PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

THE CONSERVATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DETERIORATION OF MONUMENTS

SZMYGIN Bogusław [1]

[1] Prof Bogusław Szmygin, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Lublin University of Technology
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0629-4495

ABSTRACT: Over the last decades, built heritage and the conditions of its protection have changed a lot. There has been a significant increase in the number and diversity of monuments. The expectations of contemporary societies regarding the use of heritage have changed as well. As a consequence, the ownership, protection, financing and use of heritage has been privatized. These conditions should be reflected in conservation theory. Conservation theory should be realistic - it should indicate how to protect and use heritage in practice. Therefore, it is necessary to scientifically develop a modern conservation theory. The application of conservation theory which does not take into account contemporary conditions contributes to chaos in the protection of monuments and facilitates the destruction of their values. Therefore, the development of contemporary conservation theory can also be considered an ethical problem.

KEYWORDS: Paradigm shift, heritage protection, conservation theory

Modern heritage protection is a complex and difficult task. Many historical sites are being destroyed and this worrying issue draws particular attention. However, at the same time, the limits of conservation interventions into historical sites are being pushed further and further. In many cases it is even hard to tell if the undertaken actions still belong to heritage protection[1]. There are many examples of such activities all over the world.

The numerous examples show that objects recognized as heritage and protected accordingly may lose their historical value and context. Therefore, critical analysis of the quality of modern heritage

---

[1] An example of a very controversial activity in heritage protection is facadism. An analysis of this phenomenon on a European scale is presented in the publication – *Facadisme Et Identite Urbaine. Facadism And Urban Identity,* Centres Des Monuments Nationaux, Paris 2001

protection is necessary[2]. It is a very important ethical aspect of heritage protection in the twenty-first century. This should become a topic of a debate among the conservation community. It is the responsibility of the International Scientific Committee Theory of Conservation and Restoration to elaborate this matter.

The background to the debate on the quality of modern heritage protection should be the analysis of the conditions on which it is based[3]. Heritage protection is in principle not a discipline that defines the target, objective and methods of the action independently/autonomously. Heritage protection is a discipline determined and shaped by multiple external factors - technical, social, cultural, historical, political, financial, functional etc. However, for the purposes of this analysis three main aspects may be presented:

– characteristics of contemporary heritage /object of interest/

– competences of conservators /heritage protection system/

– theory of conservation/ tools for analysis/

Fig. 1 Washington - the facades of historic buildings „glued" on the side wall of the shopping center; Photo: B. Szmygin

[2]   A good example of activities shaping and popularizing the right forms of monument protection is the "*Well-preserved Monument*" campaign in Poland. This is a nationwide competition organized by the National Heritage Board, which supports and promotes appropriate forms of protection of various typological groups of monuments. - *Well-preserved Monument. What does it mean?*, Iwoana Liżewska (ed.), National Heritage Board, Warsaw 2015.

[3]   The key factor changing the heritage protection conditions is the broadening perception of cultural heritage and the recognition of the rights of stakeholders to decide on the contemporary use of heritage.– Francesco Bandarin, Ron van Oers, *The Historic Urban Landscape. Managing Heritage in an Urban Century*, Willey-Blakwell, 2012, pp.105-111.

Fig. 2 Istanbul - historical tenement „enclosed" with a contemporary office building; Photo: B. Szmygin

Fig. 3 Madrid - brick facades of historical warehouse buildings are part of the wall of the exhibition building; Photo: B. Szmygin

1. Characteristics of contemporary heritage

The first factor influencing contemporary heritage protection is the material characteristics of the set of elements that are recognized as heritage. Heritage is a vast and heterogeneous set of elements in bad condition that need significant intervention in order to perform contemporary functions. Each of these aspects have its own objective character. The problem can be illustrated by the example of listed heritage in Poland. This analysis concerns three aspects of the collection of historical objects in Poland.

The first aspect is the quantity of monuments[4]. According to the National Heritage Board of Poland the set of monuments' documentation is the following[5]. (see Fig. 4)

---

[4]   Increasing the collection of objects considered as heritage is a common process. In England, for example, the number of listed buildings increased from the 1960s to the 1990s from around 100,000 to around 500,000. This means that there is 1 listed building per 100 people.– *Understanding historic building conservation*, M.Forsyth, (ed.), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, s.26

[5]   Jacek Dąbrowski, Dariusz Jankowski, Czy Wawel można nadbudować? Refleksje na temat klasyfikacji zabytków, [w:] Klasyfikacja i kategoryzacja w systemie ochrony zabytków, PKN ICOMOS, Politechnika Lubelska, Warszawa 2016, p.22.

