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Papers of the National Associations of E.C.C.O. - Ensuring high quality in safeguarding Cultural Heritage. The vital importance of protecting the title and regulating the profession of Conservation-Restoration in Europe



ΣΥΛΛΟΓΟΣ ΣΥΝΤΗΡΗΤΩΝ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ
& ΕΡΓΩΝ ΤΕΧΝΗΣ ΤΡΙΤΟΒΑΘΜΙΑΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΩΝ/ΗΜΕΡΙΔΩΝ

ACAWA-GR CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Papers of the National Associations of E.C.C.O.

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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Overview of the issues and challenges for the conservation-restoration profession in Greece

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Overview of the issues and challenges for the conservation-restoration profession in Greece

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ABSTRACT

Considering that conservation-restoration (CR) has been recognised as a profession for the past 25 years, it is still viewed as a new discipline and there is a constant need to communicate the importance of the work we do for the protection of the national Cultural Heritage (CH). There is still little public awareness for the profession and this has, as an indirect result, its disconsideration.

Conservators-Restorers (CRs) are responsible for safeguarding CH, for past and future generations, and the need for acquired competencies has been well documented over the years. In Greece, the professional CRs are the holders of an EQF-6 degree or higher (Masters, Ph.D), however, the national educational system has created discriminations within this level that hinder their accessibility to the work market and professional development. Additionally, the existence of different educational levels is creating inconsistencies in the working environment.

The legislation for the regulation of the CR profession is well established in connection with the law for the protection of CH. Nevertheless, there are issues and challenges that need to be adjusted, revised and reformed. One of the most important limitations of the CH law is that it only protects objects/monuments prior to 1830, therefore not covering contemporary and modern monuments, allowing for interventions on the latter to be applied by non-CRs. Furthermore, parts of our CH that are not under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and belong to other state or private organisations, remain unprotected and unregulated considering their care and maintenance.

Part of the regulation of the profession is setting the rules and competences for the private sector by appointing a licence to practice CR as a freelancer or contractor. The current version of the law is hindering the accessibility of younger professionals to enter the private sector thus limiting their professional development and requires reformation. Although the legal framework that regulates the CR profession in Greece appears to be strict, it also includes ambiguities and generalities which result in creating significant inconsistencies. These legal, practical, ethical issues, ACAWA-Gr is trying to resolve. Its mission remains the safeguarding of the profession and the promotion of public awareness on the protection of CH.

1. A.C.A.W.A-GR PRESENTATION

The Association of Conservators of Antiquities and Works of Art (ACAWA-GR) was established in 1995 by the first tertiary education graduates in Greece. There are also 2 other

unions/associations in Greece, the “Hellenic Association of Conservators of Antiquities”, a Trade Union that consists of the permanent employees/civil servants of the Ministry of Culture and employees with indefinite contracts, and the “Association of Freelance CR/Private Contractors”.

Members of ACAWA-Gr are the graduates of Greek Conservation-Restoration (CR) tertiary education institutions or of equivalent foreign institutions - recognized in Greece by the respective government agency. Professional Conservators - Restorers in Greece hold a higher educational degree, specialised in the field of CR of antiquities, works of art, ethnological and archival material, equivalent to EQF 6. Tertiary education professionals are represented by the Association regardless of their legal form of employment, i.e., unemployed, working with hourly contracts, fixed time or indefinite contracts, or having permanent positions. Today the Association has over 650 members.

ACAWA-GR's main scope stands in safeguarding the professional, educational and scientific status of CR at a national level, as well as to ensure the legal and ethical rights of its members. Moreover, the Association works in cooperation with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, mainly with the Directorate of Conservation of Ancient and Modern Monuments which is the body entitled to oversee the CR activities and set high standards for the professional development. The common goal of the Association and the Directorate is to keep up to date the evolution of the profession in an ethical and scientific manner, as well as to adapt to current CR practices in an effort to set an example at the European level.

2. EDUCATIONAL LEVELS IN THE FIELD OF CONSERVATION RESTORATION

In Greece, there are two levels of professionals working in the field of CR: Conservators-Restorers (CRs) and Conservation technicians (CR technicians).

As mentioned before, CRs hold a higher educational degree equivalent to EQF 6 and are specialised in the field of Conservation and Restoration of antiquities, works of art, ethnological and archival material.

