

Departmental museums at the University of Karachi: exposure and exploitation

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Resumo

Os museus são locais onde sobretudo se aprende, desempenhando um papel crucial na sensibilização das sociedades para o património cultural e natural. A necessidade do estabelecimento de museus existe desde a criação da Universidade de Karachi (Paquistão), em 1951. Após a indispensável reunião das condições financeiras e das respectivas colecções, foram criados diversos museus destinados ao ensino. Presentemente, os museus dos departamentos de Botânica, Geologia, História Geral (Arqueologia), Sociologia (Etnologia) e Zoologia encontram-se adormecidos. As razões são de diversa ordem e vão desde a falta de recursos, à necessidade de modernização, à negligência administrativa e à falta de uma estratégia clara para atrair estudantes. Este artigo descreve e explica a actual situação deplorável dos museus departamentais da Universidade de Karachi e esboça algumas ideias para o seu futuro.

Abstract

Museums are centres of learning. They play a significant role in the projection of cultural and natural heritage and can increase awareness among the masses. When it was established in 1951, academics in several departments at the University of Karachi felt the need for a Museum. Funds were raised and material was collected to set up educational museums for the instruction of students. At present the museums of the Botany, Geology, Geography, General History, Sociology, and Zoology Departments are well-nigh dormant. There are several reasons for this, such as organizational and administrative neglect, lack of funds, lack of upgrading, and lack of an adequate programme to attract students. The aim of this paper is to clarify the causes of this deplorable situation and to develop ideas for future improvement.

Introduction

In Pakistan, major efforts have recently been made to renovate and modernise museums. However, university museums are left behind and have been neglected. It may be noted that university museums have often been seen as a dumping place for all objects resulting from teaching and research. However, the question arises, why have university museums been treated so strangely? Should they be looked upon as different from general museums? Do they exercise a different background or paradigm? Don't they serve students? Don't they stimulate students to choose their careers? In general, museums in Pakistan are perceived as strange and eccentric environments, places where old things are displayed or dumped once and for all. Moreover, museum people have been considered old fashioned people or even 'unscientific'.

In a way, departmental museums at universities are more important than general museums, as they provide guidance for students, i.e. future generations, to receive higher education and even help them in choosing the field of their future career. With a combination of discipline-based knowledge and practical training, students can gain critical intelligence and the ability to analyze and achieve their objectives in the professional museum field. There is an urgent need to raise the present status of departmental museums at Pakistan's universities. At this point, it is clear that these are not being considered 'museums', at least not in the sense the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) considers them. However, in essence, departmental museums have the same mission and function as general museums.

In this paper, I will: i) stress the need to encourage the establishment, development and professional

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management of museums of all kinds; ii) put forward some reflections on the nature, functions and role of museums in the service of society and its development; iii) emphasize the necessity of cooperation and mutual assistance between museum professionals in different university museums and different general museums. I will also defend the creation within Karachi University of a Karachi University Museums Authority (KUMA) in order to provide the adequate legal framework enabling museums to fulfil their public mission and functions adequately.

Brief History of the Univ. of Karachi

Pakistan gained independence from Britain on 14 August 1947, when the Indian sub-continent was divided into present day India and Pakistan. The different assets of the former colony were divided rather randomly between the two new countries and the number of universities which befell Pakistan after the partition were very few in number. On 29 October 1951, the government of Pakistan established the University of Karachi, temporarily housed in five evacuee school buildings, and Prof. A.B.A. Haleem was appointed its first Vice Chancellor. In the first academic year four departments were established, viz. Philosophy, Geography, Mathematics, and Zoology, with each department only having one or two professors, few staff, and no proper funding (AKHTAR 1978). In 1953-54, the existing departments were expanded and new departments of General History, Islamic History, Political Science, Economics, and Bengali, Physics, Chemistry, and Botany were created (AKHTAR 1978). Thus, during the time span of two years 13 new departments were established by adding six departments in the field of the Arts and six departments in the field of the Sciences. In 1960, the University of Karachi moved to its current location, occupying 2 square miles. Museums were established between 1964 and 1966 in the departments of Botany, Geology, Geography, and General History. The Institute of Marine Biology was established in 1972 and has since been raised to the status of Center of Excellence with its own Board of Governors and Academic Committee (AKHTAR 1978).

Need for departmental museums

Learning through museums has become one of the components of higher education. Although emphasis

has varied in the past, usually one of the goals of departmental museums is to 'educate its constituency', i.e. students. At different times, several departments of the University of Karachi felt the need for some sort of a museum. Funds were raised and material collected to set up instructive museums to support students.

