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**History, Challenges and Opportunities of Italy's
Transition to a Regulated Profession**

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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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History, Challenges and Opportunities of Italy's Transition to a Regulated Profession

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ABSTRACT

Since 2018 conservator-restorer is a regulated profession in Italy. The article gives a brief recount of the steps that led from a completely unregulated sector through a series of legal provisions to the protection of the title and an obligatory study course at EQF 7 to access the profession. The qualification procedure which signed the passage to a regulated profession is discussed in detail. At the end a short review of the problems of the procedure, as well as the challenges and opportunities of the outcomes is given.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Italy the first law on the protection of cultural heritage dates back to 1939 (legge Bottai) and after the 2nd World War in 1948 the protection of cultural heritage is inscribed in the constitution (art.9) of the newly found Italian Republic. In 1985 ARI Associazione Restauratori d'Italia - Association of Conservators-restorers of Italy – is founded with the goal of obtaining a legal regulation of the profession. But is not until the year 2000 that the first law on the professional figure of the conservator-restorer is issued. What follows is an 18-year period, where several laws on the professional figure, its competences and legal standing are issued. While representing huge steps forward, these laws remain only partially applied. Only at the end of 2018, after a lengthy and somewhat contradictory process of qualification this process is concluded with the publication of a list of officially recognised conservators-restorers by the ministry of culture thereby establishing a regulated profession.

2. TRAINING OF CONSERVATOR-RESTORERS FROM 1944-2009

To understand the complexities and difficulties in reaching a political consensus for the regulation of the profession it is necessary to do a quick excursion on the professional and vocational training of the personnel working in the field of conservation-restoration in Italy. Since after the 2nd World War up to nowadays professional training in the field of conservation-restoration has been carried out in a variety of ways, by a multitude of institutions on different levels of expertise leading to a wide mix of curricula and experiences.

The oldest and most accredited training courses were those run by the institutions under the direct control of the ministry of culture: *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* (ICR Rome, 1939), *Opificio delle Pietre Dure* (OPD Florence, 1962) and *Istituto della Patologia del Libro* (ICPAL Rome, 1938), which in their structure and organization are comparable to universities of applied sciences. Alongside these there were specializations and in more

recent years dedicated courses on conservation-restoration at public and private Academies of Fine Arts. Starting from '90s university courses on cultural heritage started to appear, but none of which were specific to conservation-restoration or had practical laboratories. Since 2000 grants obtained from the European Structural and Investment Funds were used to set up regional training courses for restorer technicians with a duration between 1 to 3 years.

3. LEGAL REGULATIONS

After years of lobbying by the national professional association of conservator-restorers (ARI) in 2000 the ministry of Culture issued the first law (DM 294/2000) on the regulation of the profession defining the formal characteristics of the conservator-restorer, of the restorer technician and setting a transition period after which the regulation of the profession should become obligatory. Unfortunately, the deadline of the 31st of December of 2001 was then completely disregarded.

In 2004 the Cultural Heritage Codex (D.Lgs 42/2004 *Codice dei Beni Culturali*) is issued. This fundamental law covers all aspects of Cultural Heritage, its recognition, protection and use. In a specific article the qualification of conservator-restorers prior to the current regulation is specified copying the formal characteristics of law DM 294/2000. Furthermore, it is specified that direct interventions on listed cultural goods had to be carried out exclusively by conservator-restorers with the only exception of the sector of historic buildings. The sector was divided in 12 sectors of specialization (table 1). The codex was integrated in 2009 by two degrees of the ministry of culture defining the competences of the conservator-restorer and of the restoration technician – DM 86/2009 – and the quality criteria a dedicated university course in conservation-restoration of cultural heritage – DM 87/2009 – comprising the syllabus, the required qualification and experience for teaching, the accreditation process and the definition of the academic title. The 5 years, single cycle master level course is organised around 6 different, material specific curricula (see table 1), thereby effectively setting the accesses to the profession at EQF 7 (5 years single cycle Master level).

In 2013 law 7/2013 set the path for the regulation the profession by defining which of the persons already working in the field prior to the introduction of the study course in conservation-restoration of cultural heritage (DM 87/2009) actually were conservators-restorers and which were restorer technicians. This was done outlining a series of steps and formal criteria for the qualification procedures for restorer technicians and conservator-restorers to reach a regulated profession and protected market. The announcement of the qualification procedure (1/2014) defined the formal criteria for the participation and the general rules applied (eligible study courses, vocational training, point system to obtaining the qualification – see below), followed by the guidelines (8/2014) for the evaluation of documents to testify vocational training (work experience). On the basis of these documents the qualification procedures for restorer technicians (11/2014) and conservator-restorers (6/2015) were issued. While the first was concluded rather rapidly the procedure for conservator-restorers took 3 years (12/2018) to conclude due to the large number of participants and documents presented that had to be vetted.

