

Bergen Museum – a presentation

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Bergens Museum, the mother institution of the University of Bergen, was founded in 1825 as a museum of antiquities, ethnographic and ethnological objects, natural history and 'curiosities'. From the very beginning the purpose of the museum was to contribute to a better understanding of the natural and cultural history of West Norway. The museum was, however, for the first 25-30 years totally dependent on the efforts and enthusiasm of idealistic members of learned societies to create goodwill and promote donations of money and objects to the collections.

During the second half of the 19th century the scientific profile of the museum became more pronounced, and gradually a scientifically trained staff was built up. Towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century this staff included such outstanding scholars as Dr. Armauer Hansen, who discovered the leprosy bacterium in 1873, and the polar explorer and humanitarian Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1922 who in the 1880's worked at the Zoological division of Bergens Museum and attributed to the prominence of the natural sciences in Bergen. Dr. Vilhelm Bjerknes, the pioneer of modern meteorology, was connected to the museum in the 1920's. In 1907 a Chair of zoology was founded, and Bergens Museum became for the first time formally in a position to offer university-level teaching. From 1914 the heads of the five museum departments (zoology, biology, botany, mineralogy & geology and history & archaeology) were given the title of professor.

The main museum building, opened in 1865 and extended by two side wings in 1898, today houses the Natural History Collections (fig. 1). The Cultural History Collections have since 1927 been located in a separate building nearby, known as *Historisk Museum* (fig. 2). In the minds of the citizens the academic museums of Bergen thus consist of a *Natural History Museum* and a *Historical Museum*.

In 1946 the Parliament decided to establish a second university in Norway, located to Bergen. The University Act proclaims that the University is a direct continuation of the Bergens Museum, whose activities within scientific research and academic teaching, as well as exhibitions and popular science, were to be continued as a part of the university. By 1960 the University of Bergen had still just over 1,000 students. During the next 15 years the number increased to 8,000. A second 'student explosion' occurred between 1987 and 1995, when the number of students more than doubled, from 8,700 to 17,800. Today the University of Bergen has 7 faculties, about 100 departments, nearly 18,000 students and 2,000 staff members. Six of the university departments have a museum section in



Fig. 1. Natural History Museum (photograph Universitetets Media Senter)



Fig. 2. Historical Museum (photograph Universitetets Media Senter)

addition to their ordinary research and education activities: Archaeology, Cultural Studies and Art History, Social Anthropology, Geology, Botany and Zoology.

Most of the museum departments can claim a long tradition of interdisciplinary co-operation. In connection with contract research, triggered by the demands of the Culture Heritage Act, a large number of research projects have been

