

**BEYOND THE MUSEUM WALLS:  
CULTURES OF CURATORS, HISTORIANS AND PRACTITIONERS OF SCIENCE**

Marta Lourenço

National Museum of Natural History and Science/CIUHCT,  
University of Lisbon, Portugal

In recent decades, museums of science and natural history have become relevant spaces of public engagement and open debate about contemporary scientific, political, economic and social issues. Exhibitions are also presenting increasingly complex, innovative and non-linear narratives about the past, including the presentation of recent historical research, citizen science and interdisciplinary perspectives. Change, however, has been largely limited to the public dimension of the museum. Beyond the museum walls, or backstage in the museum storages, it's 'business as usual'. Although science and research have changed dramatically in the past decades, museum collecting has often remained confined to pre-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century practices. Moreover, although historians of science, technology and medicine (STM) have been increasingly interested in material sources, the actual use of museum collections for historical research is still scarce. Museums collect, preserve, study and interpret artefacts and specimens because they have significance and values associated with memory, identity and culture. This does not necessarily mean collecting historical sources. Can both be achieved? How?

In this paper, I will broadly discuss three main actors that gravitate around the museum of science – curators, historians and scientists – and examine how their practices and cultures simultaneously encourage and obstruct a more meaningful role of museums in contemporary societies.