Currently, the University of Karachi has museums at the departments of Botany, Geology, Geography, General History [Archaeology], Sociology [Ethnology], and Zoology. The Museum at the Centre of Excellence of Marine Biology and the Marine Reference Collection & Resource Centre are apathetic in many respects. These museums suffer from organizational and administrative neglect, dearth of funds, shortage of qualified staff, lack of upgrading, and the lack of short-term and long-term agendas and set-ups to attract students. After converting these moribund museums into more dynamic ones, one may begin to see the vital role of museums in transforming the dead subjects into full of zip subjects.

In this paper, I explore the underlying reasons for the deplorable state of the departmental museums of the University of Karachi. The following reasons can be recognized: i) the initial purpose of these museums at the time of their establishment; ii) the circumstances leading to the problems; iii) the present conditions; iv) the changing role of the museums in a wider perspective; and v) the role of ICOM in Pakistan.

I will discuss these points in order to discover why the departmental museums have failed to play a key role in the education of students and to formulate proposals to enhance their future role. My reflection does not offer a quantitative analysis of equipment and collections, but rather points to the absence of a strategy leading to these Museums losing their significance.

The museums of the University of Karachi

It is important to note that a single main Museum was part of the original plans when the University of Karachi was initiated, contrary to departmental museums. The departmental museums of the University of Karachi were created at different times.

For instance, the first Museum of Zoology was established in 1965 due to the personal efforts of the Chairman of the Department. As far as collections are concerned, it is one of the best museums in the country, with a large repository of fishes, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, etc., totalling more than 100,000 specimens. It also contains hundreds of teaching charts and photographs. This large collection is mainly the result of research projects of different professors. The museum is located in the basement and is open to the first floor. It does not have sufficient space for proper display, no arrangement for security, and no safeguard or protection from humidity, air and dust. Most of the specimens are preserved in liquid (some jars being dry) and kept in the same showcases from the time the museum was established. Rare species of vertebrates are displayed unprotected on tables and floors and there is no proper arrangement for conservation of specimens. At present, the Department's new Chairperson intends to bring drastic changes to both faculty and museum and the results of her efforts are already beginning to be visible.

When archaeology was introduced as a new subject in the Department of General History, the Chairman of the Department, Dr. Mehmood ul Hussain, felt the need for an archaeological museum. The task was assigned to the newly appointed lecturer, Dr. Arif Mirza, who, with the backing of the Chairman succeeded in getting support from the Director General of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan. As a result of Mirza's efforts, the Archaeological Teaching Museum was created in 1966. Material was borrowed from the Department of Archaeology and Museums. It has two galleries (pre-Islamic and Islamic) with dioramas, sculptures, pottery, photographs, and coins. Since 1966, basically nothing changed at this museum and it is facing neglect, shortage of qualified staff, as well as lack of interest and funds. One of the damages was caused by the seepage in the walls of the building. The utilization of Museum premises for other purposes also indicates the lack of room in the department.

The Ethnological Museum at the Department of Sociology was established in 1964 by the Chairman of the Department. It was inaugurated by the then

Minister who became later the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The museum received more funds and collected its material during the tenure of Dr. Kazalbash, owing to the Head of the Department who through his personal efforts succeeded in getting funds and a monthly contingency from the Vice Chancellor. It has a good collection of more than 600 objects. However, most of the collection is currently displayed in the museum and gives a crowded impression, being organized in a very cumbersome way owing to lack of space.

Apart from the Museum of Zoology, one museum that also has large and good collections is the Museum of Geology. It was founded in 1954, together with the Department of Geology. When the department moved to its present location, the basement and ground floor were allotted to the museum and it is one of the largest university-museums in Pakistan. The museum's display area is divided into seven sectors with altogether almost 2000 specimens, including both national and foreign collections. The collection comprises sediments, igneous and metamorphic rocks, minerals, and fossils. It is well-equipped with maps, charts, models, and gemstones. The Museum gradually expanded its collections through field trips and surveys, but space to house them is highly insufficient. At present, it faces the same general problems as the other museums.

The Museum of Geography is the one museum at the University of Karachi which was founded, arranged, catalogued, and maintained by a single man, Prof. Rauf, a famous name in the University of Karachi, at present 83 of age. He is the only person alive today who has witnessed the early days of the University. He has been collecting specimens ever since he joined the department in 1955. The Museum has a large collection from most parts of the country, still stored in cabinets and lying in bags and on the floor. More spacious premises for proper display are needed. Prof. Rauf collected a large number of tools from Palaeolithic sites and discovered more than 400 sites in Karachi. Since his retirement, he has still been looking after the Museum and he continued to teach at the department. At present, Italian researchers are working on his collection and plan to establish a museum soon in collaboration with the University of Karachi.

