

The University of Lisbon's cultural heritage survey (2010–2011)

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Abstract

In this paper, a survey of the cultural heritage of the University of Lisbon (2010–2011) will be presented, with a focus on the methodological approach. Main results will be discussed, as well as future perspectives regarding management, preservation and access of the university's scientific and artistic collections, and buildings of artistic, architectonic and historical significance.

Introduction

In the twentieth century, university museums and collections became increasingly complex institutions facing many challenges. During the post-war, particularly in Europe, three major factors had direct consequences in the mission and role played by university museums and collections. First, structural reforms in higher education systems had impact in the university internal structure, autonomy and governance. Secondly, a significant development of the museum sector, with the gradual implementation of accreditation systems, improved training and professional standards, with a significant increase of public access. Finally, advancements in science often had a profound impact in scientific research and teaching trends, deeply transforming the curricula of many courses.

These three factors posed major challenges to university museums and collections. Many suffered a considerable decrease in their use for teaching and research and became orphaned and vulnerable. Many others were shutdown. Since the 1980s, an extensive literature about the 'crisis' of university museums began to emerge.¹ Several surveys were initiated in different countries and, through the 1990s, collaboration both at national and international levels emerged, as professionals from both university museums and the museum sector mobilized for the preservation of university museums and collections.

Until the 1980s, comprehensive national surveys of university museums and collections were rare in Europe. The first took place in the Netherlands in the 1980s. After almost three decades of instability, neglect, department closures, reorganizations, and disposals of orphaned collections in several Dutch universities, keepers and curators created the LOCUC² (DE CLERCQ 2003). Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, the LOCUC published a seminal report about the situation of Dutch academic heritage (LOCUC 1985); a second survey with a broader scope was commissioned by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science (ADVIESGROUP RIJKSDIENST BEELDDE KUNST 1996).

Since the 1960s in the United Kingdom, surveys and reports about higher education museums and collections have been published regularly (e.g. STANDING COMMISSION ON MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES 1968, 1976; MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES COMMISSION 1987; BENNETT ET AL. 1999; UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS GROUP 2004). However, detailed and systematic surveys, covering every region, were only conducted between 1984 and 2002 (BASS 1984a, 1984b; ARNOLD-FORSTER 1989, 1993, 1999; DRYSDALE 1990; ARNOLD-FORSTER & LA RUE 1993; ARNOLD-FORSTER & WEEKS 1999, 2000, 2001; COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS IN WALES 2002; NORTHERN IRELAND MUSEUMS COUNCIL 2002).

In other countries, such as France and Germany, national surveys are ongoing, often informal, processes. Germany initiated in 2001 a census of German university museums and collections, disseminated through the Internet.³ More recently, the German Council of Science and Humanities

¹ Cf. a review of the literature in LOURENÇO 2005.

² LOCUC stands for *Landelijk Overleg Contactfunctionarissen Universitaire Collecties* (Survey Group for University Collections).

³ Cf. www.universitaetssammlungen.de (accessed November 8, 2011).

published a report regarding university scientific collections, *Recommendations on Scientific Collections as Research Infrastructures* (2011).⁴ In an approach similar to Germany's, France is developing a national online platform for universities and other institutions of higher education (*Plateforme OCIM Universités*), coordinated by the OCIM, *Office de Coopération et d'Informations Muséales*.⁵ This platform aims at creating a collaborative network, for which a preliminary launch meeting took place in 2009, at the Universeum annual meeting in Toulouse. The network encompasses all French universities (SOUBIRAN ET AL. 2009; SOUBIRAN & BELAËN 2012).

In Italy, under the direction of the Italian Conference of Rectors (CRUI), a special 'Committee for university delegates for museums, archives and centres of historical and scientifically significant university collections' was created in 1999.⁶ The so-called *Commissione Musei* conducted a national survey of university museums and collections. Results are available online, although still far from representing the rich and diverse Italian university heritage.⁷

At international level, two organizations are worth mentioned as they have conducted formal or informal university museums surveys: the *Universeum* European Academic Heritage Network and UMAC. The latter has developed a remarkable Worldwide Database of University Museums & Collections,⁸ aimed at providing a global online directory, including information from other directories, inventories, catalogues and other sources (WEBER & LOURENÇO 2005).

