Kira Ilina, Alexandra A. Koroleva

UNIVERSITY HISTORY MUSEUMS IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE

Kira Ilina[1], Alexandra A. Koroleva[2]

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The present study focuses on practices of self-representation in the virtual space that are specific to university history museums. The object of the study includes six museums: the Academic Historical Museum of Leiden University, the Helsinki University Museum, the National Cheng Kung University Museum, the University Museum of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, the University of the West Indies Museum. The research is based on analysis of websites and homepages on social networks of these university history museums. The authors elicit ideas and formulas of the mission of a museum of this kind, examine various ways to provide the objective information about museums (address, opening hours, contacts), and also analyze various ways of virtual representation of the university history.

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Key words: history of universities, museum studies, University museums, virtual space, representations of the past

[1] National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Leading research fellow; E-mail: glukist@mail.ru.

[2] National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Faculty of Humanities. Student of the 3rd year of the 'History' Bachelor's Program.

Modern scholars draw attention to specific features of university museums that serve as a mediator between academic corporation and society. Furthermore, researches suggest to study university museums and museum collections not only in the light of their scholar and pedagogical functions but also as an integral part of national heritage and institutional identity. This complex of aspects of the analysis of university collections is supposed to serve for their revaluation, to give them a new initiative role in their relationship with university and to use them as a peculiar advertisement for possible students, faculty and sponsors [Kozak, 2007].

Public or university museums either accept challenges of present-day reality and so long for asserting themselves in the media space, look for interesting ways to represent themselves and communicate with their potential audience [Tirell, 2002, p. 120]. This research focuses on revealing practices of self-representation made by university museums from different countries in the virtual space. The present research is based on the analysis of the information about museum everyday activities and projects that is provided on their websites and pages on social networks.

University museums and present-day reality

Functions of university museums, especially devoted to the history of the university collections, seem to be a complicated process both in real and virtual spaces. This process requires not only to accomplish communication between museum and a visitor but also to take into account the "specifics" of the university. For example contrary to the mark "university" examined museums most often claim that they look up not only to members of the academic milieu represented in their spaces in a particular form. During last 20 years European university museums revalue their own mission, try to define their particularity more clearly and to enlarge their audience, to change the structure of expositions and in the same time to integrate themselves into standards of larger-scale museums [Kelly, 2001, p. 11].

A direct connection between a university history museum and a university itself seems to be one of the main problematic factors for researchers and staff of these museums [Kelly, 2001, p. 10–11]. As Melany Kelly, scholar from The International Centre for Higher Education Management of the University of Bath, points out, many university museums were originally designed for public and thus presented dissemination

of knowledge both for ordinary people and members of academic community as a main goal of the university. By now, the focus of activities in the university museums has shifted in some measure. A relationship between a university museum and a university itself seems no longer obvious and so university museums started to look for more adaptation to public interests. These interests are not always associated with university's science and history and also with a fact that a university could be a significant part of local community and could have intense communications with its members [Kelly, 2001, p. 12; Haan, 2001, p. 121].

According to the researchers working on museum studies, the active use of the internet space could contribute to improve the existent order of things by various ways: providing text information in a convenient format, attracting visitors, providing new and more comprehensive vision of museum, making art and historical artifacts exhibited in museums more accessible [Henning, 2006].

It should be added that this new form of digitalization does not mean a simple uploading of digital copies of museum pieces to the website but takes more broad approach to presentation of the museum and its collections in the media space. However some of the researches believe that even the simple digitization of museum items could enlarge their didactic value by bringing them back their significance of an outstanding rarity (that is something that could not be found in everyday life of "a man in the street"). This kind of value was associated with exhibits of the first museums at the dawn of the early modern period [Bann, 2003, p. 124].

The media are a pledge of cooperation between different social layers and also a new way of systematic communication and translation of symbols, information and emotions for the public in the contemporary world [Chomsky, Herman, 1998]. Museums demonstrate their readiness for interaction with a potential visitor by their representation in the media space. Besides, this way enables a dialogue with ones that can access only the virtual image of the museum but not its physical body. The first acquaintance of the museum is made by means of its website where one takes an interest in museum subjects and exposition for the first time and a wish for a real visit starts.

