

The challenges for Austrian university museums and collections within the University Law 2002

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Abstract

The Austrian University Law of 2002 has brought about legal and financial changes within universities. Some of these changes are welcome, but others pose new challenges for university collections, which must adapt if they are to survive.

Introduction

The implementation of the University Law 2002 has, since 2004, fundamentally changed the legal as well as the economic situation of Austrian universities. For university museums and collections, these changes bring challenges and dangers, as up to now their mission within the universities has not been clearly defined. Many of them have been affected by the changes, not only from a legal point of view, but also in their position within the universities.

The major changes which have affected university collections are: the implementation of the Bologna Process, the autonomy of universities, the implementation of a new management and the introduction of a new accounting system.

The purpose of the restructuring of European universities since the Bologna declaration 1999 is to create a common European Higher Education Area. "Management instead of administration" are the key words of this European trend. Critical voices also talk of an "economizing" of universities.

The relationship between state and universities was re-defined to implement the Bologna declaration of 1999. The influence of the state is now reduced to the legal framework and to legal supervision and control. Within this framework universities can define their own organisation. The obligation of basic funding remains with the Federal Government, while the framework of university autonomy is the performance contract, which forms the basis of a three year guaranteed global budget. The autonomy requires an efficient and solely responsible university management.

The management now consists of: the Board, nominated by both the Senate and the Ministry, the Senate which is elected by the university staff and the Rector, who is appointed by the board after recommendations from the Senate which are not binding. The power of decision is now with the Rector as the highest-ranking officer of the university.

In all Austrian universities the rectors have been newly appointed. In some cases the former rector was approved, in others the whole management was replaced, with both Austrian and foreign candidates.

The former accounting system has been replaced by SAP, a system which enables precise analyses of costs. Under the new system all income remains within the institution and can be used, without restrictions, for publications, collection, acquisitions of art works etc. Ultimate decision making is the responsibility of the rector, but since 2004 universities must declare their expected income in the budget of the museum or collection, and can only spend in accordance with the allocated budget.

There are very few Austrian university museums and collections which are in a position to attract additional income through reproductions, loan fees or fundraising events. This possibility is mainly restricted to collections which have their own premises and museum structures.

Public and private universities in Austria

Due to the small size of Austria with only 8.3 Million inhabitants, it is easy to obtain an overview of universities, as they are mostly limited to the main cities: Vienna, Graz, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck. The exceptions are Leoben and Krems. In total there are 23 public universities and 8 private ones.

The following list gives an overview of Austrian university museums and collections, which is certainly not complete. In preparation for this paper I started my research of these collections on the internet, through personal contacts and during some courier trips, which have enabled me to visit a fair number. But based on the experience of the University of Vienna, which owns approximately 150 collections, I am convinced that there are many more hidden collections in the universities of Innsbruck, Graz and Salzburg. It is to be hoped that the UMAC Conference 2007 will be the starting point of a survey of all the collections and that the initiative of the University of Vienna will be followed by other universities. As a first step, our Chair Cornelia Weber has installed a special platform within the context of the UMAC Website.

Public Universities

Graz

Karl-Franzens-University
University of Technology
Medical University

Innsbruck

Leopold-Franzens-University
Medical University

Leoben

Montan University

Linz

Art University

Salzburg

Paris-Lodron-University

Vienna

Academy of Fine Arts
Medical University Vienna
University of Applied Arts
University of Technology
University Vienna
University of Veterinary Medicine

Private Universities

Catholic-Theological Private University, Linz
Anton-Bruckner Private University, Linz
New Design University, Private University, St. Pölten
Paracelsus Private Medical University, Salzburg
PEF Private Management University, Vienna
Sigmund Freud Private University, Vienna
UMIT – Private University for Health, Medical Information and Technology, Vienna
Webster University Vienna

Austrian university museums/collections (excluding the University Vienna)

