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**Diverse and dynamic Slovenia, towards the necessary changes**

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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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# Diverse and dynamic Slovenia, towards the necessary changes

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is a value in all its forms. As an important and indivisible part of local, regional, national and European identity, it represents the quality of the living environment and is a key source of balanced development. Heritage is the foundation of Slovenia's cultural diversity, which is intertwined with remarkable landscape and biological diversity and the country's attractiveness for living, education, development, artistic creation, tourism and other economic activities. Cultural heritage broadens Slovenia's visibility in the international community. In a Eurobarometer survey (2017), 92% of Slovenians surveyed said that cultural heritage is important for our country, and 76% said they are proud of our common heritage. Naturally, cultural heritage cannot exist without the people who protect, preserve and popularise it. This is precisely where we need to work on the challenges and problems that have arisen as a result of the free movement of labour and the emergence of market activities.

One of the biggest challenges facing the conservation-restoration field is the regulation of the profession. The regulation of the conservation-restoration professions is relevant in Slovenia for the public sector and in the case of persons who independently perform a specialised profession through recognition fees, from the point of view of covering the social instruments in the field of self-employment in the cultural heritage sector. The status of self-employed persons in the cultural heritage sector is granted by the Ministry of Culture. However, the profession isn't regulated on the market since anyone who believes they have sufficient knowledge, even without appropriate education, can create and register a conservation and restoration business in any field without examination by a commission. Conservation and restoration activities in Slovenia can therefore be based on three different starting points: The Public sector (regulated), the Status of self-employed persons in the cultural heritage sector (regulated), and Independent entrepreneurship in the field of conservation and restoration (unregulated).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Austria and Italy are very important neighbouring countries of Slovenia in terms of conservation and restoration. Slovenian conservators-restorers often refer to the Italian conservation-restoration methods and to the Austrian system of functioning of the broadly organised conservation-restoration field. The latter is even more so since we come from a former common state – the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Taking a step back in history, we know that at the time, the Central Commission for the Study and Conservation of Archi-

tectural Monuments, established in 1850, was in charge of immovable heritage<sup>1</sup>. This has enabled the systematic and professional study of monument protection issues. In 1913, the Austrian Central Commission appointed Slovenian conservator France Stelè as the regional conservator for Carniola. His work in the spirit of the principles of the Austrian founders of monument protection, Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák, with the motto “conservation, not restoration”, triggered a major change in conservation-restoration practice and mentality. The foundation was laid for the development of organised functioning of the profession in Slovenia. The close collaboration between conservator<sup>2</sup> Stelè and painter and restorer<sup>3</sup> Matej Sternen has brought together

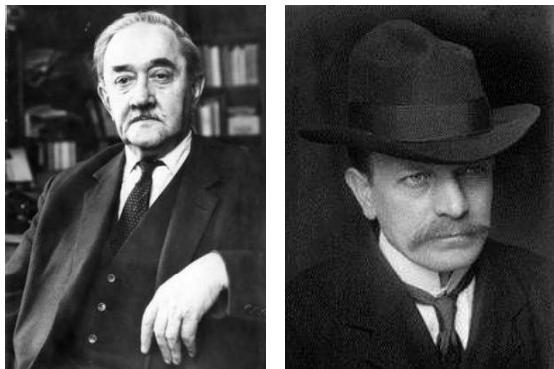


Figure 1, 2: Conservator France Stelè (1886–1972), photo: IFS, ZRC SAZU and conservator-restorer and painter Matej Sternen (1870–1949), photo: Ferdo Vesel, dLib. NUK

different professions in the conservation of cultural heritage. In his conservation memoirs, Stelè writes that Sternen was already considered one of the most skilled conservators in Austria at the time and could have become a court conservator if the outbreak of the First World War had not prevented it (Stelè, 1965). After 1919, when the Monument Bureau for Slovenia was formed within the newly constituted State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, both Stelè and Sternen continued their work in monument protection (Kavčič Klančar, 2014).

The monument value system designed by Alois Riegl and other theoretical texts by the pioneers of conservation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made it possible for art-historical science to assume a leading position in monument protection or conservation, especially in Central European or German countries, meaning also in the countries of the former Austrian monarchy (Peskar, 2014).

