

# University collections: An important part of the German cultural landscape

Cornelia Weber & Martin Stricker

## Abstract

*University collections are an important part of national cultural landscapes and form a cultural landscape in themselves. Thanks to a centralized web portal, it is possible to view the landscape of German university collections around the world. The Coordination Centre for University Collections in Germany recently used data from the portal to develop key indicators on the infrastructural situation of university collections. These key indicators can help investigate, characterize and define strategic perspectives, stimulate collaboration and encourage the creation of strategic alliances.*

*This paper describes the potential offered by the generation and evaluation of key indicators for university collections, which are seen collectively as a national landscape.*

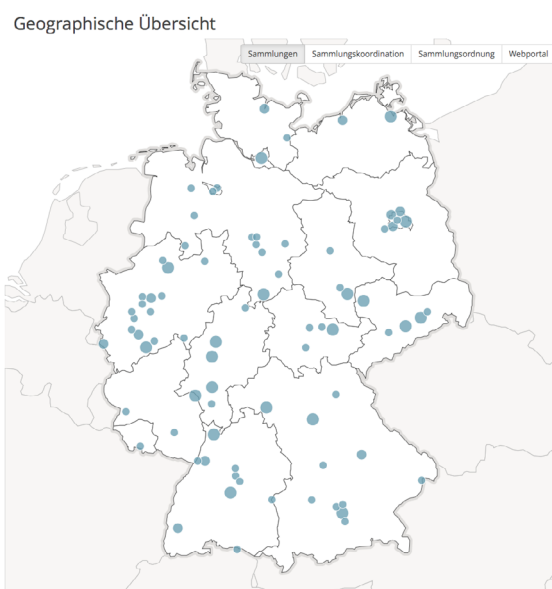
## Introduction

The conference theme 'Museums and Cultural Landscapes'<sup>1</sup> addresses the relationship between museums and cultural landscapes. "Cultural landscapes are landscapes that have been affected, influenced, or shaped by human involvement."<sup>2</sup>

Following this definition, in a first analysis it can be argued that some university collections, such as botanic gardens, geological parks or sculpture parks, are cultural landscapes because they are intentionally created and designed by humans. A university campus, with buildings for museums and collections, can also be seen as a cultural landscape. In this paper, we would like to go further and identify university museums and collections as important cultural landscapes both in themselves and as an integral part of national cultural landscapes. Although distant from more literal definitions, here we will understand the term 'cultural landscape' in a broader metaphoric sense, one that includes cultural activities of individuals and communities in a particular geographical area. We will apply this broader sense to university collections in Germany, but a similar exercise can be done at local, regional or national level anywhere in the world.

In Germany, as in other countries, university collections were created and evolved as mirrors of the state of knowledge at a given time, in multiple aspects and dimensions. When we project university collections onto a map of Germany, we obtain a photography of the present landscape. However, if we consider that each university collection has its own singular development through time, reflecting local and global social and political dimensions, the map becomes an even more interesting and complex cultural landscape, encapsulating knowledge, culture and society, in time as well as in space.

In order to continue to strengthen the contemporary role of university collections, this landscape needs to be thoroughly studied and documented in its multiple dimensions and relations. The more information we compile about it, the stronger the identity of university collections as shared national heritage. Moreover, the more we know about this landscape, the more we will be able to explore, define and specify strategic perspectives, stimulate collaboration and encourage the creation of strategic alliances.



**Fig. 1**  
Geographical overview of  
universities with collections

<sup>1</sup> General ICOM/UMAC Conference, July 2016 in Milan, Italy

<sup>2</sup> About Cultural Landscapes. <http://tclf.org/places/about-cultural-landscapes> (accessed September, 2016).

### The landscape of German university collections

The simplest way to capture or visualize the shape of a cultural landscape is to use available data to produce a map. Today, thanks to a central web portal run by the Coordination Centre for Scientific University Collections in Germany, the collective landscape of German university collections is visible around the world.

The Centre's objective is to further develop and integrate Germany's<sup>3</sup> university collections as decentralised research, teaching and education infrastructures, with due regard for their diversity and specific local characteristics on an interdisciplinary, cross-site basis<sup>4</sup>.

The national web portal<sup>5</sup> for university collections presents a range of information about collections as scientific and academic infrastructures, with information about the collections themselves, the persons and organisations involved in them, and their research, documentation and exhibition activities.

The underlying idea behind the national web portal was the digital presentation and accessibility of academic collections as essential infrastructure for current research, teaching and public education. The portal's visibility has already resulted in important partnerships between large research museums and small academic collections.

In July 2016, 989 collections in 82 universities have been catalogued and made available in the portal. In order to develop the topography of this landscape, it is necessary to connect the collections descriptions with various geographic data – geolocation and political geography like cities, states, and so forth.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, universities – thus, university collections – are the responsibility of the states. This map of Germany includes its sixteen states and depicts 82 circles of different sizes<sup>6</sup>, each representing one university with collections. A small circle represents a university with less than 10 collections, a medium circle a university with 10-20 collections, and a large circle represents a university with more than 20 collections. When users click on a circle, more information about the university and its collections is provided.