It should be noted that scholars do not have one common vision of this subject. Certain of researches believe that overly active use of the new media vulgarizes museum and turns it from a place of knowledge transmission into an «edutainment» site [Henning,

2006]. Other authors who are researching museum audience state that it is essential for museums to explicate and assert the relevance of their communication strategies rather than to make a usual narration about their activities and collections [Bann, 2003, p. 126].

Dr Michelle Henning, Professor in Photography and Cultural History from the University of West London, points out that new media first offer a way to organize information and draw visitor's attention to the museum and only then are designed for a communication with visitors [Henning, 2006, p. 303]. The researcher proposes a new way of museum studies: to regard the museum's own qualities as media ones because of their possibility to affect one's behavior and modes of perception of the actual reality [Henning, 2006, p. 305–306]. Peter de Haan, the Director of the Utrecht University Museum, agrees with the scholar and suggest focusing on the active role of museums in local cultural and educational development [Haan, 2001, p. 126].

Sources and criteria for review

Actual selection of university museums' sites was made with the use of search option («University History») on the web portal of the International Committee for University Museums and Collections that collects information on university museums [http://umac.icom.museum]. The search revealed 281 items [http://university-museums-and-collections.net/search?subjects%5B%5D=13]. This list embraces not only the university history museums but also museums that focus on the history of university science and memorials dedicated to outstanding university figures (well-known academics, professors, rectors).

The present article is concentrated on a number of museums from different parts of the world (Europe, Asia, North and South America) that implement comprehensive approach to representations of academic past and culture. The subject of the current study includes six websites of university museums:

The Academic Historical Museum of Leiden University [https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/about-us/library-locations/academic-historical-museum] (Netherlands), the Helsinki University Museum [https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-museum] (Finland), the Jagiellonian University Museum [http://www.maius.uj.edu.pl] (Poland), the National Cheng Kung University Museum [http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/index.php] (Taiwan), the University

Museum of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul [https://www.ufrgs.br/museu/] (Brasil), the University of the West Indies Museum [https://uwimuseum.wordpress.com] (Jamaica). It should be pointed that only a site of the Academic Museum of Leiden University is made like a page on the site of the university library. The other five sites could be defined as independent ones.

When analyzing the home pages and websites of the universities we were interested in forms that serve as a "package" for information about museum and a description of its structure besides the content itself. We draw special attention to the availability of the physical address and the description of its location (especially in case of museums that do not have their own building and are located in some part of an administrative building); to ways of providing the information about opening hours and holidays; to availability of information about museum staff and contacts (phone number or/and e-mail address; special attention was paid to the cases when a visit should be agreed in advance by the management of the museum or/and university); to links to museum pages in the social networks.

Mission of the university history museum

Content of the site shows what kind of arguments are given by museum to approve its necessity, which purposes and tasks they set. With respect to the contemporary museology, a particular scientific concept (regulations, manifesto) is a basis of viability and relevance for every museum [Kaveckaya, 2013].

For example, the website of the National Chen Kung University Museum is focused not only on the current museum activities but also on the conceptual rationale for museum's necessity. At the same time the contents are divided into non-equal parts. On the same site the field "News" remains empty while annual reports on museum activities (from 2008 to 2017) and information about last events update.

The section "Mission" is located on the first line of the menu. This section reports that the National Chen Kung University Museum was opened in 2007 in order to "promote the good traditions of the University, preserve significant historical and cultural artifacts, provide services to present research achievements of faculty members and students, and foster cultural education for the public, with the aim of developing NCKU campuses into a wall-less cultural center of the community" [NCKU Museum,

http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/p/412-1008-2950.php?Lang=en]. The goal of the Museum is to "built upon the University's longstanding belief that campus cultural property is an important part of university education".