Conservation technicians are the graduates of secondary public education courses or public and private 2-year post-secondary education courses equivalent to EQF 5. According to the Greek legislation, Conservation technicians work only under the supervision of tertiary education CR and have different professional competences.

Issues resulting from the Different Tertiary Educational Backgrounds

An issue that tertiary level CR graduates are dealing for decades in Greece is the discrimination between tertiary education levels. The first professional CRs with a tertiary education conservation degree from a Greek institution, namely the Technological Educational Institute of Athens (TEI-Ath.) graduated in Greece in the early 1990s. Along with them there were certified CRs who had studied at Universities abroad and had the licence to practice the profession legally. The Greek State considers these two kinds of graduates as having different academic levels thus limiting the access of the latter to work in the public sector, as the educational level is a prerequisite in the job postings published by the Ministry of Culture, and less jobs were advertised for graduates of Universities abroad.

Since 2001, both Technological Educational Institute (TEI) graduates and University graduates are considered to have the same European Educational Level - EQF 6 and 240 ECTS. Despite that, the situation did not change for the Greek legislation and the discrimination between the CR professionals in Greece remained. The situation even worsened

with the abolition of Technological Educational Institutes by law, in 2018, and the establishment of the Department of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art of the University of West Attica (UNIWA), which is actually a transformation of the Department of Antiquities and Works of Art of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI-Ath). Since then, the government seems unwilling to resolve this problem by equalizing the different levels and the discrimination remains, along with the problems of CR professionals of tertiary education institutions to access the public sector. Today, professionals licensed to undertake conservation work are CRs with a tertiary education degree in CR equivalent to EQF 6: graduates of TEI-Ath, TEI of the Ionian Islands (TEI-Ion) -a Technological Educational Institute that was active only for a few years-, UNIWA and of Universities abroad. ACAWA-Gr still strives for the right of all graduates to have equal access to work in the public sector.

CR professionals

The main employer of Conservators-Restorers is the Ministry of Culture. We work mainly as employees of the state in permanent or more frequently fixed-term contracts. The private sector occupies a very small percentage in the field, while freelance CR or CR companies are even fewer. There is also another small percentage of CRs who work in public organisations/institutions -other than the Ministry of Culture- such as University Collections and Libraries.

Despite the long-standing presence of the CR profession in the cultural sector and the longtime existence of the legal framework regulating the profession, it is still considered quite a new discipline and there are still many challenges which we have to face as CR professionals over and again.

Licence to practice in need of revision

The tertiary education CR can be freelancers/private contractors only by holding the Licence to practice, and this means that they have legally the ability to undertake and supervise CR practice, conduct surveys, as well as to establish a conservation studio/laboratory, although the law regarding the regulation referring to conservation laboratories is still pending.

Regarding the current law, the prerequisites to have a licence to practice is to:

- i) hold a CR tertiary education degree, with a certain specialisation in CR (e.g., CR of paper, CR of paintings, CR of stone) and
- ii) have a certain amount of proven work experience (volunteer work experience is excluded) in the CR of categories of materials (e.g., paper, paintings, stone) which have been studied according to the curriculum of the holding CR tertiary education degree. The problem in this case is that, if professionals specialise during their studies in CR in more than one material -which is the case in the Greek CR educational institutions-, they cannot acquire one licence for practice for all of them at once. On the contrary, if they want to have a licence for practice for their different specialisations, they must collect proven work experience and respective licences for each material. Particularly,

it is obligatory to have 2-year proven work experience in order to acquire the licence to practice CR work concerning 1 material, and after the acquisition of the first licence one can apply to get licence extension for other materials, having 1-year experience for every new material.

Additionally, due to the change of law over the years - since the current law (law 4152/2013) that regulates the Licence is a revision of an older law (law 2557/1997) - , CRs of tertiary education degree who have acquired their licences in different eras and therefore under the different laws, are dealing with unequal acquisition processes which usually affect their position in the market and the public sector. The previous law considered as prerequisites the tertiary education degree and only a 3-year proven work experience in any material (of those that each one had studied), in order to provide one, unified, licence to practice the total of the materials that one had studied or specialised in. This means that holders of the previous licence (law 2557/1997) have a major advantage against the younger professionals, who are also having difficulties of finding work experience in every material, as the Ministry of Culture advertises jobs that mostly concern certain materials (i.e. conservation of stone, mural paintings). Job postings in CR of other materials like metal or archival material for example are rare and hard to find.

