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PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION: REDUCING RISKS TO COLLECTIONS
International Course – Sibiu, Romania, 18 June-6 July 2007

COURSE INFORMATION DOCUMENT

BACKGROUND

Today, preventive conservation is a leading theme in all fields of cultural property. Useful scientific and technical knowledge continues to grow but is often incorporated in current practice slowly, incorrectly, or not at all. Despite the best intents, museums may apply unrealistic standards, guidelines, or lists of best practice, with no clear sense of priority, or of realistic expected benefits.

With limited resources, decision-makers are immediately confronted with difficult choices in planning conservation strategies. Should we put all our resources in a sophisticated environmental control system, or should we upgrade the fire control system instead? What exactly will happen to this collection of costumes and fine basketry if they remain exposed to this level of light? And in the long term, how will this damage compare to the various forms of damage possible from the increasing numbers of visitors?

Risk management, which informs and guides decision makers in many fields outside cultural heritage, can help these planning decisions. It directly addresses the question: what will be the condition of my collections at some future moment, for example in 10, 30 or 100 years, if no actions are taken, or if new actions are taken. Risk management encourages the reappraisal of conservation strategies which require tremendous efforts from our institution, if those strategies do not significantly improve this future state.

Risk management can be understood as not only the management of rare catastrophes, but also the management of slow continual hazards, and everything in between. At the core of risk management is the concept of "loss of value," of the collections. Thus risk management becomes an integrated institutional view of both the use and the conservation of cultural property.

Motivated by the potential offered by this new perspective, aware of the need to facilitate its understanding and practice, and anxious to bring leading developers and knowledgeable users together during this formative phase, ICCROM and the Canadian Conservation Institute, in collaboration with other leading institutions, developed this international course on Reducing risks to collections.

PURPOSE

The course is focused on the discovery, discussion and practice of the concepts underlying the risk management approach. It examines the best available research to enhance estimates of all types of risks. Studying a real museum collection, participants practice each stage of this approach, from risk assessment to the development and planning of options for risk mitigation. Special consideration is given to the concerns of institutions with limited resources. The course emphasized risk communication and teamwork.

OBJECTIVE

At the end of the course, participants will see preventive conservation from the viewpoint of risk management.

They will be able, using a systematic approach, to identify, estimate and rank risks within their specific context. They will use the terminology appropriately and communicate risks more effectively. They will be able to develop and assess options to treat risks, and suggest ways to plan their implementation.

They will propose and design a "home project" which they will carry out when they return to their working context in order to contribute to the development and dissemination of the risk management approach.

PARTICIPANTS

The 22 course participants come from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czech Republic, China, Greece, Estonia, France, Hungary, Germany, Iran, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Romania and United Kingdom. They represent a range of heritage and conservation professions dealing mainly with collections in museums, galleries, libraries and archives. At least a third of the group has managing responsibilities and half of them are actively involved in teaching. A majority are conservators. The rest of the group includes conservation scientists, curators and lecturers. Refer to Participants' list and profiles.

PROJECT TEAM

The project team is composed of senior staff from the CCI, (Canadian Conservation Institute), ICCROM, ICN (the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage), the Canadian Museum of Nature, the National Museum in Belgrade - Department for Preventive conservation "Diana", and guest lecturers from other institutions. A course Moderator, former participant of the 2003 ICCROM-CCI course in Preventive conservation, completes the team. Refer to the Information on the Project team.

WORKING LANGUAGE

English will be our working language. There are twenty different mother-tongues spoken in the group! Dutch, French, German, Italian, Romanian or Spanish is spoken by at least 3 people within the group. The course Moderator is available at all times to help in overcoming language barriers.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Following an induction session, the course is structured into 6 units, based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard for Risk Management, presented below in sequence. However, the various units are inter-related, as are the knowledge and skills they encompass.

The structure is linear and progressive, with opportunities for participants and teachers, at various stages, and as the course develops, to refine and integrate the various notions (see REVIEW SESSIONS). A course schedule is provided as a separate document. Refer to Course schedule.

Note: Units are organized into modules and then into sessions of 90 minutes.

UNIT 1 ESTABLISH THE CONTEXT

Module 1 Probable cause

To introduce the risk management approach.

Module 2 Concepts of risks

To discuss and adopt a common terminology for risk. In particular, to establish the meaning, interpretation and connections of key words such as risk, loss, agent, cause, hazard, frequency, likelihood, probability, rare, and continual. To familiarize with the risk management cycle

Module 3 Integrating Risk Management

To consider integration of the risk management approach within national preservation policies and within an institution's missions and mandates. To specify the framework and to define scopes for the risk management case-study.