The following missions of the Museum are formulated as follows: "1. Collect and preserve significant historical artifacts of the University; 2. Research and publish the cultural property of the University's history; 3. Exhibit and expand teaching and research accomplishments of the University's faculty members and students; and 4. Promote and assist in multidimensional social education" [NCKU Museum, http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/p/412-1008-2950.php?Lang=en]. The contents of the university website, for example the section with publications of annual reports [NCKU Museum, http://b1700.web3.ncku.edu.tw/p/426-1008-3.php?Lang=zh-tw] and the section for the museum page on Facebook [Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/nckumuseum/], are in accordance with its manifesto.

In the case of other university history museums the mission of the particular museum is usually presented in the section "About us" or "About Museum". In some cases the website does not provide such a full and conceptual rationale for the necessity of the university history museum as the site of NCKU Museum. For example, the following mission of the Helsinki University Museum [https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-museum/about-us] is described quiet briefly on the site as follows: the museum cares about the cultural heritage and artifacts of the university and presents the historical development of the university in the general exposition[4].

On the website of the Jagiellonian University Museum a number of passages from the Jagiellonian University Statute is cited as museum's mission. Two most important statements declare as follows: "The Jagiellonian University Museum is a unit of scientific, educational and didactic character" and "The Museum's main tasks are collecting, researching, preserving, conserving and demonstrating the objects related to the University's history and the history of science, culture and art in general" [Collegium Maius, http://www.maius.uj.edu.pl].

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[4] «The Helsinki University Museum preserves the cultural heritage of the University of Helsinki and manages its artefact, art and photographic collections. Through its exhibitions the Museum imparts knowledge about the history of science and the University, thereby contributing to the building of the University community» [Helsinki University Museum, https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-museum/about-us].

Other paragraphs of the Statute tell about the organizational structure of the Museum and staff requirements. According to the website of the University of the West Indies Museum, this museum aims to "recall its heritage and affirm its continuing relevance to the Caribbean region and beyond" [UWI Museum, https://uwimuseum.wordpress.com/our-vision/]. The orientation on interactions with a larger audience that is not limited to university and region is also reported in this text. The website of the Academic Museum of Leiden University provides only a description of its collection and an online-catalogue of museum pieces and does not present any articulated mission [Academic Historical Museum, https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/about-us/library-locations/academic-historical-museum].

These examples demonstrate an obvious connection between local and global levels of the self-representation of university history museums and conforms to the idea that universities are important both on national and international levels [Kelly, 2001]. Therefore university history museums have to maintain the same approach in their historical representations either in virtual or in real space. The highest grade of this conception seems to be a comprehensive description of the university's mission. Among examined cases only the website of the University of the West Indies Museum (that is the biggest and the best-known educational institution in the Caribbean countries) tells clearly about the international meaning of the University and its history.

Ways to provide impartial information

The university history museums may be qualified as a group of corporation museums. This feature leaves a mark on how museum staff perceive/see the visitors. The analysis of the museums' sites indicates that patterns of their self-representation are directly related to their target audience. Museums that are open to the public seem to be also more open in virtual, and the information provided on their websites mirrors the real essence of museum as fully as possible. More "closed" museums that function mainly as a place of corporate culture (i.e. are oriented to the members of the university corporation) are not more open in virtual space too.

The presence of basic informational attributes such as address, contacts, opening hours and holidays on the museum website plays a particular role. The description of the museum location, especially if it contains a specified geolocation, indicates the degree of

attention given by administration to create conditions for easy finding of the museum by a visitor.

There are various ways to describe a way to a museum. For example the only website where a map with the indicated geolocation belongs to the University Museum of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul [UFRGS Museu, https://www.ufrgs.br/museu/contato/]. There is no map of this kind for hypothetic visitors on the site of the University of the West Indies Museum but one can find a detailed description of its building and ways to get to it [UWI Museum, https://uwimuseum.wordpress.com/about/]. The website of the National Cheng Kung University Museum contains information about ways of getting to the museum by various types of vehicles: a car, an autobus and a train [NCKU Museum, http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/p/412-1008-2963.php?Lang=en]. The home page of the Academic Museum of Leiden University contains its address and quite a comprehensive description of the location of the Academy Building where the university library is situated. That is where the collections of the Academic Historical Museum are exhibited in a dispersed form [Academic Historical Museum, https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/about-us/library-locations/academic-historical-museum].