At university level, surveys are more common than at national or international levels. In the past two decades, many universities in Europe have conducted surveys of their heritage. Typically, these surveys result from institutional reorganizations and the need to improve standards and long-term sustainability.

In Portugal, the public higher education system encompasses 16 universities and 31 polytechnic institutes, although the majority of university museums and collections are at the Universities of Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto. Despite recent efforts in reorganizing and raising the visibility of Portuguese academic heritage, particularly scientific (LOURENÇO 2010), no national survey has ever been done or is planned. At university level, Lisbon is the first to have completed a systematic and methodology-controlled survey of its cultural heritage.

The University of Lisbon

In 1290, a studium generale was created in Lisbon, where it functioned until the sixteenth century, except for two short periods of 30 years.⁹ In 1537, it was transferred to Coimbra (FERNANDES, in press). Higher education would only be re-established in Lisbon in the nineteenth century, with the creation of the Medical and Surgical School (1836), the Polytechnic School (1837) and the Higher Course of Humanities (1859). In 1911, these schools were united to form the faculties of medicine, sciences and humanities of the University of Lisbon, respectively. Therefore, the University of Lisbon celebrates in 2011 the centennial of its re-foundation. Studies about its museums, collections and buildings of artistic, historic and architectonic interest have been limited and fragmented (e.g. CALADO 2000; LOURENÇO & CARNEIRO 2009; PASCOAL 2012).

⁴ Cf. www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/10464-11-11_engl.pdf (accessed November 8, 2011).

⁵ Cf. www.ocim.fr/spip.php?rubrique57 (accessed November 8, 2011).

⁶ Cf. www.cruil.it/HomePage.aspx?ref=891 (accessed November 8, 2011).

⁷ Outside Europe, two broad-scale surveys are worth mentioning: Australia, coordinated by Peter Stanbury (UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS REVIEW COMMITTEE 1996; UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS PROJECT COMMITTEE 1998) and the USA (DANILOV 1996).

⁸ Developed by Cornelia Weber, Humboldt University of Berlin, cf. publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/collections/index.php?id=about (accessed November 8, 2011).

⁹ Between 1308–1338 and 1354–1377.

Today, the University has c. 23,000 students, eight faculties, nine institutes and two museums, distributed in five campuses (fig. 1). The main campus is *Cidade Universitária*, encompassing the Faculties of Medicine (and academic hospital), Sciences, Humanities, Law, Pharmacy, Psychology and Dental Medicine; the Institute of Social Sciences, the Institute of Education, the Institute of Geography and Territorial Planning; and the rectorate building. The Faculty of Fine Arts and the two museums – the Museum of Science and the National Museum of Natural History – are located in the centre of Lisbon (the so-called *Seventh Hill* quarter).¹⁰ The Câmara Pestana Bacteriological Institute and the Lisbon Astronomical Observatory have yet different locations in Lisbon, respectively *Campo de Santana* and *Tapada da Ajuda*. Finally, the Guia Marine Laboratory is located in Cascais.

The survey

The cultural heritage survey was integrated in the programme of the university's centennial commemorations. It was conducted between April 2010 and January 2011. Its methodological approach had been established in a preliminary survey developed in 2007,¹¹ which in turn had drawn from the Australian surveys coordinated by Peter Stanbury (UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS REVIEW COMMITTEE 1996; UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS PROJECT COMMITTEE 1998).

The centennial survey had three main objectives: first, to assemble objective and systematic information about the volume, location, disciplinary scope and present state of the cultural heritage held by the University of Lisbon; second, to have a better understanding of its role and significance for the university, the city and the country; finally, the survey aimed at creating a sound point of departure for a consistent long-term management, study, interpretation and accessibility of the collections, museums and buildings of significance of the university.