65 000	historical sites listed in the Heritage Register
150 000	historical sites listed in the Heritage Evidence
650 000	vernacular architectural objects /Address Cards/
967	historical urban areas listed in the Heritage Register
7 600	archaeological monuments listed in the Heritage Register (C Part)
469 000	archaeological sites listed in the Heritage Evidence
25 000	historical cemeteries
9 000	historical greenery layouts

Tab. 1 Listed heritage (in different forms) in Poland

Such a huge set of elements is considered to be a heritage. It ought to be examined, properly documented and protected.

The second aspect is the technical condition of the monuments. The National Heritage Board of Poland carried out detailed analysis of all 65, 000 objects listed in the Polish Heritage Register[6]. The authorities responsible for the heritage protection of these sites evaluated 3 elements:

– technical condition of the monuments

– condition of historical substance

– condition of historical form

In the evaluation, a 4-grade scale was applied: very good, good, average, bad[7]. The first graph shows the technical condition of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register. The second graph shows the condition of the preserved historical substance of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register. The third graph shows the condition of the preserved form of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register.

---

[6]   For information on the technical assessment and the time of creation of listed monuments in Poland, see: *Raport o stanie zachowania zabytków nieruchomych w Polsce. Zabytki wpisane do rejestru zabytków*, National Heritage Board of Poland, Warsaw 2017.

[7]   The Polish version of the report contains different nomenclature than that, used in the tables (Figs. 5-8). However, the scale of evaluations reflects the meaning of the evaluation.
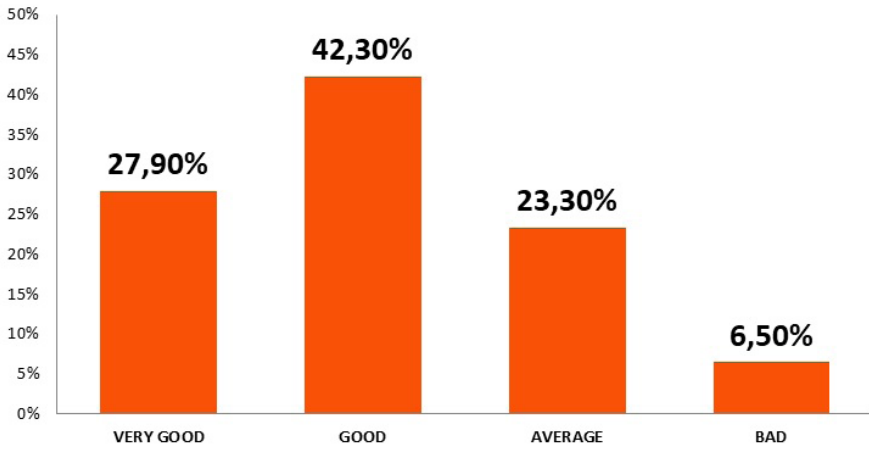
Fig. 4 The technical condition of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register
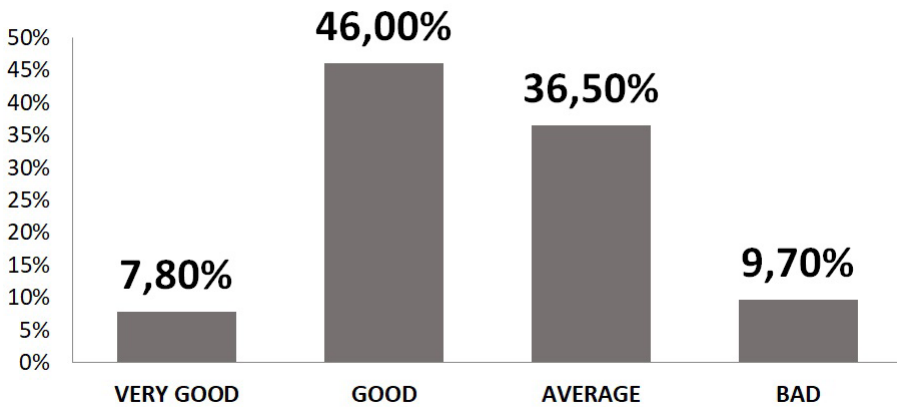

Fig. 5 The condition of preserved historical substance of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register
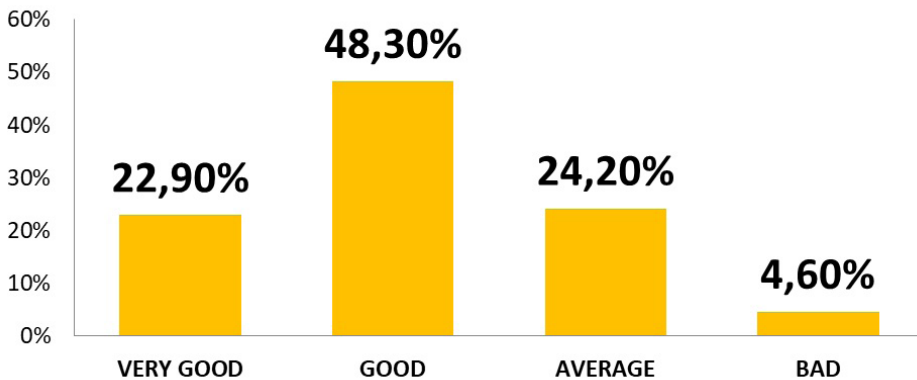