The site of the Jagiellonian University Museum lets its potential visitors know only about its address [Collegium Maius, http://www.maius.uj.edu.pl]. More detailed description of its location and its building is disposed in the section about the history of the Museum [Collegium Maius, https://maius.uj.edu.pl/en_GB/muzeum/historia]. The explanation for this could be that this university museum represents itself as a part of the urban cultural and historic landscape and as one of the main touristic sights situated in the historical center of Krakow. Therefore the website of the museum could not be the only source of information about this museum and its location.

Every museum publishes information about its location and contacts (e-mail address and phone number) and quite detailed information about its opening hours with indication of weekends and holidays. For example the site of the National Cheng Kung University Museum informs that in spite of Mondays museum does not work during the New Year holidays of the Chinese lunar calendar [NCKU Museum, http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/p/412-1008-2960.php?Lang=en]. The home page of the

Academic Museum of Leiden University does not contain information about the precise opening hours [Academic Historical Museum, https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/about-us/library-locations/academic-historical-museum]. This fact could be explained, first, by the "fragmentation" of the museum collection and, second, by the inaccessibility of its collection to larger audience because the entrance to the Academy Building is limited. The museum itself is dedicated to guest visits, place for defenses of thesis for Doctor's degree and formal events. According to the site other visitors of the museum could be received only with the advance approval of its administration. For this purpose all the examined websites have a feedback option that means information about museum staff and their contacts.

Links to museum's pages on a social network and forums, a possibility to leave an opinion (as it is organized on the sites of the Museum of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul [UFRGS Museu, https://www.ufrgs.br/museu/contato/] and the Helsinki University Museum [Helsinki University Museum, https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-museum/about-us]) could also be considered as a "feedback". This kind of the content plays an important role in museum's interactions with the audience and helps to indicate the degree of museum and/or university administration's interest in self-promotion and openness to the potential visitors.

The website of the University of the West Indies Museum provides all the enumerated opportunities including the subscription to the blog [UWI Museum, https://subscribe.wordpress.com/?update=invalid]. Ways of self-representation in media used by this university history museum represent it as a vivid and dynamic institution (for example, the site updates every 5-7 days) that is ready to tell about activities connected with the history of the university and memory about it. One can leave comments on the news. Such comments and answers to them show the present interaction between people interested in the life of the museum and museum staff. The page of this museum on Facebook is also active: it updates regularly the data about upcoming and recent events [Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/uwimuseum/].

The website of the Jagiellonian University Museum contains sections «Newsletter» and «Media Maius» [Collegium Maius, https://maius.uj.edu.pl/en_GB/newsletter] besides information about its opening hours and staff (sections «Museum Council» and «Employees») [Collegium Maius,

https://maius.uj.edu.pl/en_GB/kontakt/pracownicy]. First of the cited sections provides free access to the current edition of the Museum newsletter dedicated to its events and museum scientific activities. According to the site, the aim of this monthly edition is to obtain attention not only of the Museum staff, but also of all academics and students of the Jagiellonian University. However there are only six numbers (No. 1–5, 8) of this magazine available on the site and the latest one dates back to 2016. Unfortunately we do not know if this edition is actual or stopped. There are later data (from the autumn of the 2018) in other sections of the website. Despite the apparent availability of the museum for different visitors including foreigners the information is not totally provided in an accessible way on this site: many sections are filled up only on Polish (even for the English version of the site).

The Helsinki University Museum has active presence in the social network space (there are museum accounts on popular social networks like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), the same can be said about the National Cheng Kung University Museum and the West Indies Museum (Facebook).

It is interesting that regardless of the existence of the English version for every section of the website, museum pages on social network are regularly updated and are maintained in national languages (Finnish, Chinese, Polish) without translation. In other words, the target audience of museum data posted on social networks are inhabitants of university's and museum's home country. These particular features of the examined museum accounts on social networks seem to be very important – especially the use of the national language. So museums mark their belonging to the national cultural background and to the system of symbols of its cultural representation [Hall, 1997]. At the same time the "international cultural code" is not overlooked in this way because social networks provide an opportunity to translate every page to any language known by a user.

