Marta C. Lourenço

UMAC-ICOM, University of Lisbon

TITLE:

**Gates to knowledge:**

**The role of university museums, collections and heritage in the 21st century**

ABSTRACT:

When UMAC was created in 2001, university museums and collections were at a crossroads. Although the first museum in the modern sense of the term was created in a university in the late 1600s, and for 300 years university museums have significantly contributed to shaping what the university is and does, the 21st century brought them at best considerable identity challenges and, at worst, dispersals, closures and loss. Across the world, several university museums associations and networks – including UMAC – were created in response to the ‘crisis’.

Today, the landscape is considerably more stable. In many countries, particularly in Europe, university museums and collections are enjoying an increase of interest from, and use by, universities and society. Public access and visibility have also increased, and so has the recognition by the broader museum and cultural sectors. However, identity dilemmas still persist. Are we more ‘university museums’ or ‘museums in universities’? Are we museum professionals or university professionals? How do we strike a balance between teaching, research, and culture? Who are our target audiences? These questions still have no easy answers.

In this paper, I will use the past 20 years as a point of departure for a reflection on the history, contemporary significance and relevance of university museums and collections, focusing on their future and what makes them unique.

BIONOTE:

Full time researcher and deputy director at the Museums of the University of Lisbon (MUHNAC), **Marta C. Lourenço** has background training in Physics (University of Lisbon) and a MA in Museology (New University of Lisbon). Her PhD in Museology and History of Technology (CNAM, Paris) addressed the distinct nature and contemporary significance of university collections in Europe. She is the PI of PRISC (Portuguese Research Infrastructure of Scientific Collections), included in the Portuguese roadmap of strategic research infrastructures. She is a research member of CIUHCT, the Interuniversity Research Centre for the History of Science and Technology (University of Lisbon). Since 2016, she is the President of the International Committee for University Museums and Collections (UMAC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). She has been awarded the Vital Brazil Medal (2014) and the George Sarton Medal of the University of Gent (2015).