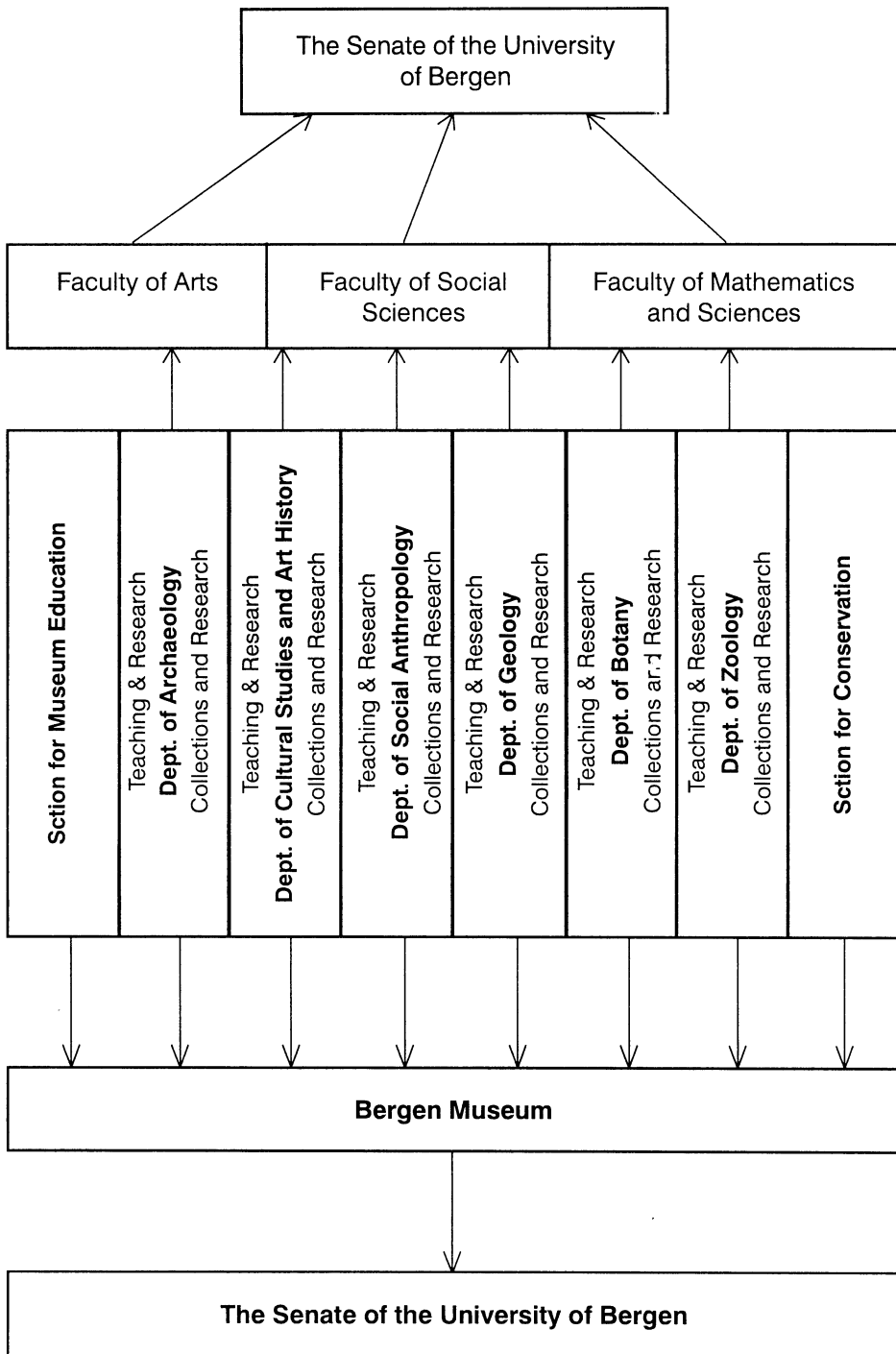
undertaken through the last 30 years. In such projects archaeologists, osteologists, paleobotanists and geologists have worked closely together in research groups on ad hoc bases since the early 1970s. In fact the tradition of this interdisciplinary work in Bergen has roots back in time more than a hundred years, when the entire group of Bergen Museums scholars could gather around one coffee table.

During the 1960s and 70s the University of Bergen changed from a small institution to a medium sized European university. The growth, that continued also in the 1980s, was focused primarily on the university functions, leaving to some extent the museum sections in a deadlock. From the mid 1980s, however, a new concern for the university museums arose and their importance was also recognized in governmental reports. The question of the positions of the museum sections within the university structure was put on the agenda, and the expediency of joining the six museum sections into one organizational unit was debated in the university bodies. An obvious advantage would be a closer research co-operation across department and faculty boundaries.

In 1993 the University Senate decided to re-establish the 'old' Bergens Museum in a 'new' form, as a modern, internationally oriented, multidisciplinary institution with close co-operation between the museum and education sections at each of the six academic departments. The new *Bergen Museum* – note that the new institution has omitted the 's' of the old Bergens Museum – was led by a provisional board in 1993 and 94. From 1995 Bergen Museum has been a permanent organization, led by a board and a council. The director, supported by a management team that includes a contract research manager and an information manager, is in charge of the day-to-day operations.

The mission statement of Bergen Museum is: 1) to collect, record, conduct research, preserve and inform (*formidle*) within the museum's current fields of specialization, 2) to make the scientific collections available for research and education at a university level, 3) through displays and exhibitions, publications, school services etc. the museum will disseminate research results and research based knowledge to the public, and 4) on the basis of its collections and research activities, the museum shall function as a regional competence and information. centre.

