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Centro Conservazione e Restauro
La Venaria Reale



S H A R I N G C O N S E R V A T I O N D E C I S I O N S 2 0 0 6

International Course - ICCROM - Rome, 16 October - 10 November 2006

WHY A COURSE ON SHARING CONSERVATION DECISIONS

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I would like to attempt to introduce this course; a course for which the third consecutive time we have received numerous applications from many professionals throughout the world, and all very highly qualified.

Is a course like this really necessary? Why - once again - do we want to talk about things we all know so well? Conservation, decision-making, interdisciplinary approach, risk, emergency, context, and so on.

Let's start with the word: "**conservation**". What is it that we want to conserve? And why? When did fixation first start? Who decided that we **must** to conserve our heritage, our cultural inheritance?

Until a short time ago, we lived happily and care-free: if Grandmother's teapot, a house, an old building were no longer useful, if they no longer fulfilled their function, if we didn't like them anymore, we changed them, we disposed of them, or we transformed them into something more useful and/or more pleasing. This was everyday life, unwritten, ancient and recent.

Then **history** appeared: and with it the first problems.

We discovered that many objects, which up to that time were considered everyday things - like the great monuments or sites or particularly **significant** objects - had a **message** to pass on, a **value** to conserve, because they were the expression of a collective interest that collaborated on the configuration of a cultural identity (*Ferrari 1966*).

A shared **decision** was made almost concurrently in many regions and nations: was it the result of studies and research? Or was it a convergence of problematics and necessities that, strangely enough, solidified at the same time in different places? (*Kubler 1962*)(*Phillipot 1995*)

But who, in past eras, which person or what community, religious, political or civil, decided what to conserve, and for what reason: which object, which symbol? And through what mechanisms, on both individual and community levels?

In those areas of the world where **technology** reigns, we believe that we can 'discover' everything, and as a consequence 'understand' everything by means of super-sophisticated analyses, delving more and more into the heart of matter, even being able to 'see' the energy that matter generates (the neutrino). Perhaps we can understand the mechanisms of the relationships between the **material** world and the **non-material** one, but this knowledge does not unveil the most profound essence of these two entities - that can never be separated - their substance and their content.

This is what necessitates us to reflect and to work together. Here is the interest and the richness in **diversity**. Here is the urgency to be 'curious' about what we don't know, to know how to listen, and to have respect for what we don't yet know.

UNIT 1 - SHARING & COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES: ANALYSIS OF DECISION PROCESS IN CONSERVATION

What are the mechanisms today that guide us in the choice of objects and in the motivations for their conservation? Do we know what these mechanisms are, or are they unknown to us? Do we base ourselves on 'images' that are sedimented in our **memory** and in our **consciousness** – even without being aware of them – and that we have to re-discover, re-acquaint ourselves with, or, are we following other traces and not only from memory, and what could these be?

The objects we encounter can have various types of **values**; moral, economic, social, religious, etc. But, above all, to us will be the values that we give to them: "...on one side there is the 'goods' or the thing that has value, on the other there is the value of the thing (*Argan 1969*)".

UNIT 2 - CULTURAL PROJECT: CONSERVATION DECISIONS IN CONTEXT

An object, large or small, moveable or immovable, made of organic or inorganic materials cannot be considered by itself, removed from its **context**.

When it was commissioned, conceived, and created it was in relation to its maker (whether a human being or by mechanical means), then it lived in a context, and now, from the moment it relives in our consciousness, it establishes new relationships with its new public.

All these points of connection, of layered experiences interwoven in time, form a set of relationships that the historian, the conservator-restorer and the scientists have a duty to investigate.

History and not chronicle: not merely a listing, but a **critical act** not only in the choice of the objects but also, and above all, in explaining the "...phenomenon; which means identifying within the object those relationships from which it is produced, and externally, the relationships that [the object] itself produces, that is to say, those relationships that connect it to other phenomena, thus forming a domain, a system *où tout se tient*¹." (*Argan, 1969*).