Virtual representations of the history of the university

There is a mobile media guide in Finnish to the permanent exhibition called "The Power of Thought" on the website of the Helsinki University Museum. This exhibition is dedicated to the history of scientific research, teaching and historical development of the University [Helsinki University Museum, https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-university-

museum/exhibitions/main-exhibition]. Using the special online platform [Helsinki University Museum, https://tarinasoitin.fi/ajattelunvoimaa1] one can see the exhibition halls and the museum pieces. The annotated photographic record of museum pieces that corresponds to thematic sections of the real exposition is available online.

One can find less detailed guides to the permanent exhibition dedicated to the history of the university on the websites of the Jagiellonian University Museum and the National Chen Kung University Museum. Since the representation of the Jagiellonian University is mainly focused on its historical interiors (for instance, the library, therefectory, the treasury, professors' rooms), there are views of these interiors accompanied by a short annotation and pictures of selected exhibits available on the website [Collegium Maius, https://maius.uj.edu.pl/wystawy/stale]. The exhibition dedicated to the history of the National Cheng Kung University was opened in November, 2017. There are only general views and a short annotation in Chinese and English available on the website [NCKU Museum, http://museum.ncku.edu.tw/p/406-1008-181124,r2482.php?Lang=zh-tw].

The website of the Academic Museum of Leiden University also provides a link to the online record of museum pieces but only for registered accounts. A non-registered user can have access only to the screensaver depicting the portrait gallery of famous university figures.

It should be pointed that online platforms of this kind (that represent more or less in detail both the university museum and its collections in the virtual space) are not unique. For example, there is a virtual platform basing on the e-library of the University of Padua [University Library System (SBA), http://bibliotecadigitale.cab.unipd.it/en/] created in 2010 to provide free online access to the digital collection of exhibits from the university museums of Padua [Andreoli, Fornasiero, Menegazzi, Talas, 2015]. It is hard to call equivocally such virtual platforms the virtual museums because they are not equal to a 3D internet space or to locations with virtual objects [Lebedev, 2013]. The purpose for using virtual resources of this kind is to facilitate access to the collections of university museum and to create a convenient interface for cultural and informational exchange between userы of the website and the virtual image of the museum.

The University Museum of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul has chosen slightly different way to represent the history of the university. It represents itself

as a knowledge-based institution that gathers all the information about history, memory and identity of the university. This museum is implementing a project to collect oral memories of former students, professors and managers. It organizes special meetings where academics can share their experiences of introducing courses and researches at the University. One part of these materials is available on the museum website [UFRGS Museu, https://www.ufrgs.br/museu/acervo/projetos/] and the other – on YouTube [Museu da UFRGS https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHocRe4IfASEEsPnTyXG_4Q].

Furthermore there was a PhD-thesis upheld in 2016 that was dedicated to tracking of the memory landscapes of the university support staff [Rolim, 2016].

Thus basic characteristics of museum in the virtual space could serve as an object of primary research while trying to determine and understand answers on the following questions: how do university history museums demonstrate themselves and represent the history of the university on their websites? On what aspects do they focus and by what means? What goals do they try to accomplish by providing information? In what way do the data provided on the museum website influence on the image of this museum as an active institution? How do the provided data help to create an attractive image of the museum? And finally, how much is this image verified by providing real details?

The examined university history websites have more similarities than differences. The explanation could be that some new algorithms of self-representation of educational and cultural organizations (like museums) have appeared in the contemporary virtual space. The presence of updating news feed and their relevance to the contemporary way for interactions with the audience testify the relevance and up-to-dateness of the museum itself. And this particular representation of the university history that is hidden behind the trappings (formalation of the museum mission, publications by museum staff, photos of the museum building, announcements about coming events and scientific discoveries on the social networks) makes every university museum unique and tells about its individual aura even in the virtual space.

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Kira A. Ilina

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletaev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Leading research fellow. E-mail: glukist@mail.ru

Alexandra A. Koroleva

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Faculty of Humanities. Student of the 3rd year of the 'History' Bachelor's Program. E-mail: alex.98.koroleva@gmail.com