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REFLECTION ON CONSERVATION-RESTORATION PRACTICE TODAY. A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

BELISHKI Stefan [1], CORR Susan [2]

[1] Vice-President of E.C.C.O., Head of the Department of Conservation-Restoration at the Academy of Arts in Sofia; stefan_belishki@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3161-7129
[2] President of E.C.C.O., accredited member of the Institute of Conservator-Restorers in Ireland, Head of private practice and Consultant; susan.corrnewman@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6555-9820

ABSTRACT: Contemporary conservation-restoration practice is affected by theoretical and ethical principles and by social factors. They are often discussed separately, but their effect on the processes of conservation-restoration is complex and intertwined.
This paper offers an overview of the development of professional codes of ethics in conservation-restoration and as they relate to and inform professional competences. It looks at how ethics and competences are defined and link with professional education. It also discusses relationships with other professions in the preservation of cultural heritage and the need for clarification on the role and obligation of these respective professions. The legal and social issues they generate at a European level are touched upon.

KEYWORDS: Conservation-restoration, professional codes of ethics, professional competence, professional education, legal issues

1. Introduction

Theory

The twentieth century was a period of significant development of theoretical principles of conservation-restoration.

Some of the core concepts formulated in theoretical texts still play an important role in professional conduct today: the concepts of authenticity, integrity, minimum intervention, reversibility, author's intent etc., are often quoted by conservator-restorers as informing their professional practice. While the development of theoretical concepts can be easily traced back to Alois Riegl and Camillo Boito,

further elaboration of these concepts was carried out in the work of Cesare Brandi, Umberto Baldini, Paul Philippot, to mention a few of the most famous names.

More recent authors, like Salvador Muñoz Viñas (2005, 2009, 2015) have published theoretical texts which challenge traditional concepts and reinterpret them to reflect new insights on the subject of conservation-restoration.

Our understanding of what constitutes cultural heritage has evolved significantly in the late twentieth century and now encompasses a broader landscape and a reappraisal of the theory of conservation-restoration is certainly due. However, this does not displace an approach to the conservation and restoration of traditional (material heritage) art objects which emphasises aesthetic value, authenticity, historical significance. etc. These remain potent concepts and important to professional conduct today. But, seminal theoretical texts concerned with aesthetics and philosophy hardly provide explicit and specific guidance on professional conduct. The need for such guidance has lead the professional community to develop a more comprehensive set of precepts and principles making it possible to standardise professional practice in order to guarantee and deliver a high quality conservation-restoration service. This process began in the 1960's and these principles are elaborated in documents which are considered as either

- doctrinal texts developed by international organisations, and:
- guidelines/codes of ethics (either by international or national organisations).

Both aim to provide guidance for quality in professional practice and by extension, to help regulate the work of conservator-restorers.

2. Doctrinal texts

The development of doctrinal texts is related to the establishment, after World War 2, of international professional organisations involved in the conservation and protection of cultural heritage.[1] ICOMOS has lead this process to date having issued more than twenty doctrinal texts. Most ICOMOS documents however, do not focus explicitly on the conservation-restoration profession, but rather on different aspects in the wide process of conservation and protection of cultural heritage (Jokilehto, 2009). These texts, called Charters, Principles or Documents, are dedicated predominately to architectural and archaeological sites[2] rather than with art objects or collections.

There is an exception in the document 'Principles for the Preservation and Conservation-Restoration of Wall Paintings' (ICOMOS, 2003). This document specifically considers professional practice on the conservation-restoration of wall paintings. In so doing, wall paintings are explicitly described as being part of the built fabric - 'monuments and sites', and integral to them. But the reverse is

[1] Amongst the most influential and largest organisations are International Council of Museums (ICOM) <icom.museum> established in 1946 as a successor of the Museums Committee of the League of Nations, International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works IIC, established in 1950, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) established in 1965. At European level the establishment of the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.) in 1991 should be noted.