Module 4 Selecting and communicating conservation priorities

To share current approaches and experiences related to preventive conservation decisions in a variety of contexts.

UNIT 2 IDENTIFY RISKS

Module 1 Tools for comprehensive identification of risks

To examine various systematic approaches for the risk discovery process; to improve deducting skills from observation of context of collections and of damages to collections.

Module 2 Finding specific risks

To identify the specific risks in a real context (the case-study) and to ensure that identification is comprehensive.

UNIT 3 ANALYSE RISKS

Module 1 Risk scenario

To describe the specific risks in a given context and to ensure that the description will allow their subsequent evaluation.

Module 2 Informing scenarios

To examine critically three main sources of information, i.e. material science, statistic records, and institutional and staff memory. Illustrations will focus on risks due to incorrect RH and light, fire & earthquake.

Module 3 Value and loss in value

To discuss the importance of value in cultural heritage, the interpretation of 'loss in value', and how to integrate 'loss in value' into the risk analysis.

Module 4 Magnitude of risk

To discuss and apply a framework within which risks can be compared on common scales.

Module 5 Dealing with uncertainty

To make uncertainty transparent, to recognize its sources and to determine its role in risk evaluation.

UNIT 4 EVALUATE RISKS

Module 1 Comparing magnitude of risk

To interpret the final ranking in calculation of the magnitude of risks using common scales. Various scales and computation methods used in this and other fields are critically reviewed.

UNIT 5 TREAT RISKS

Module 1 Developing options

To apply a methodical approach to developing options for reducing risks.

Module 2 Implementation plan

To turn the option into a risk treatment plan.

UNIT 6 COMMUNICATE

Module 1 Sharing risk assessment results

To communicate and share risk assessment results with decision-makers, using appropriate report systems and visual aids.

Module 2 Selecting and communicating conservation priorities using the Risk Management approach

To select and communicate conservation priorities in a specific situation using the risk management approach.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY AND THE “HOME PROJECT”

Every Wednesday afternoon, time is allocated for individual study and reading, and for consultation with the project team members. Suggested reading and an optional topic is proposed every week:

- Week one Learn more about the Preservation framework
(see http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/tools/framework/index_e.aspx)
- Week two Learn more about specific agents (content to be agreed with participants)
- Week three Planning the ‘home project’ (*)

During these periods, participants will have also the opportunity to arrange individual appointments with the available resource-persons and colleagues.

(*)We encourage each participant to think in advance of an idea or a project related to the theme of the course which they can initiate and possibly carry out within six months of their return. Results will be collected, reviewed and shared after this period.

REVIEW SESSIONS

It is expected that participants be actively involved in debating and sharing knowledge and methodologies. Beyond regular opportunities during the various course sessions, special review sessions are scheduled at the beginning of the second and the third week, for review, further thinking, discussion and linkages. Participants can bring forward any issues arising from the course so far.

VARIETY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In order to draw upon and to develop the participants’ learning and communicating skills, the course offers a variety of teaching and learning activities. It includes a balance of illustrated lectures, practical work, study visits, group works, seminars and discussions. Most sessions promote interactive learning. The course features in particular:

A “Mini conference”: At the end of the first week, a “Mini conference” will include presentations from participants and the teaching team.

A case-study: From day 2 of the course, and as the course develops, participants practice the risk management approach through a case-study specially selected for the course. Approximately one third of the course will focus on the case-study.

A one-day Risk Assessment: At the end of the course, a one-day exercise will allow participants to test their knowledge and skills by carrying out autonomously a specific risk assessment.

A risk management online community: A web site is created to facilitate communication, serving as an information and exchange platform for the course and as a support in the learning process during and after the course. Participants will be able to find there all the necessary information concerning the course, as well as information on Risk Management. They may use the web site as a place for asking questions, start discussions on different topics related to the risk management process, put information about their projects, etc. They will be encouraged to actively use the site and contribute to its development for the benefit of the risk management online community.

PARTICIPANTS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE COURSE

The course will bring together a group of professionals from very diverse backgrounds. The past experience and the challenges they face in their work will be an important contribution to the course content, and the exchange of experience, concerns and ideas is a major aim of this project.

A separate document "Participants' contribution to the course" describes a variety of items that participants are invited to collect or prepare in view of their contribution to the course.

COURSE EVALUATION SYSTEM

As for all ICCROM courses, a formal course evaluation system is in development. It will address course content and approach as well as the learning environment. It will involve the participants and their institutions, the coordinating and teaching team, as well as the partners. It will follow course impact and outcomes well after the end of the event.

In practical terms, the course evaluation will consist of questionnaires to participants and teaching team, during and after the course. Six months after the course, participants will be asked for final feedback, and a report on their "home project".