Fig. 6 The condition of preserved historical substance of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register

In general, the results can be summarized as follows - only circa 10 % of historical objects do not require maintenance and renovation work. This means that for 90% of registered monuments, maintenance and revitalization work are required due to the poor technical condition of the historical object/form/ substance.

The third aspect are the needs resulting from the adaptation of monuments to contemporary functions. Obviously, historical buildings need to be adapted to contemporary functions and it is a condition for their protection and funding. It is hard to find a simple indicator that would define all the needs resulting from the adaptation of historical buildings to contemporary functions and standards. However, the age of the building may be used as a simplified indicator.

The older the building, the more it differs from modern standards of usability, technology and functionality. Therefore, the older the building, the more maintenance and renovation work is needed in order to adapt it to contemporary functions.
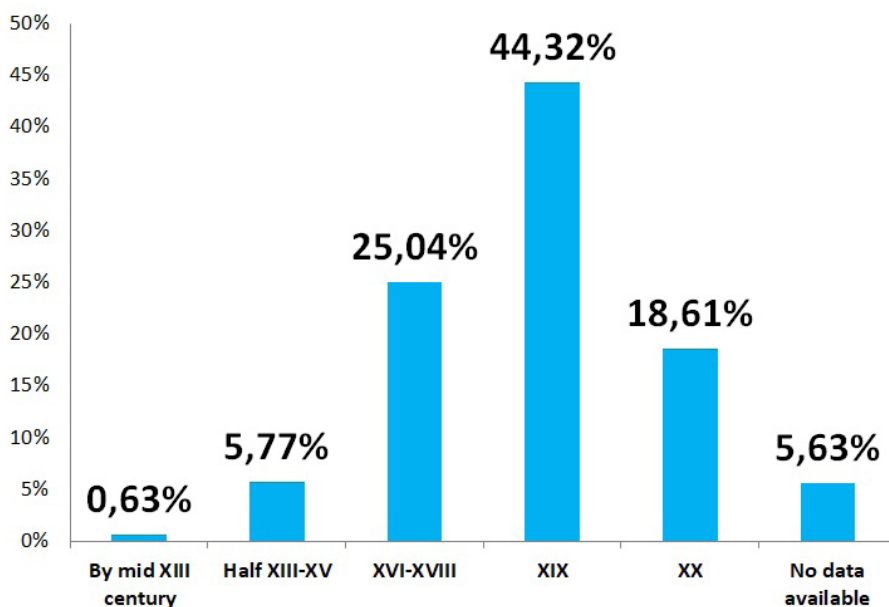

Fig. 7 Period of creation of all monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register

All the monuments listed in the Polish Heritage Register were divided according to the time period they were built in. Only 20% of the objects listed in the Heritage Register are from the twentieth century. In practice, however, they are a hundred years old. However, over 80% of objects are older. That is why, excluding the sacral architecture, the scope of intervention needed to adapt the great part of the historical sites to modern functions has to be huge.

The statistics presented above give an overview of Polish Heritage and allow the following conclusion to be drawn.

The objective conditions - amount of monuments, technical condition, functional requirements, etc. - mean that contemporary interventions (maintenance, revitalization and adaptation) need to be multidimensional and extensive.

The maintenance of the proper technical condition as well as the adaptation of historical sites to modern standards and functions requires significant interventions and transformations of historical form and substance of the monuments.

Furthermore, it causes a major decrease or even deterioration of the historical value. However, this process is necessary even if conducted in accordance with the guidelines and under the supervision of the conservator. Therefore, the work of the conservator will never be perfect and he/she will never be fully satisfied with its final result. He/she should always search for better solutions.

2. Competences of the conservator and stakeholders' participation

Characteristic of the contemporary protection system is the second main area/factor influencing the quality of heritage protection. The system of cultural heritage protection comprises many elements. One of the key factors defining these elements is the contemporary vision of the function of heritage and the responsibility for its protection. Obviously, these two elements are closely interlinked - they both derive from a certain philosophy of the perception of heritage.

