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ΣΥΛΛΟΓΟΣ ΣΥΝΤΗΡΗΤΩΝ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ  
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ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΩΝ/ΗΜΕΡΙΔΩΝ

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### Conservation-restoration in the Czech Republic

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# Ensuring high quality in safeguarding Cultural Heritage

The vital importance of protecting the title  
and regulating the profession of  
Conservation-Restoration in Europe

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# Conservation-restoration in the Czech Republic

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## ABSTRACT

This paper briefly summarises approaches to restoring cultural sites and artefacts in the Czech Republic from the establishment of the so-called Czech Restoration School at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague to the current scientific concept of conservation-restoration based on broader interdisciplinary co-operation. Major universities and schools which teach young conservators-restorers are listed, and the activities of professional associations and methodological workplaces are also described. The paper is centred on an overview of regulatory legislative measures in regard to carrying out restoration work. These measures include the so-called restorer's licence granted by the Ministry of Culture for the restoration of cultural monuments which are works of art or craftsmanship.

## 1. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESTORATION

In the Czech lands, the history of the profession of restoring sites and artefacts is linked to the figure of restorer and academic painter Bohuslav Slánský, who laid the foundations for the so-called Czech Restoration School. In 1946, he established the restoration of artworks as a discipline at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, enabling university education in the subject. Slánský was the first to define the skills which a graduate should acquire during their studies. His two-volume publication, *Technika malby* (Painting Technique) [1] shaped the education of generations of restorers, and, to this day, is a coveted source of knowledge about historical techniques and restoration procedures for artworks. The author stresses the importance of understanding the artwork as an integral whole – its physical essence and authenticity, calling for this authenticity to be preserved during restoration [2]. This concept represented an ethical shift away from the interventions of restorers who in the 19th century especially prioritised a work's aesthetic and artistic aspects as the main value which had to be respected and preserved. This perception had led to many bad renovations and repairs to assets which involved considerable interventions in the original appearance of the works and often also resulted in damage.

The development of science and modern technologies led to the next stage in the development of the discipline of restoration, one based on interdisciplinary approaches making use of various sophisticated methods of research and treatment of artefacts. Conservation interventions and a scientific concept of restoration were increasingly prioritised. These aspects lie at the core of conservation-restoration work today, although the objective here is to find compromises and balanced approaches through discussions across humanities and science disciplines, including artisan practice.

Relevant education and professional experience are imperative requirements in order to carry out restoration work. There are currently a number of higher education facilities in the Czech Republic providing diplomas in restoration education. These include the traditional Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, and also the University of Pardubice Faculty

of Restoration, which provides education in different fields, such as restoring paper and parchment, murals, sgraffito and mosaics. Conservation-restoration technologies are a subject of study at the University of Chemistry and Technology Prague and at Masaryk University in Brno. Vyšší odborné školy, or colleges, also provide an important basic education in the field of restoration, providing necessary practical training<sup>1</sup>.

Conservation-restoration approaches are also shaped through the activities of professional associations and a number of cultural organisations. Asociace restaurátorů (the Association of Restorers) was set up in 1990, advocating for establishment of a professional Chamber of Restorers. To the present day, however, these efforts have not achieved success. For many years, the most active association has been Komise konzervátorů-restaurátorů působící v rámci České asociace muzeí a galerií (The Commission of Conservators-Restorers at the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries)<sup>2</sup>, which is also an associate member of E.C.C.O. It includes over 250 members – mostly museum conservators-restorers, but also teachers and scientists. Conservation interventions, ethical matters<sup>3</sup> and legislation are discussed within various working groups. The desire is the overall promotion of the conservation-restoration discipline amongst experts and the general public. The network of museums and galleries also includes methodology centres supported by the Ministry of Culture, which provide help and development in various areas of museum activities. One of these is the Methodological Centre for Conservation<sup>4</sup> at the Technical Museum in Brno, which provides services in the conservation of museum collections, research into materials, testing means and technologies, training conservators and other museum workers, and holding conferences. It also publishes the academic journal, Fórum pro konzervátory-restaurátory (Forum for Conservators-Restorers)<sup>5</sup> and methodology guides. It is also a site of collection rescue in the event of emergency incidents – providing fast aid by treating and storing artefacts which are under threat. The Methodological Centre for Conservation collaborates closely with the Commission of Conservators-Restorers, thus creating an important communication platform for building up and sustaining the restoration community.



Image 1: Members of the committee and council of the Commission of Conservators-Restorers at the Czech Association of Museums and Galleries, 2018.