In this sense, we can say that Riegel and Dvořák conceptualised a “modern” form of monument protection that also included our territory. Their concept is, therefore, the direct foundation for our (Slovenian) solutions, since Stelè, as the pioneer of monument protection in Slovenia, was Dvořák's student at the Vienna School of Art History and his subordinate in the monument protection service until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Pirkovič, 1993). These principles gave the profession of conservator-restorer and the collaboration between conservators and conservator-restorers a solid foun-

<sup>1</sup> Kaiserlich Königlich Zentralkommission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmäle, later renamed K. K. Zentralkommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst und historischen Denkmale

<sup>2</sup> Conservator (slovenian: konservator) is specialists in the cultural heritage protection services. They record, evaluate, study and, above all, conserve immovable cultural heritage. They coordinate measures for the protection of heritage and advise owners on comprehensive conservation efforts and promote heritage and integrated conservation. The first professional conservator in Slovenia was art historian Dr. France Stelè.

<sup>3</sup> The title of restorer (slovenian: restavrator) was renamed conservator-restorer (slovenian: konservator-restavrator) in the new rules of the Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration from 1996.

dation foundation in the recent past, on which the contemporary monument protection and museum professions stand firmly and draw inspiration even today.

In addition to a brief and summarised overview of the current content, it might also be worth noting the articles dealing with individual critical views on the profession of conservator and conservator-restorer and on the legislation that has been governing the profession for quite some time. In professional publications such as *Vestnik* and *Varstvo spomenikov*, one of the first articles was contributed almost 30 years ago by Dr. Iva Mikl-Curk: "Poklic? Konservator..." (Profession? Conservator...). Both hers and Dr. Jelka Pirkovič's "Osnovni pojmi in zasnova spomeniškega varstva v Sloveniji" (Basic concepts and design of monument protection in Slovenia) are characterised by a desire for a comprehensive presentation of this field of activities. These two works, each in their own way, discuss the state of our monument protection and provide proposals for its further development. The common characteristic of both works is that despite the diversity, extensiveness and increasing interdisciplinarity of the conservation field, they are each the work of a single expert and that, in principle, they do not represent exact analyses of previous conservation work but rather descriptions of the field of work of a certain professional profile and an assessment of the effectiveness and visibility of this work both in the professional and in the general public (Hazler-Papič, 1994/95). The number of such articles is increasing nowadays, which also means a continuation of a critical perspective on the protection of cultural heritage with an emphasis on the profession of conservator and conservator-restorer, where interdisciplinarity still comes first, which is welcome in the search for solutions in the future as well.

## 2. EDUCATION

An important focus on the protection of the profession starts with appropriate education. The Academy of Fine Arts and Design of the University of Ljubljana is the only higher education institution in Slovenia that offers a restoration study programme. The study has a long tradition at the Academy, starting as early as 1954 with a two-year post-graduate programme in fine art restoration. At that time, the postgraduate restoration study programme was intended for academic painters and sculptors who wanted to pursue a career in restoration. The establishment of the Department for Restoration in 1996 marked the beginning of the four-year university undergraduate programme Restoration of Works of Art. In 2009, the programme was transformed into two cycles in line with the Bologna Process, a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree. The design of the programmes was based on the organisation of the educational institution, national specificities and the recommendations and guidelines of the European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education. Vertically, the programme has two levels: a first-cycle Bachelor's study programme (BA) and a second-cycle Master's study programme (MA). The BA programme has no courses and covers the field of conservation-restoration of works of art, while the MA programme has two courses based on the conservation-restoration of works of art. The collaboration of institutions, private individuals and societies involved in the protection of cultural heritage is extremely important in education. Training sessions and workshops organised at the inter-institutional level ensure quality learning and staying up-to-date with new methodologies and technologies. This allows for the consistent development of a modern approach to cultural heritage conservation for all professionals, regardless of their status.



Figure 3: International workshop organised by DRS and ZVKDS:

“Retouching murals, Methodological approaches, techniques and materials”

The workshop was conducted by conservator-restorer Alberto Felici from the Opificio Delle Pietre Dure institute in Florence. <https://www.slodrs.si/2020/08/05/vabilo-delavnica-retusa/>

Despite its small size, Slovenia's cultural space is extremely diverse and dynamic. Cultural heritage professions are becoming more dynamic every day, requiring more knowledge and transferable skills, the so-called soft skills. Above all, it is important to note that certain skills cannot be acquired through schooling alone, but that there is a need for the establishment of continuously funded lifelong learning where formal or non-formal acquisition of skills would be recognised.