### Key indicators

The characterization of the cultural landscape of university collections in Germany, as well as its infrastructural situation, requires the development and use of key indicators. Key indicators are a set of quantifiable measures enabling the analysis of available data and facilitating a diagnosis of the current infrastructure situation of collections.

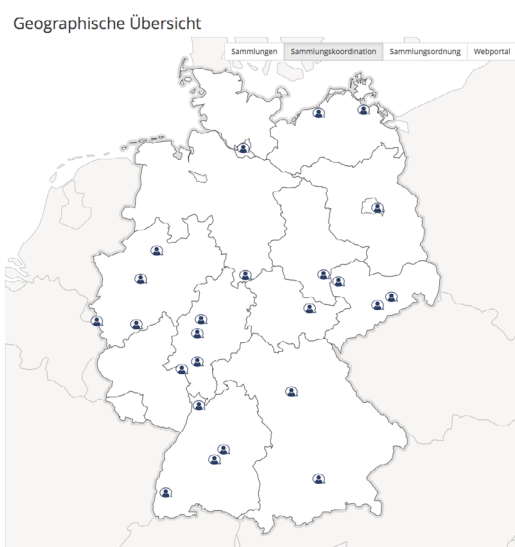
University collections are extremely dynamic. The regular compilation of key indicators can assist in identifying relevant developments and changes in a given collection over a specific period, as well as comparing certain results – such as the institutional settings and framework conditions – across universities. Key indicators also allow the possibility to make solid statements about the relevance and the potential of collections and their usability and use. Thus, they can help key actors to develop strategies to strengthen the cultural and scientific role of the collections, win strategic partners for the future and inspire future policies for collections.

3 See <http://wissenschaftliche-sammlungen.de> (accessed September 2016).

4 Cornelia Weber, Sarah Link, Martin Stricker, Oliver Zauzig: Repositioning University Collections as Scientific Infrastructures. A New Approach in Germany. In: Enhancing University Heritage-Based Research, ed. by Gudrun Wolfschmidt, Hamburg 2016, pp. 31-43 (Nuncius Hamburgensis - Beiträge zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften 33).

5 <http://portal.wissenschaftliche-sammlungen.de> (accessed September 2016).

6 There are in total 107 universities in Germany (2015/16).



**Fig. 2**  
University collections with  
centralized coordination

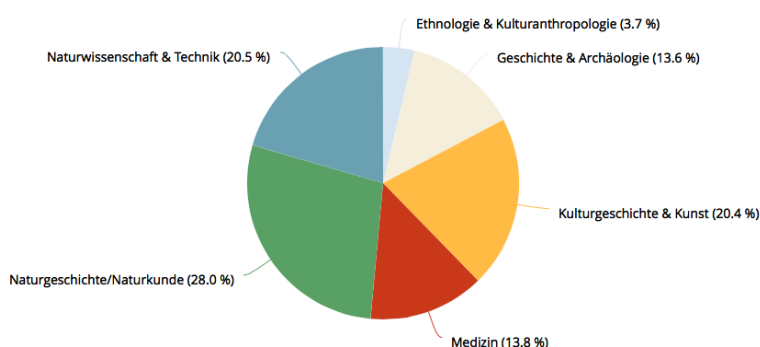
### The infrastructure situation of university collections in Germany

Today, 24 German universities coordinate centrally their collections, which account for about 72% of all collections in Germany. 'Centrally coordinate' means that the collections are coordinated by some working group or committee which meets regularly or by a collections officer, responsible for a university-wide policy, strategies and activities. Four additional universities are currently discussing hiring a collections officer. In 2012, when the Coordination Centre initiated its activities, only a few universities centrally coordinated their collections.

Given that work with collections should be based on clear and reliable policies, it is important for universities to develop university-wide policies for their collections. Unfortunately, to date, only four universities in Germany have completed and made available their policies; some are currently in the process of doing so. 27 universities present their collections, museums and heritage in an autonomous website. 62.5% of university collections are active. This means, for example, the collection is maintained and/or accessible and/or usable and/or involved in activities. 6.9% are not active and 30.6% did not provide any information in response to our inquiries.

### Sammlungsarten

Die Kategorie Sammlungsart, die den Bestand und den inhaltlichen Schwerpunkt einer Sammlung charakterisiert, ist aus dem Museumsbereich übernommen. Sie wurde jedoch – in Anlehnung an die UNESCO-Klassifikation – für den Bereich der akademischen Sammlungen entsprechend modifiziert.



**Fig. 3**  
Subject areas

University collections have been categorized by general subject area. The distribution of collections by subject area is as follows:

- o Natural History 28.0%
- o Cultural History & Art 20.4%
- o Natural Sciences & Technology 20.5%
- o Medicine 13.8%
- o History and Archaeology 13.6%
- o Ethnology & Cultural Anthropology 3.7%

In addition to the general situation in Germany, we also show the same key indicators for each of the sixteen German states. That is significant because in Germany higher education funding is provided by the states.

