**Managing university museums: professional values, users and cultural entrepreneurship**

**Brief description of the research proposal**

In the last four decades, museums all over the world experienced a deep process of transformation that have seriously questioned the core idea of these old institutions (e.g. Vergo, 1989; McCall & Gray, 2013). The current definition of museum by ICOM entails a crucial distinction between collections and museum that would have not made sense 40 years ago. Such a transformation of new museology is sometimes referred to as a change of emphasis from an “object based to people centred institution” (Murawski, 2018). In this view, the primary issue of collecting and preserving the museum as an archive of objects is linked to issues of knowledge sharing and community involvement (from mere “keeping”, to an articulated set of activities: conservation, research, access. For a critique see Cannon Brookes, 1998). In parallel to that, museums, as well cultural institutions more in general, are also experiencing a new emphasis on the use of resources, both human and financial (Gstraunthaler & Martin Piber, 2007).

To what extent such process of transformation is affecting university museums is the main interest of this research. Looking at university museums with the lenses of organizational and management studies, we study if, how, and to what extent the challenge of transforming collections into the notion of museum as defined by ICOM has influenced the transformation of museums and collections of universities in terms of administrative solutions, activities, resources and visitors. Attention is paid to the contextual factors facilitating or hindering the process.

Based on a preliminary investigation at the Bologna University Museums (Ferri et al, 2021), the research will develop a comparative analysis at a double level:

* between the eight universities of the Una Europa network, that have already signed a research project on “Manging issues in running university museums and collections “;
* between four old Italian universities (Bologna, Padua, Pisa and Naples), benefiting from a substantive interest from the professional teams inside the universities, and a cooperation agreement signed on theses aspects.

**State of the art and goals of the project**

The organization and functions of university-based museums and collections have been the object of much debate worldwide over the past thirty years. Projects have been launched in the attempt to redefine the structure and the scope of repositories and museums, focusing on the preservation of the historical heritage (collections, museums, archives, libraries, botanical gardens, astronomical observatories, etc.) and the positioning of these assets in the context of education and research activities. Along with these objectives, growing attention is currently being paid to the role that historical heritage plays in the enhancement of the image of universities, not only in the eyes of the members of such institutions (staff and students) but also and above all in the eyes of members of the local community, potential donors, and other stakeholders. Equally important, is the role of historical heritage within the third mission of higher education and research institutions. In the US examples of best practice are provided by Harvard and Yale, whose museum public engagement programs have done much to enhance and expand the operations of the collections and their universities. In Europe, Oxford and Cambridge have already launched plans for the reorganization of their museums and the enhancement of their historical heritage; an excellent example of best practice is the re-definition of the functions and structure of the Uppsala University Museum implemented in 2008; equally promising is the ongoing reorganization in progress at the University of Strasbourg.

Italian universities especially the most ancient ones, hold exceedingly valuable collections whose value is recognized at international level. However, some common and distinctive criticalities may hinder the expansion of the functions of Italian university museums beyond the university walls, and prevent them from becoming an effective component of the universities' third mission.

In fact, like any museum in the western world (US excluded), the functioning of university museums is highly intertwined with that of public administration, with the related implications in terms of funding scarcity, the progressive depletion of high skilled professionals due to public sector hiring freeze, and the formalism and legalism of the (Italian) public administrative procedures (Kickert 2007).

To make things worse, university museums share some distinctive critical aspects. To start with, university collections have a problematic relationship with research and teaching, the most important universities' functions. Indeed, in most cases objects enter universities' collections when they are no longer relevant for these core tasks (for example scientific instruments). What is required, and has already been successfully achieved in the above-mentioned foreign institutions, is to redefine new scopes and functions for museums' collections which are functional to present day educational activities, as well as being valuable assets as historical heritage.

Besides, what characterizes university museums the most is the fact that they are part of the (Italian) University, an institution that is not always able to interpret and manage the specificities of museums from an organizational point of view. The ambiguity of relationships between museums and "normal" academic departments and the issue of human resources are central aspects here. While the departmental silos were appropriate to manage collections 100 years ago, nowadays this organizational form does not satisfy the students, researchers and the general public in many wide-ranging disciplines.

Moreover, specialized disciplinary focus tends to hinder the interdisciplinary use of individual objects and collections (e.g. the possible meanings for science students of humanities collections; for humanities students of science collections; or for social science students of both scientific and humanities collections). Both of these realities have been undermining the rationale for university collections-increasingly so of late, as competition for resources intensifies with constraints on external funding (Janes, 2009). lt should also be noted that museums need specific professional figures, such as curators, restorers, or educators, raising the problem as to whether the Italian university system is able to recruit and motivate employees that are neither researchers nor teachers. Even more deleteriously, in times of cuts in public expenditures University museums' curators are often not replaced when retiring, thus leading to a shortage of such professional figure. Besides, collection management experience is seldom recognized in terms of career progression within the university, thus making the role of curator not attractive for academic staff. This goes hand in hand with a more general redefinition of the task of a collection manager. The conventional outward flow of museum expertise and knowledge-manifested as displays, exhibitions, catalogues and scholarly publications-is to be balanced by an inward flow of enriching and complementary perspectives from experts in other fields, and from students and researchers able to widen the terms of engagement with historic material culture.