It is also the duty and **emotional activity** of each person to give life to these objects in his or her own consciousness, thereby perpetuating the moments when they are no longer only a piece of paper, a block of stone, a fragment of painted wood, but a precious codex, a column, part of an important painting (*Dewey 1934*)

In order to attain a satisfactory result, and with that, transmit the cultural patrimony that we have received to the future generations, we must again activate all measures and scientific instruments at our disposal: from the philosophical and cognitive to the purely technical and applicative. (*Phillippot 1985*)

UNIT 3 - THE OBJECT AS SOURCE OF INFORMATION

If we open the window and **gaze** out with our eyes, what is it that reaches our retina, our mind, our consciousness (*Berkeley, 1709*)? What emotions will the object that we have **chosen** to **look** at produce? In order to have a better understanding of this, will we attempt to investigate the mechanism of **perception**, relying upon collaboration from the natural sciences, or, will we look into the depths of thought and consciousness, assisted by the human sciences?

Perhaps we don't realize it, but each one of us possesses an enormous patrimony of **unwritten knowledge**, accumulated during our lives from work, study and experience. And we know how to use this unwritten knowledge very well; especially in the case of an emergency. How can we uncover and share our **hidden patrimony** with others?

¹ Self-contained system

After we have perceived, seen and observed something, often we have the desire to document it. But why? To have better control of it? To stop time? To remember? There are many questions about how, and just as many ways to **document** something. The etymology of the word clarifies the original meaning, that is, to demonstrate, to teach. But how? By what means? By using our senses: by stories, by descriptions, by poetry and other intangible forms; or, by using a **sign**. A sign, a tangible means, which has developed as writing and as **image** (*Brandi 1960*).

Once again, there are three of us: me, the object, and the means of sensing and transmitting it. I must be aware that every time I try to hold the object, to document it, I make a choice; I **interpret** the object and its message, just as I do when I play or sing a musical score.

The object I perceive - large or small, individually or in context, made from organic or inorganic material, etc. - once my consciousness chooses it as a cultural object, it becomes a **monument**. Once again, let us use the dictionary to assist with this **terminology**. "The term monument...is used in designating an object that transmits the memory of persons or things from the past" (*R.Assunto 1963*)

The **new technologies** and technical progress can help us in the task of transmitting objects and their documentation, but the level of attention must remain very high: it is not the number and the quality of analyses that we can make, or the number and quality of documentations we can carry out that lead to the understanding of the substance of the object, or to a correct and functional diagnosis of the conservation of our cultural heritage.

UNIT 4 – DECISIONS IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Using the history and facts behind two serious events, which have left profound scars on the material patrimony that is the symbol of the **identity** of their communities, we will try to understand what mechanisms and what knowledge we can draw from in emergency situations. What are the mechanisms that are activated consciously and unconsciously, how much and what **knowledge** works side by side with **experience** in a solidarity relationship, where each one will have an exact role to play, often in a creative rather than a bureaucratic fashion.

Knowing how to **listen** is the most effective tool we can develop, using the experience of others, benefiting from past and recent history, and after having critically analyzed all the available data, a concept and risk and emergency plans that best utilize the human resources and the tools available. Often dramatic and traumatic situations, like the events proposed, will engender a reality that is rich with new ideas and new proposals, which in a meaningful but favourable way, modify the course of the history of the conservation of our cultural heritage.

UNIT 5 – IMPLEMENTING CONSERVATION DECISIONS & TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Up to this point, we have examined various aspects of the problems tied to conservation and restoration of cultural heritage. But what are the **tools** for concretely facing some of these problems?

We need to know how to formulate a **plan of conservation** in such a way that it is acceptable not only to the various parts of society and sustainable under a legislative profile, but that is also capable of producing a greater **awareness of the values** in which we all live, and which we are duty bound to transmit. In this way, we will succeed in two purposes: conserve the patrimony and produce **material and immaterial wealth**.

But in order to produce wealth we must begin with the wealth we have, whether it be tangible or intangible.

Who will pick up the **costs**, even when they are very modest: the community? And with what revenues? Or will it be volunteer associations: with what tools and to what ends?

Whoever finances an activity, a project, increasingly wants to be an **active partner**: how do we communicate with these new players? How can we involve them, and how can we collaborate with them so that we share not only objectives, but also methods and knowledge? But before any of this, we must ask ourselves who and where are these **stakeholders**?

They are, perhaps, closer than we may think: it is all of us, in different ways we are the owners, even though not the possessors, of that cultural inheritance which we have received and which we must be able to understand, **share** and conserve for the future generations.