

The Pavia Document: towards a European profile of the conservator-restorer

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Forty-five experts in the field of conservation and restoration from sixteen European countries met in Pavia (Italy) from 18 to 22 October 1997 at a European summit entitled 'Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Towards a European Profile of the Conservator-Restorer'. The purpose was to identify common guidelines to propose to the various institutions of the European Union so as to encourage the adoption of concrete measures which would clearly define the role of the conservator-restorer. Their deliberations resulted in the unanimous adoption of the Pavia Document. Gaël de Guichen, Assistant Director-General of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome, was there and explains why this was a watershed in the affirmation and recognition of the profession of conservator-restorer.

Compared with previous statements on the same subject, the Pavia Document is truly different and goes much further. It is different because it is the result of a group effort in which all types of specialists were represented, from the conservator to the scientist, from the theoretician to the practitioner, from the director of heritage to the director of the school of conservation-restoration. What is more, the group – deliberately limited to forty-five participants – reflected a balanced spectrum of the various currents of thought in the fifteen countries of the European Union.

As will be seen, the text goes further than its predecessors in several ways. However, I would like to single out three points which were the result of long and passionate discussions and which obtained an overall consensus: any intervention on the physical heritage, either direct or indirect, is called 'conservation-restoration'; this is a discipline that should be taught at university level and lead to a doctorate; the person responsible for the conservation-restoration intervention is called a 'conservator-restorer'.

These three steps are essential to ensure the recognition of a profession that guarantees that interventions of conservation-restoration not only preserve the historic integrity of the heritage but its maintenance and promotion to the public as well.

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Considering that the cultural heritage, both movable and immovable, is a cornerstone of European cultural identity, an identity which respects both national and regional diversities,

Considering the special nature of this heritage, its finite nature, the moral obligation to guarantee access to it for present and future generations and to raise awareness of its origins, history, vulnerability and preservation amongst professionals, the public and decision-makers,

Considering that it is necessary to ensure the highest level of conservation-restoration for cultural heritage, i.e. that which is capable of guaranteeing its integrity and prolonging its existence,

Considering that this high level of conservation-restoration depends on the professional status of the conservator-restorer being given urgent recognition at a European level,

Considering that the conservator-restorer must be part of the decision-making process from the outset of a conservation-restoration project and that he/she must assume, in collaboration with the other partners involved, the responsibilities which relate to his/her own competence (in particular, diagnosis, prescription, implementation and documentation of treatment).

The experts concerned with the conservation-restoration of cultural heritage, meeting in Pavia from 18 to 22 October 1997, recommend that, on the basis of the document prepared by the professional bodies ('ECCO Professional Guidelines', 11 June 1993, Annex 1¹) the European Union, in collaboration with all the specialists in the field, should encourage the following actions:

1. The recognition and promotion of conservation-restoration as a discipline covering all categories of cultural property and taught at university level or recognized equivalent, with the possibility of a doctorate.

2. The development of interdisciplinary exchange between conservator-restorers and exponents of the humanities and the natural sciences both in teaching and in research.
 3. The development of the profile of the conservator-restorer based on the ECCO professional guidelines (1993/94), of his/her role in decision-making from the outset of a project and of his/her responsibility for communicating with other professionals, the public and decision-makers.
 4. The development of a definition at European level of the full range of professional competences of the conservator-restorer.
 5. The avoidance of the proliferation of training programmes which do not meet the standards of the profession.
 6. The assurance of an appropriate balance of integrated theoretical and practical teaching, as well as the teaching of strategies for communication in the education and training of the conservator-restorer.
 7. The setting up, as a matter of urgency, of a programme of co-operation and exchange within a European network of training and research institutions.
 8. The setting up of a comparative study by the profession of the different educational systems (objectives, contents and levels).
 9. The promotion of improved dissemination of information by means of publication of conservation-restoration projects.
 10. The promotion of research in conservation-restoration.
 11. The establishment of a regulatory framework to guarantee the quality of intervention on cultural heritage or its environment in order to avoid the negative impacts of market forces. This regulatory framework will include, in particular, provisions concerning:
 - the competence of enterprises or teams of professionals in charge of conservation-restoration projects;
 - the drafting of specifications for conservation-restoration projects.
 12. The publication of a multilingual glossary prepared on the basis of the conceptual definitions to be found in the professional literature.
 13. The provision of appropriate resources to ensure improved communication between professionals, the public and the decision-makers.
- The experts gathered in Pavia urge the Institutions of the European Union to demonstrate their commitment to the preservation of the cultural heritage by translating these recommendations into tangible, coordinated actions.
- Unanimously adopted.
Pavia, 21 October 1997. ■
- Note
1. ECCO = European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organizations. – Ed.