In methodological terms, the survey comprised field data collecting, oral interviews and bibliographic and archival research. The first stage consisted in identifying the various units and their locations; the data was uploaded into a database (April–May 2010). At the same time, bibliography, documents and iconography regarding the University of Lisbon were compiled. This compilation continued throughout the whole duration of the survey. Bibliographic and archival research focused especially on past collections and museums, both to trace their location today and to understand why they had been lost (LOURENÇO & TEIXEIRA 2011). This has often posed challenges as there are few studies available, let

alone published materials, and the sources are considerably dispersed among a dozen of different locations.

Fieldwork took place between July 2010 and March 2011, often including multiple visits to the same department, faculty or institute (total 45). All visits included oral interviews and comprehensive image collecting. Multiple visits were mostly due to: a) volume and dispersal of collections, both through Lisbon and through the faculties and departments; b) a misunderstanding of the objectives of the survey, including what was meant by 'cultural heritage' and 'collections', requiring

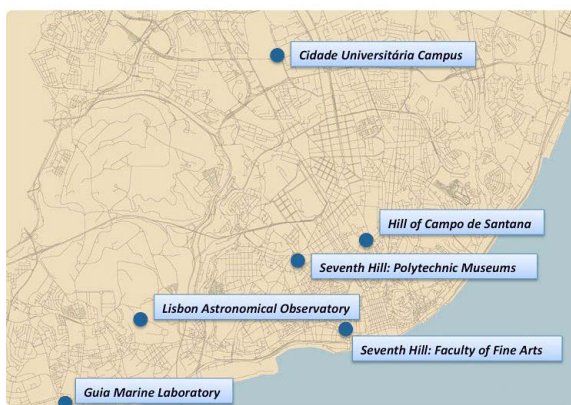


Fig. 1 - Geographical distribution of the University of Lisbon

¹⁰ The Museum of Science was created in 1985, although its planning dates back to the 1960s; the National Museum of Natural History has its origins in the eighteenth century royal natural history collections; the latter also includes the Botanical Garden.

¹¹ LOURENÇO, M. C. 2007. *O Património Histórico, Científico e Artístico da Universidade de Lisboa. Levantamento Preliminar. Parte I – Centro da Cidade e Observatório Astronómico de Lisboa*. Lisbon: Museum of Science of the University of Lisbon (did not cover the *Cidade Universitária* campus; unpublished, in Portuguese).

further explanation and contact. Additional challenges related to the fieldwork included: c) difficulty in identifying the person in charge of the collections, or absence of someone in charge, or even the complexity of defining 'in charge' in some cases; d) the difficulty to establish clear boundaries between individual and institutional collecting.

Given the diversity of the heritage, a working typology was considered essential. Initially, five categories were considered for survey – collection, museum, historical library, historical archive, and building – but these were later simplified to three – collection, object and building. This simplification had two main reasons. First, it is obvious that archives and libraries can be considered collections. Second, in universities, the use of the term 'museum' is often fluid, problematic and not necessarily in the ICOM sense; it is thus easier to consider the collection as the main unit – this can be organized in a museum or not. Although subject to several adaptations during the survey, the working definition of 'collection' used in the survey was: 'a set of objects with an internal and logical consistency, constituting both in themselves and as a whole material evidence of human or natural activity, deliberately reunited in a permanent or temporary way for a specific and previously established purpose'. In disciplinary terms, collections surveyed encompassed the sciences, arts and humanities.¹²

During the survey, each item was provided with an identification number and a brief designation. Data collected in the field included: number of artifacts and specimens, provenance, department and location, contact, legal and institutional background, history, relevance, use, catalogue and conservation state, documentation, staff and bibliography. There were also variations in data collected for each category (e.g. object requires information regarding title, author, category, date, dimensions and materials, and building requires data on architect/author, date, etc.). As mentioned above, a considerable number of photographs of each item were also taken.