Graz

Karl-Franzens-University

Botanic Garden

Collection of Originals and Casts

Hans Gross Criminal Museum

Herbarium

Physics Collection

University of Music and Performance

Institute of Music-Ethnology

University of Technology

Institute of Experimental Physics

Medical University

Institute of Forensic Medicine

Innsbruck

Leopold-Franzens-University

Alpine Garden Patscherkofel

„Archiv für Baukunst“

Art Collection

Botanical Garden

Brenner Archiv

Museum of Casts and Collection of Originals

Physics Collection

Medical University

Anatomical Museum

Leoben

University of Mining, Metallurgy and Materials

Mineralogical and Petrological Collection

Linz

Art University Linz

Collections of the Art University Linz

Salzburg

Paris-Lodron-University

Archaeological Collections

Botanical Garden

Derra de Moroda, Dance Archives

University Library

University Mozarteum

Collections

Vienna

Academy of Fine Arts

Picture Gallery

Graphic Collection

University of Applied Arts

Collections

University of Economy

Advertising Archive

University of Music and Performance

Vazquez Collection of Historical Instruments

University of Soil Cultivation

Botanical Garden

University of Technology

University Archive

University Vienna (not listed here)¹

Medical University

Forensic Medicine Museum

Medical History Museum – Josephinum

Collection of the International Nitze-Leiter Research Society of Endoscopy

Ethnomedical Collection

Collection of Anaesthesia and Intensive Medicine

University of Veterinary Medicine

Botanical Garden

“Narrenturm”

Federal Museum of Pathological Anatomy

Kind of Collections

Arts	15
Botany	14
History	13
Medicine	7
Archaeology	4
Ethnography	4
Pharmacy	3
Musicology	2
Numismatic	2
Anthropology	2
Prehistory	2
Zoology	2
Astronomy	1
Chemistry	1
Criminology	1
Dance	1
Egyptology	1
Ethnology	1
History of Science	1

¹ See Claudia Feigl, The collections at the University Vienna.

Mathematics	1
Mineralogie/ Petrographie	1
Palaeontology	1
Physics	1

Function

It is generally true to say, that the initial objectives which led to the foundation of most of the university collections are no longer applicable, as most of them are not used any more for teaching. This is particularly true of the sciences, rather less so in the humanities. Beside the art and anatomical collections and the Crime Museum in Graz very few of the others are open to the public. Very few are still used for academic courses and research, and even one which is still used for teaching, the Archaeological Collection Vienna, has been without a curator for several months.

The main challenge of the new university law will be to re-establish the collections within the curricula and redefine their role. The wish for this tighter link comes particularly from curators, but until now has not been expressed by the teaching bodies, which sometimes are not even aware of the quantity and quality of the different collections.

The re-integration of the collections is vital for their survival in times when cost factors govern decisions. Universities are not only losing their heritage, but also significant funds. The responsibilities for heritage has to be enforced and conveyed to management and ultimately to the government.

In the last four years, since the implementation of the new law and the re-structure of the universities, the situation of university collections has been very difficult and the survival of some of them is still not secure. It is evident that many changes – such as new structures, adequate budgets, up-to-date presentation, public relations - are necessary and in some cases overdue, to make them attractive both for students and visitors.

But there are also challenges for both the universities and the collection, to use them as public relation tools, windows to the public and bridges from the past to the present. The major change in the attitude towards the university has to come from the top management and the government. That is why international conferences such as this one, networks such as UMAC and a national platform is vital to insure the survival of many of the university collections in Austria.

University collections are the visual and material memory of the academic heritage. Their neglect or denial means the neglect and denial of their own history.

Conclusion

All collections need budgets, collection guidelines and clearly- defined job descriptions for curators. At the moment it entirely depends on the head of the department or the policy of the respective university, as to whether the collections-based work is officially acknowledged by the university. In some collections there are appointed curators, in others all work linked with the collection has to be done outside the office hours. This is clearly unsatisfactory and only through collective action and advocacy can changes be brought about.

Future actions

- Create a database of all Austrian university museums/collections
- Create a platform
- Increase public awareness through media, exhibitions etc.
- Increase the significance of university collections
- Increase the responsibility for heritage

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