Table 1. Correlation of Study courses and specialisations

PFP	6 study courses – DM 87/2009	sector	12 specialisations
1	- stone and derivatives	1	stone, mosaic, derivatives
	- decorated architectural surfaces	2	decorated architectural surfaces
2	- easel paintings (wood and canvas)	3	easel paintings (wood and canvas)
	- wooden objects: sculptures, furniture and structures	4	Wooden objects: sculpture, furniture and structures
	- Composed, worked and/or coloured objects in synthetic materials	5	composed, worked and/or coloured objects in synthetic materials
3	- materials and objects in textile and leather	6	materials and objects in textile and leather
4	- materials and objects in ceramic, glass and organic excavation finds	7	materials and objects in ceramic, glass and organic materials from excavations
	- materials and objects in metals and metal compounds	8	materials and objects in metal and metal compounds
5	- books and archive material	9	books and archive materials
	- materials in paper and parchment	10	photographic and cinematographic materials and digital media
6	- photographic and cinematographic materials and digital media		
	- music instruments;	11	music instruments
	- scientific and technical equipment and instrumentation	12	scientific and technical equipment and instrumentations

4. QUALIFICATION PROCEDURE

The qualification procedure of the conservator-restorer was based on an evaluation of formal and vocational training. For both a number of points were assigned. The number of points for formal training were based on the type of institution in relation to the duration and qualification of the study course. For vocational training, if considered applicable, it was based on the duration of the documented work experience. To be recognized as conservator-restorer one had to reach a minimum of 300 points.

A completed study at one of the universities of applied sciences run by the ministry of culture (ICR, OPD, ICPAL) was sufficient to qualify, while all other study courses (university courses, academy of fine arts and regional training courses) had to be integrated with qualified work experience to reach the recognition as conservator-restorer. For vocational training to be recognized it had to be carried out on listed heritage under the supervision of the superintendency – the soprintendenza is the territorially organised state office responsible for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage in Italy. An exception to the obligatory of supervision by the superintendency was made for work on contemporary art as it is not listed according to Italian heritage law. If the participant had only vocational training at least 8 years of experience were necessary to obtain the qualification. No distinction was made between self-employed and employed positions. The way the general rules for the application were set especially the requirements to document vocational training were rather vague. This represented the influence of lobby groups, especially the trade unions of the building industry and associations from the arts and crafts sector. This meant that no special requirements were made to document the level of qualification of vocational training as long as it met the formal criteria outlined above. A full summary of the point system is given in table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of formal and vocational training

Formal / Vocational Training	Evaluation (points)
Diploma ICR/OPD/ICPAL (University of Applied Sciences)	300
Regional training course*	75 / year (max 200)
Diploma of the academy of fine arts**	50 / year (max 200)
University (Bachelor or Master) **	37,5 / year (max 200)
Qualified practical experience***	37,5 / year
Minimum for qualification	300

* minimum 2 consecutive years;

** courses related to, but not specific for conservation-restoration;

*** for works on listed CH under supervision of the superintendence;

As the sector had been divided in 12 specializations (D.Lgs 42/2004) the qualification was obtained in specializations: the general qualification comprising one or more specializations was assigned based on the syllabus of the formal training of the participant or, in the case of only vocational training, based on the specialization were the majority of the experience derived from. Beyond this primary qualification it was possible for the applicant to be granted additional specializations on the basis of at least two additional two years of documented work experience.

5. OUTCOMES

The not well-defined criteria for eligibility of vocational training led to a flood of documents presented by the participants. In order to analyze the applications in a reasonable amount of time the commission checking the applications ended up applying only formal criteria of validation, without a real analysis of the single documents. This resulted in the approval of 6.162 (97%) of a total of 6.531 applications, which clearly seems a unreasonably vast percentage. Still thanks to the conclusion of the qualification procedure the conservator-restorer is now a regulated profession. A list of all recognized conservators-restorers is held and updated by the ministry of culture. It comprises both the conservators-restorers of the qualification procedure and the graduates of the new study courses with their respective specializations. It is published on the website of the ministry as a (partially) searchable database - <https://professionisti.cultura.gov.it/restauratori>. At the moment of writing it contains about 8.000 names.

6. EMERGING PROBLEMS AND OUTLOOK

Now that the system is in place new problems arise on various levels. First of all, having correctly set the entry level to the profession at EQF 7 all continuous professional development is set at university level. But as the vast majority of conservators-restorers resulting from the qualification procedure do not have a university degree, they are cut off from these programs. Considering that the qualification recognizes *de facto* competences and knowledge equivalent to EQF 7 it would be necessary to find a viable solution granting the possibility of access to these programs, including masters, even without a university degree. There is as of now no obligation to continuous professional development, but it is the logical consequence of being a regulated profession. Various requests to the ministry of culture for setting up a table to discuss the issue have been declined.

The educational process for new professionals is far from resolved. After the initial set up of the course several issues became evident, but have not yet been addressed. The study programs of schools of the ministry of culture (ICR, OPD, ICPAL), universities and academies of fine arts are organized differently leading to different curricula in the same specialization. As well as the simple number of schools seems to exceed by far the market needs: by now there are a total of 25 institutions between universities of applied sciences, universities and academies of fine arts offering over 30 study courses in conservation-restoration. Yet there is still not a single PhD in conservation-restoration available in Italy. Making things worse the quality level of the single courses varies dramatically with the quality control mechanisms set up by a joint commission of the ministry of culture and the ministry of education are largely unattended. A reduction in number and maybe at the same time a specialization of some institutions to only offer advanced studies (PhD, specific master, etc.) would be advisable.

To make things worse, at university level due to administrative issues that have not been solved, it is still not possible to become professor as conservator-restorer. This relegates teaching positions in conservation-restoration to year by year contracts.

Furthermore a growing mismatch in competences and market needs emerges due to the changes of concepts around cultural heritage, like community involvement and participatory enjoyment of heritage.

At a level of public tendering the competences necessary for planning and elaboration of projects in conservation-restoration is still not completely clarified, especially in the field of historic buildings, monuments and sites. Especially the question of specializations is often misunderstood or poorly applied.