As we can see from all that is mentioned above, the law concerning the License to practise CR in the private sector is in need of revision, as it has created discriminations between professionals and hinders the access of new professionals to the private sector, as long as their professional development. ACAWA-Gr is currently striving to compose a proposal in order to revise the law and address all the problems that are mentioned above, in respect with the Code of Ethics and the Law 4858/2021 for the Safeguarding of Antiquities and the CH in general.

Conservation in private practice

There is not much public awareness for the work we do, and this has as an indirect result the disconsideration of the profession. Parts of our CH that are not under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and belong to other State or private organisations, remain unprotected and unregulated considering their care and maintenance. For example, it is a common practice for municipal authorities to call upon a sculptor or a craftsman to "mend" public sculptures that have suffered from the passing of time. This malpractice is directly connected with the protection of the title and has led ACAWA-Gr to publish recently a press release, as we understood that conservators-restorers need to introduce the profession to the wider public audience, in order to understand the importance of our work for the best preservation of the public CH. E.C.C.O. with European days of CR is trying to convey the same message to the European public.

An immediate result of what is mentioned above is the fact that people who are from culture-related professions (artists, craftsmen, ecclesiastical academy graduates et.al.) work privately as CRs and establish what they claim to be "conservation labs". Due to the fact that there is no law to obligate the Revenue Office to request for the Conservator's Licence to practice in order to approve the establishment of a conservation studio/laboratory, this practice continues to happen in the shadows regarding the CR field, and cannot be controlled since there is a lack of connection between the State Officials and the different Ministries.

In all these cases, A.C.A.&W.A-GR and other associations try to intervene in order to protect the heritage and for the legitimacy to be followed.

3. GAPS IN THE EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Law for the protection of CH focuses on the archaeological and ethnographic objects/monuments

The law for the protection of CH is limited to archaeological and ethnographic objects/monuments, not covering contemporary and modern objects/monuments. This means that the law, as it is now, cannot regulate the interventions on the latter, that can be applied by professionals of other specialties besides CRs.

In specific, the movable and immovable monuments till 1830 are considered fully protected. The CH created after 1830 is considered protected only in case specific conditions are satisfied, while artefacts and monuments dated back 100-years from today have to be "characterised" as protected heritage by the State in order to be included in the legislation. Consequently, Greek law for the protection of CH does not cover contemporary and modern monuments.

This fact strongly affects who is responsible to apply interventions in newer, contemporary and modern objects/monuments. Professionals of specialties other than tertiary education CR -i.e. artists, craftsmen, chemists, chemical engineers, graduates from religious schools, or secondary CR education graduates- are not hindered by law to intervene upon objects and monuments which are not considered protected by law.

The stiff nature of the Archaeological law

Although the boundaries of the law are established thoroughly, the efficiency is problematic in certain cases. Specifically:

- Conservation of state owned artefacts rarely takes place in private studios/laboratories due to the time consuming procedural bureaucracy for the move of the object. As a result, common practice for CR freelancers/private contractors is the application of conservation treatments in state owned spaces that are usually unsuitable and under-equipped.
- Scientific research (including academic projects) is often hindered by the time-consuming bureaucratic processes that are needed to take place in order to obtain permissions.

All that are mentioned above are essential processes that the law ought to find a way to simplify or expedite, as in many cases the fragile objects need immediate treatment. Concluding, even though the legal framework that regulates the CR profession in Greece appears solid, it includes ambiguities and generalities which result in creating significant inconsistencies. The aforementioned legal, practical and ethical issues, ACAWA-Gr is trying to address and resolve.

Recent Update:

As of April 2023, the Law concerning the Licence to practice has eventually changed. The Licence is now given for all specializations based on verified educational proficiency per material (as established in the BA degree) and after 2 years of verified work experience. The Licence can be extended to more materials after acquiring further related tertiary education degree (i.e., a master's degree).

Additionally, the Register of Professional Activity of Conservator-Restorers was founded in order to regulate freelance and contracting work of CRs in Greece.