As a university museum, the collections are important for research and university education within several fields. At the same time the museum has a responsibility to preserve vital evidence on our natural and cultural history and to offer the public access to information and new knowledge about nature and history. Bergen Museum has therefore developed an organizational model that integrates the museum collections both in an academic department structure and in a museum structure. The teaching activity of the departments is a faculty matter, and the faculty has the responsibility for budgetary policies and decisions, for matters relating to standards and procedures concerning the educational process, and for appointments. Bergen Museum has the corresponding responsibilities with regards to museum matters. Both the faculties and the museum report directly to the University Senate. Thus Bergen Museum has in effect faculty status. However, while the 6 institutes report to 3 different faculties in teaching matters, Bergen Museum is the sole superstructure for museum matters. In addition to the departments and the central administration, the museum also has a section for school education and public affairs, as well as a conservation section (fig. 3).



The materials of each museum department are in most cases organized into several sections or collections:

Department of Archaeology:

- *Prehistory collection*
- *Medieval collection*

Department of Cultural studies and Art History:

- *Church art collection*
- *Cultural history collection from rural districts*
- *Cultural history collection from urban areas*
- *Coin and medal collection*

Department of Social Anthropology:

- *Ethnographic collection*

Department of Geology:

- *Collection of rock samples*
- *Collection of mineral samples*
- *Collection of sediments*
- *Collection of fossils*

Department of Botany:

- *Herbarium of cryptogams*
- *Herbarium of pteridophytes and phanerogams*
- *Palaeoecological collection*
- *Botanical garden and greenhouse*
- *Arboretum*

Department of Zoology:

- *Entomology section*
- *Invertebrate section*
- *Vertebrate section*
- *Osteology section*
- *Section for project related material*

Bergen Museum has an academic staff of 37 persons, including post-doctoral and graduate students in short-time research positions. In addition there are 9 museum attendants, 27 technical and 11 administrative staff. Including the education sections the scientific capacity on which Bergen Museum rests, totals ca 20 archaeologists, 15 ethnologists and folklorists, 15 art historians, 25 social anthropologists and ethnographers, 60 geologists, 30 botanists and 50 zoologists. The technical staff of these departments, also including the Technical Section, is ca 70 and the administrative staff totals some 30 persons.

The main challenges for Bergen Museum in years to come will be to strengthen and further develop the strong research profile, to promote interdisciplinary co-operation, to continue development of contacts with foreign academic centres of excellence, to computerize the museum collections and to develop new strategies and use new technologies in exhibitions and information dissemination.

A large proportion of the Museum's collections have been registered in computerized databases. A major national documentation project with the goal of converting selected university databases in archaeology, history and languages to computer-compatible form and establish a database that will make the material

accessible to researchers, the authorities and the public, is nearing its end. Some of Bergen Museums archaeological databases are included in this project. Another project of the same type is devoted to natural sciences, where the main contribution of Bergen Museum will be in zoology.

The University of Bergen has a reputation for being 'the international university' of Norway. The international perspective is also fundamental for Bergen Museum. Our scholars and research groups are engaged in research and teaching collaboration with a large number of universities and research institutions in Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Bilateral collaborative agreements on research and teaching have been formalized, and we are proud to announce that Bergen Museum departments now have such agreements with four Lithuanian research institutions.

Bergeno universitetas – prezentacija

SVEIN INDRELID

Santrauka

Bergeno muziejus – sena įstaiga, įkurta 1825 metais. Bergeno universiteto įkūrimas 1946 metais buvo tiesioginė muziejaus veiklos tęsa. Neseniai Bergeno muziejus reorganizuotas į savarankišką tarpdisciplininį muziejų ir mokslinių tyrimų padalinį Bergeno universitete. Šešių institutų (archeologijos, meno, istorijos-etnologijos, etnografijos/socialinės antropologijos, botanikos, zoologijos ir geologijos) muziejų skyriai įeina į „naująjį“ Bergeno muziejų. Taip pat turi konservacijos, informacijos tarnybos bei gidų/švietimo (parodų aptarnavimo) sektorius. Muziejus organizuoja tarpdisciplininius mokslinių tyrimų projektus (ypač susijusius su Vakarų Norvegija). Viena iš svarbių Bergeno universiteto veiklos sričių yra tarptautinis mokslinis bendradarbiavimas šešiose minėtose srityse. Ateityje šį tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą numatoma plėsti.

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