



A Tradition of Innovation

Dealing with Complex Heritage: Revisiting University Pasts in Contemporary Practice

Coimbra Group Heritage Working Group

Geneva, March 20 & 21, 2023

Call for Papers

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The project builds on growing interest in challenging pasts, as well as follows up on the conference "Colonised Objects and Bodies in Europe: New challenges and new perspectives on the Decolonisation of Cultural Heritage"¹.

The principal goal of this initiative is to explore how universities address “uneasy”, “problematic” or “difficult” heritage (tangible as well as intangible forms). Drawing on both past and present relationships such as colonial histories, North-South relations and collections and university practices under authoritarianism, universities are critical sites of thinking and practice when it comes to locally, nationally and globally significant heritage. This not only involves looted cultural objects or sensitive exhibits (human remains, religious objects, “trophies”) in university museum collections, but also the whole complex system of thought and representation (potentially) perpetuating notions of racial, social and cultural inequalities. Whereas both colonialism (active promotion colonial expansion and colonialist thought) and the authoritarian regimes opened new opportunities for scientific development for European universities in all branches of science, it also left longstanding legacies of exclusion and injustices in need of repair.

This inter-European dialogue focuses on the responsibility of present-day university institutions faced with such legacies as well as their significance for contemporary research, education and representational practice.

The project should start with two workshops taking place at the University of Geneva (spring 2023) and Charles University in Prague (fall 2023). During the workshops, existing experiences in addressing legacies through core cases/concepts should be identified that would enable the participants of the project to formulate concrete proposals as to how to come to terms with legacies through new forms of presentation, interpretation and reconciliatory practices.

¹ Jointly organized by the CG Heritage and Development Cooperation Working Groups at the University of Würzburg, on 24-25 June 2022, to increase both academic excellence and societal impact of partner universities. Conference report is available [here](#).



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The first session, scheduled for March 20-21, 2023, will invite participating university institutions to present cases of “difficult heritage” and how universities have addressed such heritage. The second session will explore good practice and policy recommendations for the Coimbra Group. We are currently looking into finance opportunities to cover certain activities and meals. Participants will cover their own travel.

Call for expressions of interest – by January 15, 2023:

Participating institutions (both within and outside the Coimbra Group) are invited to prepare brief case studies to be presented and discussed in Geneva. The cases are at this moment not limited as to the historical periods covered, nor the type of heritage addressed (tangible and intangible, museum collections, buildings as well as intellectual developments within universities tied to the colonial expansion). It is expected that through the discussion at the Geneva workshop we would arrive to collectively articulating core concepts and questions.

Kindly send us a preliminary expression of interest/ confirmation so we can move ahead with organizational matters. Please e-mail Peter.larsen@unige.ch, marketa.krizova@ruk.cuni.cz and g.f.j.plets@uu.nl.