The Karachi University Herbarium at the Botany Department is locked in more than 50 steel cabinets and dried botanical specimens total more than 100,000. Senior professors, especially Dr. Irtefaq Ali, made major contributions to the Herbarium collection. It is located in a basement with permanent open access from the first floor in the department. Main problems include humidity and growth of micro-organisms. Micro-organism prevention is done with poisonous chemicals such as Naphthalene, hazardous to human health. Efforts to protect the Herbarium will be largely in vein unless the Museum moves to another location. The Herbarium faces also the same problems as the other museums and has no public display.

The Marine Reference Collection and Resources Centre became the Invertebrate Reference Museum in 1967, to meet the growing need of knowledge of the marine fauna of the northern Arabian Sea. This is the only Museum intended for research only. The museum cooperates intensively with institutions abroad and has recently become a partner of the Expert-Centre for Taxonomic Identifications (ETI) in Amsterdam. At present, specimens are not displayed in a consistent or taxonomic manner, because the museum is seen as primarily being a research institution, without much of a public function.

Another example is the Museum of the Centre of Excellence of Marine Biology. Its museum first took shape when one of the teachers of the department had surveyed the Pakistan coastal belt of Sindh and Balochistan (southern provinces of Pakistan) in search of flatfish. When the department of Marine Biology was established in 1970, these specimens were transferred there. Dr. Makhdoom ul Hussain completed his doctorate in 1977-78. By that time he had collected a good number of fishes. To keep them together at one place, he struggled – together with the Director of the Centre – to arrange proper storage room and eventually succeeded in allocating a place for his collection. Later, the space was needed for other purposes and the collection was moved to a rather smaller place where it has been dormant since, with jars broken and dried up and without adequate space. The work of a single person who is no longer in charge, Dr. Hussain was

unable to help and save the museum, while present staff is less interested in its preservation and maintenance.

Factors leading to the problems and present condition

Factors that led to the current deteriorated state of the University of Karachi museums vary and include:

- a) all museums were established through the personal efforts of a single person, whose successors did not continue the work properly;
- b) lack of proper planning for the present and no planning for the future;
- c) lack of adequate and sufficient space;
- d) lack of funds;
- e) lack of qualified and properly trained staff;
- f) lack of scientific up-to-date equipment;
- g) lack of a proper data recording system;
- h) lack of involvement of students in order to develop their interest;
- i) lack of a qualified team to continue the work;
- j) lack of security systems (anti-theft, anti-fire), lack of prevention systems (anti-rain, anti-humidity);
- k) lack of check and balance;
- l) lack of a centralized authority for the management of museum affairs.

Present conditions demonstrate the neglect of the museums of the University. The absence of qualified staff in the museums caused gradual and ongoing damage to the objects, specimens, showcases, jars, etc. Rats, micro-organisms, light arrangements, leakage from the ground and ceilings, absence of humidity control devices, these all contributed to the present deteriorated state of affairs. In short, there has been a complete absence of proper management and maintenance. In addition, most of the museums often remained closed to the public, while faculty members and students are largely unaware of the presence of museums in the different departments.

The changing role of museums worldwide

Today, museums are changing rapidly all over the world. University museums are not just junkyards to dump objects, but constitute a way of spreading knowledge and clarifying the connections between past and present. If done convincingly, people will

become to appreciate the value of collections and one of the greatest challenges for university museums is to convince the public, government, and private sector. Visitors look at museum collections without understanding why they are there and what larger function they serve. It is through the efforts of qualified staff that one can satisfy their curiosity. To communicate the importance of collections requires an ability to connect museum research with the interests of the public, government and sponsors. Museums, whether in general or in universities, need proper exposure and publicity to attract students.

The proposed planning for the departmental museums at the University of Karachi

One needs to accept and make an effort to implement the current museological trends. The attitudes towards museums have changed. A museum is expected to be: i) an education-based semi-autonomous institution; ii) more focused on career building; iii) 'market-driven' and increasingly business-like managed; iv) more accountable to funding agencies than to the government; v), being 'self-sufficient', i.e. receiving more income, but none or less from the university or government; and vi) equipped with the necessary staff.

New technology is having a profound impact throughout the world and those who do not make use of it will be left behind. In Pakistan, it is high time to upgrade museums and to evaluate past and present scenarios to find their faults and lacunas. For this purpose, I conducted an oral survey with the museums' staff, students and Chairmen, to obtain a better insight into the problems, requirements and the needs for future planning. The outcome is presented in Table 1.

Is a strategic plan needed for all types of museums?