Given the diversity of states of access, inventory/catalogue and conservation, a classification system for collections was considered useful. Five classes or categories were developed: a) Collection class I: Not catalogued and physically inaccessible; b) Collection class II: Not catalogued and physically accessible; c) Collection class III: Catalogued and physically accessible; d) Collection class IV: Catalogued, physically accessible and observing minimal conservation standards.¹³

Results

Results confirmed initial expectations suggested by the 2007 preliminary survey and similar university heritage surveys done elsewhere.¹⁴ First, the University of Lisbon has a limited view about the size, diversity and importance of the heritage held under its responsibility. This heritage, composed mostly of collections and buildings of historical significance, is highly dispersed, heterogeneous and has low visibility in the university. Second, although the university has two museums in the ICOM sense of term, the majority of the collections are in departments and institutes. These are partly teaching and research collections and partly historical collections. The latter is thus clearly vulnerable, subject to arbitrariness and lacking proper selection and curatorial staff.

The survey resulted in a total of 214 items; of these, 153 are collections, 37 are individual objects of cultural significance and 24 are buildings of historical, artistic and architectonic relevance. The majority of the university's cultural heritage is located in dispersed academic units, such as faculties, departments and institutes (60%), followed by the museums (33%) and the rectorate (7%) (fig. 2). Geographically, the university's heritage is also dispersed: 57% at *Cidade Universitária*, the main

¹² More often than not, collections surveyed were not considered 'collections' by the university (e.g. furniture, stained glass).

¹³ One would presume that in the two museums of the university most collections would be Class IV, but that was not the case.

¹⁴ LOURENÇO 2005.

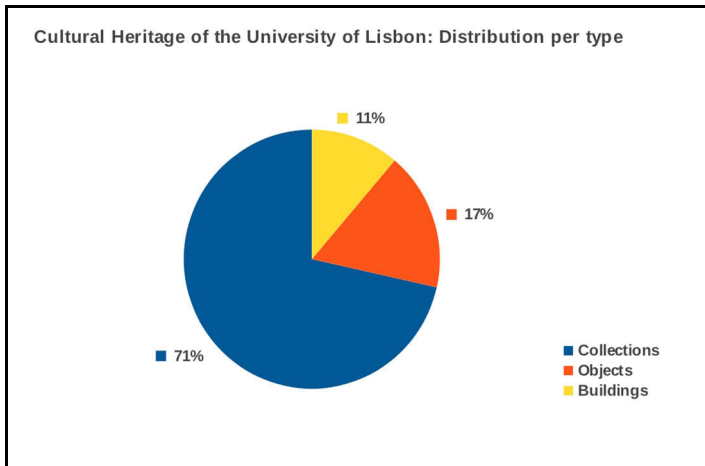


Fig. 2 - Distribution of the heritage per institutional type

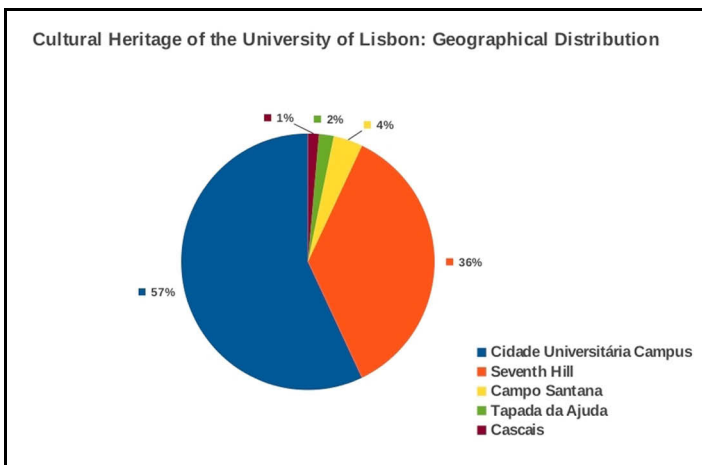


Fig. 3 - Distribution of the heritage per campus



Fig. 4 - The Astronomical Observatory of the Lisbon Polytechnic School at the Botanical Garden, nineteenth century. Photo: M. Heller, Ministère de la Recherche, Paris, University of Lisbon archives

campus; 36 % in the Seventh Hill; 4% at Campo Santana; 2% in Ajuda and 1% in Cascais (fig. 3).