### Universitäten nach Bundesländern

Die Tabelle zeigt eine Übersicht anhand der Bundesländer mit kumulierten Daten zu Anzahl von Universitäten und Sammlungen, Anteil aktiver Sammlungen, Sammlungskoordinationen, Sammlungsordnungen und Webportalen.

Durch Mausklick auf eine Tabellenzeile (bzw. durch Klick auf "Alle ausklappen") können die Überblicksdaten einzelner Universitäten aufgerufen werden.

Durch Klick auf eine Universität kann deren ausführliches Datenblatt aufgerufen werden.

[Alle ausklappen](#)

Bundesland	Universitäten	Sammlungen	aktive Sammlungen	Sammlungs-koordination	Sammlungs-ordnung	Webportal
<b>Baden-Württemberg</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>141</b>				
<b>Bayern</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>110</b>				
<a href="#">Akademie der Bildenden Künste München</a>		1		—	—	—
<a href="#">Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg</a>		30			—	
<a href="#">Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg</a>		25		—	—	—
<a href="#">Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt</a>		2		—	—	—
<a href="#">Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München</a>		27			—	
<a href="#">Technische Universität München</a>		7		—	—	—
<a href="#">Universität Augsburg</a>		2		—	—	—

**Fig. 4**  
**Universities (with collections) by**  
**states**

Clicking on a particular state – for example Bavaria – provides information about each university's collections. In Bavaria, there are 11 universities with a total of 100 collections; of these, 30 belong to the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.

A further click on Erlangen-Nuremberg provides detailed information about the university's collections such as:

- Address
- Number of collections
- Number of active collections
- Contact of the coordinating officer or contact person
- Information about the existence of a university-wide collections governance policy
- Information about the collective presentation of the university's collections on the web
- Number of collections by discipline

This university page is complemented by a list of all collections, including the state of activity of the collection (active, not active, n/a), the availability of a contact person, and comprehensive publications (if available). Key indicators for a university are linked to further information in the portal with additional detailed information on the collections (e.g. subjects, type of objects, databases).

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg <sup>7</sup> Portal

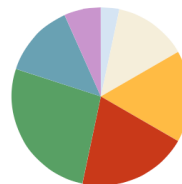
Erlangen, Bayern

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg  
Schlossplatz 4  
91054 Erlangen<http://www.uni-erlangen.de/>

Sammlungen: 30  
 Aktive Sammlungen: 21  
 Sammlungskoordination: Zentralkustodie der Universität  
 Erlangen-Nürnberg

Udo Andraschke  
[udo.andraschke@fau.de](mailto:udo.andraschke@fau.de)  
 +49 (0) 9131 85 20745

Sammlungsordnung: Nein  
 Gemeinsames Webportal: Ja - [Link](#)



Ethnologie & Kulturanthropologie: 1 Sammlung(en)  
 Geschichte & Archäologie: 4 Sammlung(en)  
 Kulturgeschichte & Kunst: 5 Sammlung(en)  
 Medizin: 6 Sammlung(en)  
 Naturgeschichte/Naturkunde: 8 Sammlung(en)  
 Naturwissenschaft & Technik: 4 Sammlung(en)  
 keine Angabe: 2 Sammlung(en)

## Sammlungen

Sammlung	aktive Sammlung	mit Ansprechpartner
Anatomische Sammlung I <sup>7</sup> Portal	✓	✓
Anatomische Sammlung II <sup>7</sup> Portal	—	✓
Antikensammlung <sup>7</sup> Portal	✓	✓
Artenmaarten Erlangen <sup>7</sup> Portal	✓	✓

Fig. 5

Collections at Friedrich-Alexander  
 University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

## Further analysis

University collections should be both digitally visible and digitally usable. The Centre has therefore developed key indicators on digital collections<sup>7</sup>. We have analyzed the general degree of digitization and the degree of digitization per collection type and discipline. Furthermore, we analyzed the type of digital reproduction (e.g. image, audio, video, 3D, animation, text) and their quality for scientific use. Using this information, it is possible to develop – in cooperation with the community – strategies and special programs for the digitization of university collections.

As a next step, the Coordination Centre will collect data on teaching activities. We would like to know more about the role of collections in academic teaching and learning. For example, are collections being used permanently for teaching activities? In which academic disciplines is teaching with collections part of the curriculum?

## Concluding remarks

In Germany, it has proven effective to treat university collections as a collective landscape with a decentralized infrastructure for research, teaching and education. The more we know about this landscape, the more we will be able to investigate, identify and define strategic perspectives, stimulate collaboration, and encourage the creation of strategic alliances.

For this reason, we study and document the collections, and analyze the available data with the help of key indicators. With these results, we can develop specific strategies and in this way ensure the long-term existence and use of our collections.

To increase the visibility and use of university collections for research, teaching and education, it is necessary to collect and present relevant data. This is especially important for the numerous, yet often hidden, departmental collections. For example, the visibility of these university collections can lead to important partnerships between large research museums and small academic collections. We thus encourage universities and countries all over the world to conduct systematic surveys, to analyze the available data and to develop basic policies.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://portal.wissenschaftliche-sammlungen.de/kennzahlen/digitale-sammlungen> (accessed September 2016).

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Scientific infrastructure - Key indicators - Strategies