[2] The full list is available at ICOMOS website: https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts.

sometimes the case; the value attributed to a building may derive from the wall paintings where the conservation-restoration of wall paintings has its own conservation issues and specificities. It must also be acknowledged that the principles contained in the Venice Charter[3] (ICOMOS, 1964) are such that they are also referenced by conservation-restoration specialists working within the museum environment (Ashley-Smith, 2017). This extended sphere of influence beyond the built environment can be accounted for by the fact that much of the theoretical approach in the Venice Charter is based on Cesare Brandi's Theory of Restoration (1963).[4]

The majority of doctrinal texts are for the most part, more concerned with concepts of conservation and protection than in offering guidance for conservation-restoration practice.

3. Professional Guidelines and Codes of Ethics

The idea of a standard high level of professional practice, based on agreed principles, lead to the development of *professional guidelines*, some of which are supported by professional *codes of ethics*, *commentaries* and other *documents* described below. These guidelines are created to promote self-regulation by the conservation professionals based on the presumption that conservator-restorers themselves know best their practice and their profession. The earliest guidelines addressed conservation-restoration practice at national level. The origin of these documents can be traced back to the Murray-Pease Report (1964) presented to the American Group of the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC). The aim of the document was to "set out the basic procedural requirements for the proper conduct of professional conservation in the U.S.A.". It wasn't adopted by the entire organisation (IIC) and was intended to serve at national level only. The Report didn't aim to define "moral obligations" – the IIC/AG code of ethics was adopted later (Keck, 1967). These documents, after being redrafted, formed the basis of the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, adopted in 1979 by the (already) independent American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC).

The documents were amended, and the last version was adopted in 1994 when the *Standards for Practice* were replaced by *Guidelines for Practice*. The Commentaries are integral to the new set of documents. They were completed in 2001 and revised in 2008. The updated version of the documents "was designed to amplify and define current accepted practice for each of the Guidelines while accommodating the individual needs of each area of professional specialisation" (AIC, n.d.). These professional guidelines, despite being widely and internationally acclaimed, remain focused at national level.

Similar professional guidelines and codes of ethics were adopted by other national organisations such as the Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM, 2008), Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property and Canadian Association of Professional Conservators (CAC/CAPC 2000), United Kingdom Institute of Conservation (UKIC)[5] and later by the Institute of Conservation (ICON, 2014a, 2014b).

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[3] Originally drawn up at the II International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in Venice in 1964, adopted by ICOMOS in 1965.

[4] Today better known to the public is the edition of 1977 (Brandi, 1977).

[5] Now part of the Institute of Conservation (ICON) <https://icon.org.uk/>.

At a European level the first (and so far the only) internationally agreed, supported and recognised guidelines for practice were created by the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.). The three-part document, entitled E.C.C.O. - *Professional Guidelines*, was first adopted in 1997 and later revised: I – *The Profession* (E.C.C.O., 2002), II – *Code of Ethics* (2003), and III – *Education* (2004). The *Guidelines* address professional conduct, ethical and educational issues referring to the needs and traditions in professional development and note the specificity of the cultural heritage in the European continent.

E.C.C.O. promotes high standards of professional practice based on a set of agreed principles defined in their Professional Guidelines (E.C.C.O. 2003). In adhering to these Guidelines which must be adopted and implemented by member organisations, E.C.C.O. is developing a coherent demographic of professional conservator-restorers across Europe. Key to this work is the discourse around cultural heritage; how it is valued, used and accessed which subsequently prompts the question of how it is taken care of, by whom and for whom. These are the issues which contextualise the practice of conservation-restoration and are considered in the first, second and third articles of E.C.C.O.'s Code of Ethics. While the Guidelines must be transposed into the statutes and by-laws of member organisations, becoming in fact the 'soft law' of the profession to borrow a legal phrase, they do not transcend national regulations for the profession where these apply.

European policy, based on the principle of subsidiarity in cultural matters, recognises that each country has its own regulations, dependent on legal traditions and the character of the cultural heritage and its values. However, even without legal enforcement of the rules of conduct, the Guidelines remain an important tool for guaranteeing high quality in conservation-restoration work and in achieving mutual recognition of the profession across Europe.