Among its items of major relevance, the University of Lisbon has a national museum; a botanical garden recently classified as national monument; two historical astronomical observatories, a historical chemistry laboratory; a historical bacteriological laboratory; a historical convent and a historical fortress. Some of these have international significance.

The collections of the University of Lisbon encompass a broad range of disciplines, from medicine to natural history, physics, astronomy, archaeology, anthropology, sacred and contemporary art, chemistry, cartography, among many others. As expected, most are teaching collections, research collections, and historical teaching and research collections. There are also collections of institutional memorabilia and art collections acquired for decoration. The majority are from the nineteenth and twentieth century, mirroring the peaks of academic activity in Lisbon as mentioned in the introduction. Size varies from a small group (c. 10–12) to hundreds of thousands of objects, mostly at the museums. Conservation state, housing and storage conditions vary significantly. The majority of collections are not catalogued or inventoried. Some do not have minimal access conditions, and several are stored in attics and basements (fig. 5). The exception is collections of historical books and some archives, which are all accessible, catalogued and in good average conservation state.

As for individual objects identified during the survey, these consist mainly in decorative and integrated art, particularly from the nineteenth and twentieth century (e.g. sculptures, tile and ceramic panels).

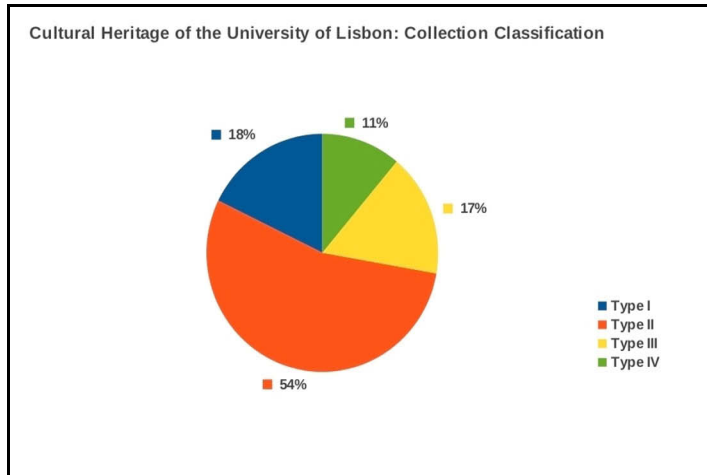


Fig. 5 - Results of the collection classification combining parameters of access, catalogue and conservation, according to the scale provided above (results do not include the collections of the two museums).



Fig. 6 - Painting by Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro, representing medicine professors and doctors, 1907, Faculty of Medicine. Photo: J. N. Lamas, University of Lisbon archives



Fig. 7 - Laboratory from the Câmara Pestana Bacteriological Institute, nineteenth century. Photo: M. Proença, University of Lisbon archives

Finally, as far as architectural heritage, the survey identified 24 buildings and structures of historical, artistic and scientific significance ranging from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. Items from the nineteenth and twentieth century are particularly important, both in the arts and sciences, as they are coherent, well preserved, documented and have not suffer major architectural transformations. In terms of historical buildings of scientific interest, the following should be mentioned: the Laboratório Chimico, Botanical Garden and Astronomical Observatory

of the Lisbon Polytechnic School; the Bacteriological Laboratory at the Câmara Pestana Institute (fig. 7) and the Lisbon Astronomical Observatory at Tapada da Ajuda, all from the nineteenth century. In terms of architectural and artistic significance, the buildings of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Pharmacy School, the Academic Hospital, the rectorate, the Faculties of Law and Humanities, the Faculty of Psychology, a couple of buildings at the Faculty Sciences and the Institute of Social Sciences are also worth mentioning. They are all from the twentieth century except the Faculty of Fine Arts, which is partly medieval, and some have been recently awarded with architectural prizes.