In sum, there seem to be a gap between the positive rhetoric concerning the role of museums within the third mission of Universities on the one hand, and the status quo of the administrative settings that should support this re-positioning on the other. To align administrative practices with the vision concerning University museums, we believe that additional understanding and improvement is needed along three interrelated dimensions, namely:

* *The degree of organizational autonomy of museums vis a vis the central university administrations*: the question to be asked when looking at the organizational autonomy of university museums is how their being part of institutions of higher education and research shapes the conditions for managerial action concerning the use of resources, the relationship with visitors, and the scientific/aesthetic dimension, that is the professional practices and criteria of collecting, preserving, restoring, and researching (Zan, 2006). interestingly, among Italian Universities a deep resistance to museums' autonomy is manifest, and yet also overcome in ways that have not been systematically examined nor contextualized.
* *The development of accountability systems that can effectively direct the attention of museums' staff towards new goals*: institutionally-generated information can play a crucial role in boundary management, "especially in those organizations having indeterminate input/output transformations which are particularly vulnerable to societal pressures for increased legitimacy" (Llewellyn, 1994, p. 13), like University museums. In these situations, what is expected is a greater reliance on accounting in order to renew organizational boundaries and therefore to legitimate organizational identity. Yet the discussion on what type of information (financial or non-financial) can serve better this purpose remains open. For instance, while for some authors knowing the financial value of the collection should make museums' managers more accountable, for others this kind of information shifts the attention away from other more relevant performance indicators (Carnegie and Wolnizier, 1996).
* *The entrepreneurial attitude of museums' leadership and staff*: for university museums the problem of resource constraint is exacerbated and universities need to stimulate entrepreneurship to activate resource mobilization processes. lt is recognized that entrepreneurship (and cultural entrepreneurship, from the seminal work of Di Maggio, 1982) can reduce resource constraint both through optimization and bricolage processes. Entrepreneurship theory shows that entrepreneurial intentions and actions depend on personal (such as personality traits and entrepreneurial skills) and context drivers (such as the national context and the industry context). With reference to our organizations the relevant context is a combination of the larger institutional setting, the individual university organization­ with its governance structure, incentive systems and values and the professional community of museum curators. Although the majority of the studies shows a preference for a focused perspective, we will adopt a more recent approach, which combines agent-centric and context centric perspectives and focus on the coevolution of agency and the context (Garud et al., 2015).

**Field work and proposed methodology**

How to foster autonomy, accountability and entrepreneurial attitude among University museums is a theme that is seldom explored in the literature about University museums, which is devoted to the study on the university collections, and to the redefinition of their educational and research functions (Tirrell, 2000; Talas and Lourenço, 2012). Needless to say, the recommendations have to be adapted and adjusted to very different contexts, and to different circumstances (Council of Europe, 2005).

The proposed project intends to compare University museums at two different levels:

* Within UnoEuropa network, for the first year, supporting the enactment of their research projects already signed within this framework (1st year);
* Between Bologna, Padua, Naples and Pisa, focusing on the criticalities that are hindering the transition towards an effective system of governance of the historical collections (1st and 2nd year).

A case study methodology will be employed. We aim at reconstructing the administrative history and the achievements of university museums focusing on their:

* activities (i.e. collection Management, Temporary exhibitions, Research, Teaching, Other);
* audience and how this had change throughout the years;
* resources, both human, financial and physical (buildings and spaces);
* degrees of autonomy from Universities;
* accountability.

A specific element that will be investigated in this regard will be the question of collection assessment. This is a very controversial issue all over the world, for all public museums. University museums are likely to add further elements of complexity, both form an institutional, organizational and conceptual point of view. As public institutions that are not expected to consider de-accessioning alternatives (i.e. to sell collections), the internally constructed collections and their intrinsic meanings are likely to pose not banal issues in any attempt to evaluate collections, in their intrinsic nature of object that cannot be reproduced, nor substitute, nor exchanged on the market.

**Candidate’s profile**

The researcher is expected to have competencies in management and/or accounting research, share a substantive interest for heritage management as a field of studies, and be familiar with qualitative research methodologies. The candidate should be fluent in Italian and English.

**Development Opportunities and expected outputs**

The researcher is expected to contribute to the research project through a research activity aimed at producing international publications. He/she is expected to develop and propose new research ideas that are not indicated in this document but that may become relevant during the research process.

By the end of the research grant, the researcher should be able to submit at least two manuscripts for consideration for publication. Ideally, empirical articles should be aimed at integrating the conversation on arts management, and/or public sector management.

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