Although the E.C.C.O. Guidelines may be considered a European document, its influence and acceptance goes beyond the geographical borders of Europe. Organisations from other countries in formally consulting with E.C.C.O. have expressed conformity in their professional conduct with the Guidelines, demonstrating that the principles they espouse resonate on a global scale.[6]

The Guidelines are not frozen in time; they can and have been revised and updated in response to the development of the profession. However, significant developments in thinking and approach to cultural heritage, reflected in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage to Society – Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2006), require further interrogation of the Codes of Ethics. The democratisation of culture and heritage, viewed as a group of resources whose value is a function of community and social engagement with the world, by corollary envisages broader participation in and responsibility for the care of that heritage. Conservation has always had to negotiate value but that such discourses are now to be refracted through the prism of social value implies that the perspectives of 'for whom' and 'by whom' have to be unpacked and problematised. The conservator-restorer draws on an evolving intellectual canon of knowledge and research, and although facilitating, where appropriate, societal participation, conservation remains a professional

[6] Organisations from Turkey and Israel demonstrated their adherence to E.C.C.O. *Guidelines* in their correspondence with E.C.C.O. National Research Institute for Cultural Heritage NRICH, Korea was especially interested in E.C.C.O. Guidelines as a model for their national code of ethics too.

discipline rooted in both the sciences and the humanities. Conservation has been described as the 'management of change' (Staniforth, 2000). Increasingly, this implies a dialogue between evolving social expectations of how heritage is made, accessed and used, and a mandate to consider its transmission to future generations. In having the potential to increase or add value through the creation of new knowledge, the conservator-restorer is bound to both advocate for and act on the heritage in the public interest. Whereas by definition conservation-restoration is a public good, it often operates in contexts of competing public interests. Balancing between advocating on behalf of the heritage and acting on behalf of the client, the conservator-restorer is ultimately guided by the level of change/intervention they are comfortable to carry out or are prepared to justify. This represents the juncture where professional guidelines/codes of ethics and theories on conservation-restoration meet. It is worth pointing out that the profession of the conservator-restorer is considered a 'liberal profession' in Europe. This means that the expert knowledge the conservator has places them in a position of trust and they are morally bound to use this expert knowledge for the benefit of the object in the service of the client.

The effectiveness and success of current codes of ethics as they inform practice have their critics. Some argue for 'adaptive' ethics (Muñoz Viñas, 2005, p. 202) or 'bespoke codes of ethics' (Ashley-Smith 2017). Muñoz Viñas wants to acknowledge the subjective values that inform decision making and which are necessarily case specific. Ashley-Smith appears to suggest that the conservator-restorer identifies, within a spectrum of possible treatments, levels of interventions that they are prepared to implement contextualised within a range of parameters. Both approaches may amount to a readjustment of the lens through which conservator-restorers engage with ethics in their day to day practice but by its very nature, the conservation-restoration process, as described in the professional competences, requires an evaluative approach where decisions are made on a case by case basis. How far interventions can be carried within 'professional' practice so that concepts such as 'truthfulness', 'reversibility' and 'authenticity' remain cogent and applicable or even useful as a yardstick for best practice continue to form a critical part of the dialogue around professionalism. However, they are only meaningful when located within the broader understanding around cultural heritage values and the cultural agency of heritage.

No code of ethics is capable of policing every single case or eventuality but as principles governing contemporary heritage practice have broadened to embrace a wider constituency of actors and stakeholders, the decisions of the conservator-restorer have in turn become more complex and iterative. By extension, it is this new dispensation which challenges to the very core the classification of heritage assets as movable and immovable (if such a typology was ever justified or helpful) given the three constituencies of the public, the heritage and the profession. What has become patently clear as the profession has evolved, is that all conservator-restorers, irrespective of specialisation, operate and are bound by the same framework of a general code of ethics.

4. Education

Although increasingly the approach of the conservator-restorer is a negotiated position, the expert knowledge they bring is based on a discrete education and training which is addressed in the third part of the *E.C.C.O. Guidelines*.