Result dissemination

Although survey data are still under treatment, it was possible to present preliminary results to the university and the general public. A comprehensive directory of collections was included in the publication *Heritage of the University of Lisbon: Science and Art* (LOURENÇO & NETO 2011). This publication also included thirteen in-depth articles about the scientific and artistic heritage of the university. Results were also presented online through the database *Memory of the University*¹⁵ and the national monu-

¹⁵ Cf. memoria.ul.pt/ (accessed November 9, 2011).

ments' database¹⁶. Moreover, a report to the University of Lisbon administration is presently being prepared, with a set of recommendations and guidelines for future preservation, organization, management, and public interpretation of the university's cultural heritage.

Finally, a series of 24 visits to the main collections and buildings of the university aimed at general audiences took place between March and May 2011.¹⁷ This initiative, which enjoyed considerable success among the public, could not have been made without the survey. It contributed to an increasing public visibility of the university's cultural heritage and also to an increasing awareness within the university of the importance of public access.

Discussion

Although a detailed analysis of the survey is still premature, a few reflexions can be put forward. Certainly, as in other similar cases in Europe and elsewhere, the survey of the University of Lisbon's cultural heritage has proven to be a powerful tool to compile valuable information. Without this information it is very difficult, if not impossible, to implement and develop a sustainable plan for the study, management, preservation and public access of university museums, collections and buildings of cultural and historical significance. In particular, this survey has also provided an opportunity to refine methodological tools used in earlier surveys – namely the definition of collection in a university context of the Australian 'Cinderella' surveys – and develop new ones, such as the *Collection Classification System* mentioned earlier.¹⁸ There is, therefore, further research to be made.

In terms of results, these were partly expected and partly unexpected. The heterogeneity and diversity of the heritage of the University of Lisbon is typical of a large European university – in terms of time span, disciplinary coverage, typology and geographical distribution. Also, it was expected that the majority of collections would be teaching collections, research collections and historical teaching and research collections, complemented by decorative art collections and memorabilia. This was consistent with published surveys done elsewhere.

On the other hand, the volume of collections was considerably bigger than initially expected. Although many collections were not catalogued, associated documentation was generally not dispersed or lost, therefore the information is retrievable in the near future. The average conservation state was also considered medium to good. A significant percentage of the collections are still intensely used for teaching and research, including those at the museums. The importance of some historical buildings – namely the two astronomical observatories, the chemistry laboratory and the bacteriological laboratory – transcends the university and the country, given their singularity, in situ conservation state, associated collections and documentation and rarity in the European context. Classification of these buildings as national monuments would signify recognition of scientific heritage as cultural heritage and should be sought. Another interesting aspect, certainly worth further research, is that many collections bear evidence of a broader Portuguese social and political history, probably due to the fact that the university is located in the capital where political elites taught and worked.

Most of the university's heritage is largely unknown from the general public and from the university itself. Access and integrated management are clearly the main challenges for the near future. Contrary to the universities of Coimbra and Porto, the University of Lisbon did not create multiple museums during the twentieth century. It created only two and these only preserve and interpret a limited part of

¹⁶ National Monuments Database, Portuguese Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU), cf. www.monumentos.pt/Site/APP_PagesUser/Default.aspx (accessed November 9, 2011).

¹⁷ *100 Locais (100 University Sites)* involved more than 1,000 visitors and c. 130 guest speakers from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds guiding visits to the different collections, buildings, libraries and archives of the university.

¹⁸ The University of Lisbon collection classification system is presently being used by the Museum of Astronomy of Rio de Janeiro in the national survey of Brazilian scientific heritage.

the university's heritage. Given the geographical distribution and present use for research and teaching of many collections, a possible organizational model could be a network with a centre at the museums, which would have conservation and documentation responsibility over the scattered collections, combined with in situ visits and a programme of rotating temporary exhibitions. This model would enable both public interpretation and use for research and teaching, as well as the combination of access and conservation.¹⁹ The organizational and management model of the university's heritage is currently under debate.

Jubilees and commemorations are important for university museums and collections. They inevitably represent moments when universities look back at their history and ponder their legacy for the future. Many university museums in Europe were created after jubilees. For the University of Lisbon, the challenge is to make the 2011 jubilee more than a mere remembrance moment and, instead, a turning point for the preservation and public access to its heritage.

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¹⁹ This model is already partly suggested in the new museums' statutes, developed in 2011.

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