Figure 4: “HAND CARVING NATURAL STONE” stonemasonry workshop organised by the School of Renovation<sup>4</sup> and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage <https://www.sola-prenove.si/>

### 3. LEGISLATION AND CHALLENGES

As we have seen many times before, the small size of a country can create many advantages over, for example, large and complex countries that are leaders in several fields. For comparison, let us consider Germany, which is divided into federated states with independent state law and their own narrower administrative units, which also means different legislation concerning cultural heritage and, therefore, varying approaches to dealing with the status of conservator-restorer, and, for example, Italy, which is characterised by a division into provinces, also with distinctive policies, where the north and the south of the country are particularly distinct. While Slovenia is small but diverse, both in biological and regional terms, it is also divided into individual regions, but because of its small size, it is uniform in its legislation. The laws are the same for the whole of Slovenia,

<sup>4</sup> The “School of Renovation” is a project of the Association of Historic Towns of Slovenia, which started in 2000, when the first expert meeting on raising awareness about quality renovation of buildings was organised. <https://www.sola-prenove.si/>

which greatly facilitates the operation and implementation of the regulations in practice. The Cultural Heritage Protection Act<sup>5</sup> is the foundation for the legal regulation of cultural heritage in Slovenia.

The cultural heritage protection issue is a category in the Slovenian Constitution. According to the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (2008), integrated heritage conservation is implemented through spatial planning: respecting the importance of heritage, the competent authorities incorporate it into sustainable development. Heritage of higher value – national or local monuments – are protected by local and national acts. The Slovenian public protection service counts on interdisciplinary experts (technical, natural sciences, social sciences, human sciences, arts). Through its constructive cooperation with other institutions, national administrative bodies and heritage owners and managers, it aims to turn from a preventive into a co-creative heritage conservation.

For its part, the heritage protection policy until 2019 establishes the following Strategic goals:

- ensuring both the protection and the inclusion of heritage in modern life,
- ensuring stable financial resources to the national public service,
- improving its organisation, working practices and homogeneous activities,
- preparing public service expert standards,
- raising awareness on heritage and its protection and
- ensuring a larger role of Slovenian heritage at the international level.

The enforcement of the Heritage Protection Strategy constitutes a further step in order to ensure the key role of the heritage within the development's strategies. At the national level, the government is in charge of approving acts on both monuments of national importance and funds for their conservation-restoration.<sup>6</sup>

In Slovenia, the regulation of the profession begins with appropriate education and the acquisition of a professional title, which is regulated by the Rules on professional exams in the field of heritage protection<sup>7</sup>. In recent years, due to increasing market demand, we have been grappling with the problem of regulating the profession in cases where individuals carry out their activity as sole traders. For this purpose, the Ministry of Culture has recently commissioned the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (in which the Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration (DRS) is also involved) to draft the Regulation on the list of qualified providers of specialised cultural heritage protection works, the legal basis of which is the above-mentioned framework law. Looking at the state of regulation of the profession in the wider European area, we note that we have a well-organised system of professional examinations and promotions to titles<sup>8</sup> awarded by the Ministry of Culture, which means protection of the profession at the highest national level, but the matter is flawed market-wise, as we have already mentioned several times. The Ministry is responsible for ensuring that laws and regulations are properly implement-

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural Heritage Protection Act. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4144>

<sup>6</sup> HEREIN is a European Cultural Heritage Information Network developed within the Council of Europe which brings together European public administrations in charge of national cultural heritage policies and strategies to form a unique cooperation network in the domain of Cultural Heritage. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/herein-system/slovenia>

<sup>7</sup> Rules on professional exams in the field of heritage protection. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV12745>

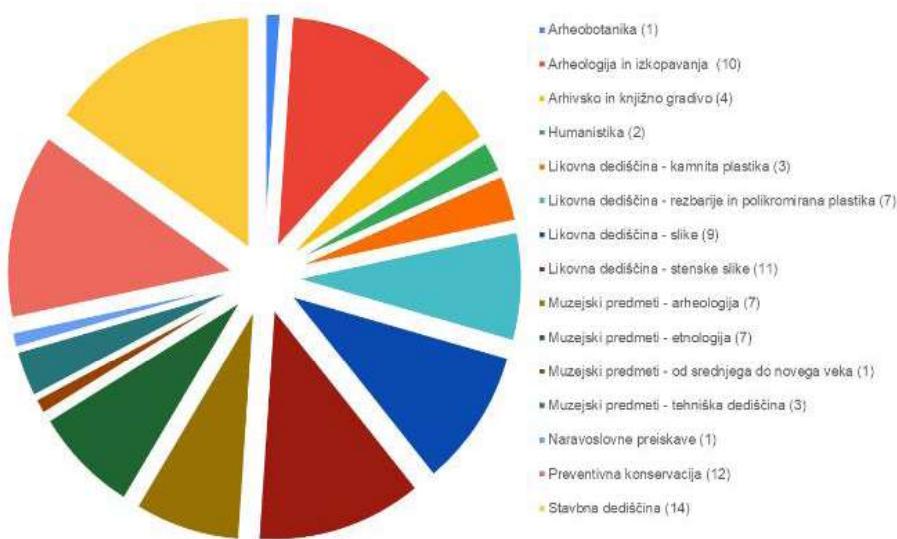
<sup>8</sup> Rules on the acquisition of titles in the field of cultural heritage protection. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV13229>