A strategic plan is a statement of the future as possibly envisioned by the museum expert, based on an objective and realistic assessment of the museum's performance and the opportunities and challenges that can be foreseen. It is thus a statement of action for institutional accomplishment. This future-oriented planning is not about 'what if' but about 'what

What were the initial aims & objectives?	What is the present situation?	What should the future strategy be?
One-man personality behind the creation of museum	No expert authority to manage the affairs of the museums	Body of Experts or a Board of Members (Senior Experts).
Uniquely meant to assist students for direct studies	Mostly no assignments have been giving to students to help in their studies	Multidimensional plus Inter-disciplinary Projects for students to work on
One-man program, sufficient for that time	No planning	Programmatic decision-making for structural expansion & adoption of new technologies, which will continue throughout the time frame of the Plan
Self-assessment	Provides no means of measuring performance	Presents analysis of the existing and potential expertise
Staff: self-expert & volunteers mainly	At most of the places no or insufficiently competent staff	Expert & well trained staff
Self up gradation of knowledge	A few of the staff-members got training courses, but no implementation	Long and short training courses throughout the year as per scheduled programme
Funding source: personal-contacts & no regular grants from the university	No grant from university or government	Scheduled programme to raise funds and find ways to become self-sufficient. Provide funds to students for various research projects

Table 1 – Summary of an oral survey conducted among staff, students and chairmen, at the University of Karachi's departmental museums.

will be'. One can say that it is like a roadmap for museum authorities and staff who set out policy and strategy, providing guidelines for fundamental decision-making and the allocation of resources in connection with institutional priorities for both short-term and long-term planning.

Museum authority and staff need to agree on how to address external pressures and internal issues. In order to run things smoothly, there must be fixed targets within a well-defined framework. Considering the current situation of the departmental museums of the University of Karachi, some reflections follow:

- 1) The absence of serious leadership is like a ship without steering. Therefore, one has to find senior staff among the authorities of Museums or the Board, selected or elected on merit.
- 2) Student and volunteer's attendance numbers are decreasing. Efforts ought to be made to attract more students.
- 3) Unlike in western countries, Pakistani museums do not have a traditional social base of supporters and advocates, or friends.
- 4) Funding authorities do not supply institutions or organizations unless clear strategic planning has been designed.
- 5) At present, university museums in Pakistan are unable to fulfil their stated mission in accordance with established standards and need to act more assertively.

A controlling authority for the departmental museums at the University of Karachi: a proposal

Taking into account past experiences and looking at the output of the Departmental Museums, one might conclude that the absence of a well-functioning Head and a Committee taking care of proper planning are the main factors that led to the present situation. The most important recommendation to all Universities in Pakistan would be to establish a controlling authority with a Director, in order to control and upgrade the present state of the Departmental Museums, irrespective of the Chairman's interest in the museum, which has been long overdue, and also to adopt new trends and technologies to enhance the work of Museums in general. This controlling authority will also provide the yardstick to look after the needs of the museums, instead of a single influential authority who receives the funds.

The expected role of ICOM

As far as ICOM is concerned ('the international non-governmental organization of museums and professional museum workers established to advance the interests of museology and other disciplines concerned with museum management and operations'), their assistance is even more needed in underdeveloped countries. I would like UNESCO, ICOM, and UMAC to take up the matter with high priority and visit underdeveloped countries to gather information about the worsening condition of museums in general and museums in universities in particular. UNESCO sees it as its task to promote education in underdeveloped countries. In Pakistan it is doing this under the supervision of Ms. I. Brieness in Islamabad. Would it not be a good cause to promote education at higher levels as well by supporting museums at the universities?

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Reference

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Conclusion

Through this paper, I would like to emphasize the need for the establishment, development and professional management of museums of all kinds, and to look at the nature, functions and role of museums in the service of society and its development. Museums should be given up to date facilities, along with qualified and well-trained staff.

There is ample need for cooperation and mutual assistance among museum professionals in university museums and general museums. It is high time to extend cooperation between museums in different countries in order to ensure brotherhood by promoting knowledge.

I also suggest the creation of an administrative authority for museums within the University of Karachi, to be named the Karachi University Museums Authority (KUMA), in order to provide the legal framework enabling museums to execute their public mission and functions adequately. The Karachi University Museums Authority must take the necessary steps to establish and maintain consultative and associate relations with international organizations, particularly UNESCO, ICOM, and UMAC. It may also establish working relations with other international organizations (including the United Nations Economic and Social Council, ICOMOS, ICCROM) as deemed appropriate.

I have great hope that, after having brought the issue into the limelight at this UMAC Conference, the appropriate authorities will take up the task and proceed to undertake the necessary measures, thus promoting the higher studies in Pakistan.

¹ ICOM 1989 (revised 1995). *Statutes – Article 1: Name and Legal Status* [adopted in the 16th General Assembly (The Hague, The Netherlands, 1989) and amended by the 18th General Assembly (Stavanger, Norway, 1995)]. <http://icom.museum/statutes.html#2>. Accessed on 27 February 2003.