<sup>1</sup> College in Turnov which focuses on restoring metals and minerals, <https://www.sups.info/index.php/vos>  
Restoration college in Brno, which focuses on restoring furniture and painting, <https://www.ssudbrno.cz/en/hp-school/departments/>

<sup>2</sup> Czech Association of Museums and Galleries, <https://www.cz-museums.cz/web/amg/czech-association-of-museums-and-galleries>

<sup>3</sup> Document about the profession of conservator-restorer, <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/Komise%20konzerv%C3%A1tor%C5%AF-restaur%C3%A1tor%C5%AF/about-the-profession-of-conservator-restorer.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The Methodological Centre of Conservation, <https://mck.technicalmuseum.cz/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Journal FCR, <https://mck.technicalmuseum.cz/en/casopis-fkr/>

## 2. REGULATION OF RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

The previous chapters briefly summarised the historical development and current approach to conservation and restoration within the Czech context. These aspects are also reflected within legislative regulations in force. In the Czech Republic, restoration is a regulated activity, specifically in the following areas:

a) The restoration of artworks which are not cultural monuments or parts of cultural monuments, but which are stored in the collections of museums and galleries, or which are objects of cultural value – qualification requirements are given by the level of relevant education and relevant experience. The responsible authority is the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and the regulatory law is the Trade Licensing Act [3]:

A trade is registered by submitting documents demonstrating the achieved competence level. In this case, this means:

- higher education in a course and discipline focused on restoration or fine arts, or
- college-level education in an education discipline focused on restoration or fine arts, or
- secondary education with a completed final exam (maturita) in a relevant restoration, fine art or craft discipline plus three years of work experience in restoration, or
- secondary education with a vocational certificate (výuční list) in a relevant craft or art discipline plus five years of work experience in restoration, or
- a retraining certificate or other document demonstrating professional qualification for the relevant work activity issued by an establishment accredited according to special arrangements, or an establishment accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, or a ministry whose scope includes the branch in which the trade is being carried out, plus six years of work experience in the field.

b) The restoration of cultural monuments which are works of the creative arts or of artistic crafts (craftsmanship) - qualification requirements are given by the level of relevant education and relevant experience. The responsible authority is the Ministry of Culture, and the regulatory law is the Act on State Monument Care [4]<sup>6</sup>:

Competence is demonstrated by meeting:

- Qualifications for restoring cultural monuments or parts of them which are works of the creative arts are a higher education course in the discipline of restoration, and for restoring cultural monuments or parts of them which are works of artistic crafts are complete secondary vocational education in a relevant field plus 5 years of experience; for specialisations where there is no established secondary school course, apprenticeship in the relevant field plus 8 years of experience in restoring artefacts which are not cultural monuments, and
- Professional skills, which are a collection of knowledge and skills guaranteeing the preservation of the material essence of cultural monuments or parts of them, which are works of the creative arts or artistic crafts while respecting their authenticity; this is demonstrated by submitting documents which show that the individual applying for the granting of permission to undertake restoration has already successfully and independently restored artefacts which are not cultural monuments.

The criteria stipulated for restoring cultural monuments (i.e. objects of cultural value which

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<sup>6</sup> The related law is also the Act on the Recognition of Professional Qualification and other Eligibility and Citizens of Member States of the European Union and Some Citizens of Other States and on the Amendment of Certain Acts (the Act on Recognition of Professional Qualifications).

are on the list of cultural monuments kept by the National Heritage Institute<sup>7</sup>), which are works of the creative arts or artistic crafts (see point 2 b) require the acquisition of a so-called restorer's licence, which is approved by the Ministry of Culture, Monument Care Department. Restorer's licences have become a general standard for demonstrating professional quality, especially in tendering processes, awarding grants for restoration, etc. Nevertheless, restorer's licences are not absolutely essential in regard to the conservation-restoration of artefacts in museum and gallery collections or books and archival documents (as long as they are not on the list of cultural monuments). Conservators-restorers are employed in line with their educational attainment, experience and especially relevant knowledge and skills. This is mainly due to current practical circumstances – restorer's licences are only awarded for a select range of specialisations, and the diversity of museum collections requires much broader material and sector specialisation (e.g. conserving classic vehicles, farming equipment, photographs, archaeological finds, etc.). The ideal case is where conservation-restoration workplaces comprise a team of workers with different specialisations, including conservation scientists, and a restorer with a licence also a member. Such a professional mix allows for professional and diverse conservation interventions and the overall development of the profession. Only a few larger institutions are able to afford this, however, with smaller museums limited by staff available. In such cases, however, the services of external restorers can be arranged, resulting in the necessary development of the private sector and a competitive landscape.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Conservation-restoration is a unique activity which makes high demands in terms of education and experience. Constantly improving methods of researching historical materials, modern technologies and materials of treatment increase study requirements for conservators-restorers. Similarly, however, the preservation of a certain continuity in transferring traditional knowledge and skills of a historic craft, reflected in different specialisations, also plays a major role. Regulatory legislative measures stipulated for undertaking restoration work allow for inspection of restorers' professional competence. This means that restoration in the Czech Republic is one of the "protected professions" which can't be done by just anyone. Equally as important, however, are the moral requirements on conservators-restorers, as formulated in codes of ethics. Humility and a balanced approach in finding the optimal ways of treating cultural heritage based on interdisciplinary discussion represent the foundations for a professional approach. The activities of professional associations are also important in reflecting these aspects, and they also act as a regulatory power overseeing the quality and development of the conservation-restoration profession.

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- [3] Zákon č. 455/1991 Sb., zákon o živnostenském podnikání
- [4] Zákon č. 20/1987 Sb., zákon o státní památkové péči

<sup>7</sup> The Monument Database contains around 50 thousand registration numbers for movable cultural monuments and groups. The other items are protected heritage areas and immovable cultural monuments (there are a total of over 2 million protected objects).