E.C.C.O- Professional Guidelines (III) Education determine the requirements and the level to which a conservation-restoration education should be delivered, stating that "The minimum level for entry into the profession as a qualified conservator-restorer should be at Master's level (or recognised equivalent)". These are an agreed set of requirements iterated in other doctrinal texts the earliest of which is published by International Council of Museums - Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) "*The Conservator-Restorer: a Definition of the Profession*" (1984). The European Network of Conservation-Restoration Education - ENCoRE[7] (2001) also outlines the requirements for education and training in conservation-restoration which were further clarified in a joint document published together with E.C.C.O. (ENCoRE & E.C.C.O., 2003).

All the above documents point to the importance for conservator-restorers to obtain complex knowledge combined with high level of skills. This fact, together with the understanding that conservation-restoration is a discrete professional occupation, different to that of the artists and craftsmen with which it is often mistakenly considered synonymous, has lead in the last few decades to the development of numerous academic/university programmes.[8] Certainly a University education is now the most common way of starting a career in conservation-restoration around Europe. The expectation on graduates in the last decades of the 20th century to have an extended knowledge in diverse scientific and humanitarian disciplines allied to substantial skills in the chosen field of specialisation has seriously challenged educational institutions in developing and delivering curriculum. Confronted with the dilemma of how to make a good academic "product", educators have reacted by constantly expanding the curriculum (Cather, 2000), which doesn't always deliver the expected professionalism (outcome). The situation is further complicated by the fact that higher education courses have traditionally varied significantly in both content and structure (Hutchings & Corr, 2012, p. 441). A significant move to address these differences led to the Bologna Declaration by the European Ministers of Education (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999). The *European Credit Transfer system* (ECTS) was introduced as part of a coordinated scheme to restructure educational delivery across Europe and to aid in the mutual recognition of qualifications. The system is related to the *European Qualifications Framework* (EQF) *for lifelong learning* (EU, 2008) which is a mechanism developed to find equivalence in qualifications. Qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes and are calibrated to eight different levels across the EQF as these levels reflect a hierarchy of learning in knowledge, skill and competence.

In visualizing this Jeremy Hutchings (2011) states that the "Recognition of the value of explicitly stating learning outcomes has shifted the academic emphasis of education from what the educator wishes to teach to what the graduate needs to know".

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[7] European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education, established in 1997, http://www.encore-edu.org/.

[8] The first diplomas in conservation-restoration were awarded before World War 2. The real expansion of the academic education in the profession began after the 1960s and continues in 21st century.

Although the issue of equivalence in qualification has been addressed, curricula in conservation-restoration programmes continue to differ, some are dominated by practice while others are almost entirely theoretical in content. Insufficient training and development in the skillsets of graduates from academic programmes has been identified as a matter of considerable concern. Jonathan Ashley-Smith (2016) for example, highlights the "risk of a decline of practical conservation skills" in the UK. This issue is examined by ENCoRE (2014) in a paper '*On Practice in Conservation-Restoration Education*'. Recognising the imbalance in curricula which leaves graduate students without fully developed practical skills the paper defines what is meant by practice within an academic programme in order that the recommended 50/50 balance between theory and practice can be achieved. The importance of an appropriate balance in theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the education of the conservator-restorer is stressed in both ICOM-CC (1984), and E.C.C.O. documents.

The level to which theoretical knowledge and practical skills need to be acquired in terms of the learning outcome of a course of study has been interrogated through the mechanism of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) by E.C.C.O. and are expressed and have been published as the competences required of the Conservator-Restorer for access to professional practice (E.C.C.O., 2011).

5. Competences

The formal adoption of the *European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning* (EQF) in 2008 was expected to "enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems" (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2008). Pan-European professional bodies, such as E.C.C.O., are encouraged become involved in this process through the specification of entry requirements for the professions that they represent.