Heritage protection has undergone a change in recent decades as far as its paradigm is concerned[8]. It consists of changing the status of the heritage. The previous (traditional) paradigm could be compared to the contemporary (modern) paradigm in a few important aspects[9].

The characterized transfer of heritage to the present has very significant consequences as far as the construction of its protection system is concerned. Heritage stops being *sacrum* and starts being *profanum*. In consequence, it also leads to the privatization of ownership, protection, founding and responsibility for monuments.

In this system the conservators cannot decide on the methods and forms of heritage protection as they do not have the appropriate instruments to force their concept of protection and usage of historical site. They are only one of the stakeholders and have to adapt to other, stronger ones - e.g. owners, investors, users.

As a consequence, the conservator-restorer is a specialist organizing the dialogue among the stakeholders on possible actions to be applied on the historical object, not the protection itself.

---

[8]   According to ICOMOS, the speech (without specifying the author) provided by G. Araoza during the annual meeting of the Advisory Committee in Valetta (Malta) in October 2009, entitled "*Protecting Heritage Places under the New Heritage Paradigm & Defining its Tolerance for Change - A Leadership Challenge for ICOMOS* "(not published) may be considered as the beginning of the discussion about the crisis of theoretical bases of heritage protection.

[9]   The change of the paradigm of monument protection has been presented in a collective publication – *Conservation Turn – Return to Consevation. Tolerance for Change, Limits of Change*, Edizioni Palistampa, Firenze, 2012.

Elements and goals characterizing the approach to historic monuments /heritage	The traditional approach Paradigm of 20th Century	The modern approach Paradigm of 21st Century
Status of historic monument/ heritage	Historic monument is an element of the past	Heritage is an element of the present
The subject of interests /elements covered by the approach/	Historic monument; isolated (architectural) object; piece of art and a historical document; artistic, historical and documental value	Heritage;objects, sites and areas /historical towns, cultural landscapes, vernacular architecture, etc./
The attitude towards to the changes and transformations	The changes are negative; changes lead to a devastation and reduction of heritage values /historic monument is static/	The changes are a natural process in historic environment; /heritage must be dynamic/
The supreme aim of activities undertaken in the historical city	Protection of the heritage values	No supreme aim /the aims are equivalent - the heritage protection, sustainable development, social identity and cohesion, etc./
The way to determine the aims and values	Specialists	Specialists + public consultations /public acceptance is required/
The aim of the restorers actions	Heritage protection /only/ /restorers are responsible only for the heritage /	Heritage protection + other aims /e.g. development/ /restorers are also responsible for other aims/

Tab. 2 The heritage protection paradigm of 20th Century versus heritage protection paradigm of 21st Century

3. Modern conservation theory / analysis tools/

In the past, when the set of monuments was relatively small and homogenous, the conservation theory was of a universal nature, such as the one formulated in the *Venice Charter*.

Nowadays, the multitude and diversity of heritage objects and the conditions of their protection mean that the conservation theory does not have a universal nature.

There is no one theory that would be applicable to all typological groups of monuments. Therefore, modern conservation theory had to be divided. Certain typological groups of heritage as well as certain regions (conditions of protection) determine their own limits and forms of heritage protection.

Therefore, conservation theory is being laid out in dozens of doctrinal documents. Unfortunately, it cannot be treated as normative guidelines.

A common characteristic for modern conservation theory is the admission of interference and transformation of the historical substance and form of the object. Regrettably, no analysis tools have been developed that would define the limits and possible consequences of these actions. Therefore, the interventions are also allowed in the case of World Heritage sites[10].

This main weakness of conservation theory combined with the weak conservator's position as far as specifying the forms of heritage protection result in the significant damage of historical objects and the deterioration of their historical values.

What are the conclusions resulting from the presented situation and who they are addressed to? What can be done in particular areas?

The first task – it is necessary to formally distinguish/differentiate the status and the value of historic objects/monuments which belong to the very broad set of heritage. It will allow the rules and form of protection for different heritage groups to be defined.

The second task – it is necessary to strengthen the position of conservator as far as the decisions regarding forms of heritage protection are concerned. The conservator has to have a privileged position among the other stakeholders - today the situation is the opposite.

The third task – it is necessary to develop a methodology of analysis of historical objects that would define the attributes of historic values. It is necessary to elaborate the analytic tools in order to relate the heritage values to their tangible representation.

The task formulated above belong to the area of conservation theory. It means that these are tasks for the International Scientific Committee on Theory of Conservation. Modern conservation theory should create the basis for heritage protection in the twenty-first century. It is also the precondition to emerge from the current crisis our discipline is in.

---

[10]   The necessity of combining the protection of World Heritage properties with their use (and necessary interventions) requires appropriate management - *Managing Cultural World Heritage*, World Heritage Center, 2013.