enterprise, but was also a portent for an increasing global interest in the materiality of the higher education enterprise.

With authors and editors in many countries, hard copy publications became difficult and expensive to produce and distribute meaning UMAC members and other interested professionals and researchers found them hard to access. This unsatisfactory situation stimulated UMAC to establish an electronic journal: the *University Museums and Collections Journal* (UMACJ) for many years hosted by the University of Humboldt as an open source journal publication. The main business of UMACJ was still conference proceedings. The site also carried the earlier more diverse set of proceedings thus coalescing much of the writing about university museums in the one place. It aimed to and achieved the provision of global, inclusive accessibility to, and distribution of, UMAC's conference proceedings. This period covered annual conferences in Vienna, Manchester, San Francisco, Shanghai, Lisbon, Singapore, Rio de Janeiro and Alexandria, again testament to the international nature of many of the questions and issues that surround university museums and collections.

But even during this more recent period it has become apparent that the output covered by the journal could easily be expanded beyond the boundaries of the annual UMAC conference. In fact, UMACJ has already done this by publishing some material that was not presented at a UMAC annual conference, including, for example, selected papers from the 2013 "Future of Academic Heritage" conference at the University of Ghent. The nature of UMAC's annual conference was also changing. For example, the 2014 conference in Alexandria was a joint undertaking with CECA (Committee for Education and Cultural Action) another of ICOM's many international committees. It is obvious that there will be further opportunities for a range of collaborations with other ICOM international committees as the scope of discourse about the university museum expands.

Ever since the start of UMAC, that saw a couple of editions of *International Museum* tangle with university museum issues, we have seen an expansion in the number of scholarly papers about university museum and collection issues published in mainstream, established, museum journals in recent years. Also a number of specialist publishers have compiled and released books focussed exclusively on university museums and collections.

It seems to be clear that the increasingly complex operating environment of higher education has prompted greater institutional interest in their museums and collections (SIMPSON 2014), not only among the senior leaders of institutions but also among the scholars (staff and students) at those institutions themselves. The current UMAC Board has as part of its strategic remit, the aim of consolidating UMACJ as the principal academic reference journal for university museums and collections in the long-term. This will involve many steps including; expanding the scope of the journal beyond the proceedings of the annual conference, revising the editorial policy of the journal and expanding the editorial committee. We aim to build our credibility as an academic publisher, attract high quality written submissions and become the publication venue of choice for those writing on/about university museums. Significant changes will be visible in coming issues.

For the moment, UMACJ continues to present a selection of papers from its annual conferences. This issue (9) of UMACJ covers the 2016 UMAC Conference, devoted to the theme 'Museums and Cultural Landscapes'. It took place in Milan between 3 and 9 July, coinciding with ICOM's 24th general conference. The exception is the article about the *Musée des Arts et Métiers*, in Paris, which was not presented at the 2016 UMAC Conference, yet already anticipates the diversity and scope of the future non-proceedings approach/model.

Literature cited

SIMPSON, A. 2014. Rethinking university museums: Material collections and the changing world of higher education. *Museums Australia Magazine*, 22(3): 18-22.