Following a meeting with the EU Commissioner in December 2006, E.C.C.O. began work on the EQF and by unanimous consent of the GA in 2007, level 7 EQF was formally declared equivalent to the Masters' degree. Work to describe the levels of knowledge and skill required for access to professional practice at this level was undertaken by E.C.C.O. and subsequently published in *E.C.C.O. Competences for Access to the Conservation-Restoration Profession* (E.C.C.O., 2011).

E.C.C.O. used concept mapping, developed by Novak in 1972, to illustrate the topography of knowledge and skills which together with experience describe competence (Hutchings & Corr, 2012).

The conservation-restoration process is mapped as a narrative of decision-making colour coded to five levels of skill. Knowledge is calibrated to a schema of knowledge based on the work of Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The map is interpreted using these scales to illustrate the levels of knowledge and skill that describe the learning outcomes for qualifications at Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate respectively. For E.C.C.O., the EQF has acted as a nexus point between the goals of an education programme and the requirements of the profession.

The Competences illustrate the centrality of the conservator-restorer and by extension conservation-restoration to decision-making in and management of cultural heritage. At EU level, policy for an integrated approach to the care and management of cultural heritage is being developed recognising

that multiple actors, from specialists to the general public have a role in the derivation of public good from the cultural heritage resource. Cultural heritage literacy, as a legitimate and important public good concerning knowledge of the nature, resilience and value of cultural heritage, is axiomatic to the goals of discernment, shared stewardship and sustainable, informed utilisation of the resource.

Whereas multiple actors do have a role in the care, valorisation and utilisation of the cultural heritage, specialist training and the critical thinking that goes with it underpins its sustainable utilisation as a resource. Existing practitioners, particularly conservator-restorers, have identified and advocated for transversal linkages not only between the specialist and the public, but also between specialist disciplines in order to maximise, in a sustainable way, the potential of cultural heritage as a public good.

Specific activities in the transdisciplinary process of heritage conservation and preservation/protection can be identified in all the discrete specialisations practicing conservation-restoration, not least amongst those in the field of decorative architectural surfaces and wall paintings. A comprehensive illustration of this transdisciplinary integration of activities in the field of built heritage conservation for example, is given by Mechthild Noll Minor (2016). Noll Minor discusses the complex confluence of legislation, standards and guidelines found in "best practice" cases and cites the conservation of the Neues Museum in Berlin as one such case. This project, undertaken in 2003-2009, demonstrates the importance of a framework for professional involvement. Noll Minor highlights the role of the conservator-restorers in this interdisciplinary project; the quality of the conservation-restoration interventions contributed to very good long term outcomes guaranteeing the sustainable use of the building and of great benefit to the public. The author concludes that in order to achieve quality assurance it is critical to develop an "interdisciplinary project leading team, including, or sometimes even lead by conservator-restorers". This presentation underwrites the impact of the Competences in helping to deliver quality assurance in the practice of heritage conservation and protection, where communication between the specialists and understanding of each other's roles is critically important.

A transdisciplinary approach, sometimes referred to as 'cross-disciplinary', has been subject of debate amongst museums' conservator-restorers too (Williams, 2017). The contemporary idea of cultural heritage brings entirely new challenges there.

The Competences publication impacts on a wide range of interested parties, including Universities, professional organisations, political institutions, individuals etc. The advantage of the approach of the authors of the book, is that regardless of the field of specialization, conservator-restorers can identify the level and scope of competence.

6. Legal aspects

From a European perspective the publication on the professional competence of conservator-restorers has been helpful as a political tool. The competences serve to identify the discrete nature of the profession, the unique role and responsibilities of the professional conservator-restorer enabling it to be distinguished amongst the other professions in the cultural heritage sector.

Legal regulation to provide a statutory framework for professional practice has been sought at European level to ensure best practice in the care of our common European heritage. However, every

state has its own specific legal framework based on cultural traditions, values and national interests although it is interesting to note, that the core ideas and principles of *E.C.C.O. Guidelines* have come to be reflected in some of the national legislations on protection of the cultural heritage and on conservation-restoration.[9] As Corr (2017) pointed out: "At EU level cultural heritage and provisions for its protection are regarded as a matter of national sovereignty. In truth the political landscape of European Union has meant that professional regulation can be seen as a barrier to integration and the free movement of trade and services".

One the other hand the Council of Europe (CoE) in the promotion of European culture and heritage through its Conventions influences the political sphere. In 2009, with the support of ICCROM and ENCoRE, E.C.C.O. made a submission to the then Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape of the CoE, CDPATEP (CDPATEP, 2009, p. 7), in an effort to develop a European Recommendation on Conservation-Restoration (E.C.C.O., 2008). Such a Recommendation would encourage national governments to adopt principles and guidelines for the preservation of cultural assets. The submission coincided with a change in the structure of this CoE committee and did not progress, but the work has subsequently been documented and published (Castaldi, Cueco, Hutchings, & Organisations, 2014).

The Council of Europe recognises the important role of cultural heritage for European identity in a globalising world and does recognise the necessity of guarantying high standards of practice in conservation-restoration. This is voiced in the *Faro convention and Namur declaration* (Council of Europe, 2006, 2015) and references to conservation-restoration are cited in the *European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century* (Council of Europe, 2017). As a finite resource the management and conservation-restoration of cultural heritage is a complex interplay of roles and activities requiring an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach highlighted by the CoE. In their recently published Factsheets on Conservation-Restoration (Council of Europe, 2018a, 2018b), the role of the public as an agent of care is highlighted in the Factsheet on Preventive Conservation while the need to more clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of the different professionals in the field of cultural heritage protection has been indicated to the EU Commission who have already started this process in their 'Voices of Culture' dialogue initiated by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (2015).

The role of the organisations (E.C.C.O., ICOMOS and ICCROM in particular) in the development of common guidelines for practice in conservation-restoration, both at European and International level, is particularly important. The European dimension characterises the work of E.C.C.O. as it informs their approach to the EU Commission and their participation as expert observers to the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP). Currently, E.C.C.O. is deeply involved in Voices of Culture dialogue mentioned above.

A useful tool in enhancing cooperation and coordination of effort between professional organisations is the development Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). E.C.C.O. has a MoU with ICCROM and with ICOMOS.

[9] An example in this direction is the Law on the Chamber of Restorers in Slovakia, as well as the regulation of conservation-restoration practice in Italy.

7. Conclusion

"The transmission to present and future generations of an authentic material heritage, retaining its cultural integrity and historic relevance is the foundation-stone of contemporary heritage management and practice. It is what lies behind the emergence of Conservation-Restoration as a discrete field of study and a professional discipline." (Corr, 2018). This simple statement places into perspective the role of conservation-restoration and by extension the profession into the wider landscape of heritage, its practice and protection. That we are authorised to do this is a condition of being human, our heritage manifests who we are and how we take care of it is a statement of value. In response to this imperative the discipline of conservation-restoration has evolved as have the precepts and guidelines that now govern the profession.

In conclusion, in its complexity conservation-restoration is a **critical act.** As Paul Philippot pointed out in 1960: "The job of restorer[10] can in no way be regarded as the mere execution of instructions defined entirely outside of it by the critic or the laboratory... The thought must always be there on alert, a thought that controls, interprets and adapts, i.e., continually creating because, like an aesthetic and technical problem, it resides within the work that it directs... The best instructions will mean nothing, if the person that carries them out does not actually accept them in order to portray them" (as sited by Stoner and Verbeeck 2017).[11]

[10] The professional title "restorer" was commonly used in English at the time Paul Philippot wrote his article (1960). During the 1980s, in the UK and USA, the title "restorer" was gradually substituted with "conservator". In the last couple of decades, the hybrid title "conservator-restorer" is widely used internationally, as it reflects both the heritage of the title 'restorer' and the complexity of the professional activity.

[11] The text was published originally in French in Studies in Conservation, 1960 and later translated in German and Spanish. With thanks to Joyce Hill Stoner and Muriel Verbeeck-Boutin for their inspiring paper at ICOM-CC congress in Copenhagen 2017, where these quotes were published in English.

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