ed and has thus set up various expert commissions<sup>9</sup> comprising experts from different fields. Members of both the Professional Examinations Commission and the Titles Commission, on the basis of laws and regulations, as well as internal rules of procedure, work in favour of the heritage professions and place them in an important strategic position. Most European countries do not have a system for awarding professional examinations and titles.

However, since professional examinations in Slovenia are only required in the public sector and perhaps within well-organised public tenders, but there is no legal basis for such requirements prior to starting a sole proprietorship on the market, we still have not solved the biggest problem of uncontrolled work. The profession in Slovenia is therefore regulated within public service but not on the market, as anyone who feels they have enough knowledge can open their own conservation-restoration business for any heritage material. This is, therefore, what we consider the biggest challenge, which could be partly solved by the aforementioned list of qualified providers of specialised cultural heritage protection works through awarding and, in the future, the establishment of a licence. These are two extremely important tasks for the future that will regulate the activities of individuals on the market.

Helping young conservators-restorers on their career path is also a major challenge. It is important to provide them with a degree of security on the market and to devise a system for them whereby they can continue to work in the profession even as sole traders. It is also important to advocate for much-needed changes related to obtaining the status of self-employed in culture, as the current requirements for obtaining and maintaining this status do not encourage individuals to be successful but rather restrict them through outdated rules.

Table 1: Lifelong learning questionnaire<sup>10</sup>; graphical representation of a broad range of expertise/fields and the finding that 30 respondents are involved in art heritage, 18 in museum objects



<sup>9</sup> Rules on expert commissions. <https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2020-01-3020? sop=2020-01-3020>

<sup>10</sup> Lifelong learning questionnaire, Matija Strlič, Martina Lesar Kikelj, Lucija Močnik Ramovš; E-Rish.si, Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration

The Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration provides assistance by drawing attention to mistakes and proposing certain changes that would systemically address the creation and functioning of conservator-restorers in their work.

However, many other shortcomings come to light when we compare, for example, the profession of conservator-restorer with that of a doctor, an architect or even an archaeologist. A rethinking of the related professions and highlighting relevant examples that might also be relevant to the profession of conservator-restorer would further refine the fairly well-written laws.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration was founded in 1993 with the purpose of assisting professionals from the field of conservation-restoration in promoting the profession and their views and approaches regarding the preservation of cultural heritage. The Society is a voluntary, professional association of conservator-restorers who have completed the necessary training and passed a state-recognised professional examination for the field of conservation-restoration. Associated members are those individuals who support the activities and objectives of the Society owing to their educational, amateur, commercial or similar professional interests and therefore wish to participate in the activities of the Society.

Regarding the status of the profession of conservator-restorer, the Slovenian Society for Conservation-Restoration, as well as other professional institutions, have been following the problem of the regulation of this profession in various countries for several years. While the issue that E.C.C.O has been facing for many years remains unresolved, Slovenia has presented itself to other countries through various consultations and projects and has ranked quite high in terms of the regulation of the legislation governing the profession of conservator-restorer, which can also be considered to some extent as a model example.

Slovenia is also actively dealing with the issue of the protection of the profession of conservator-restorer through the European Charter project<sup>11</sup>, where the Society and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia work together as partners, and within which we are regulating and keeping track of attempts to improve access to the protection of the profession, and we are actively participating, both with ideas and with the legislative acts that have already been drafted. There is certainly room for improvement in Slovenia in the form of, as already mentioned, licences with proper legislation that would cover and regulate both public tenders (with the construction sector predominating) and the whole policy concerning the provision of conservation-restoration work on the market. It is very important to note that the state needs to support this field through legislation; otherwise the relevance of the profession can be diminished in the very process of acquiring competencies<sup>12</sup>.

We understand that we need to continuously ensure and verify the correctness and relevance of the competencies that best serve the preservation of Slovenia's cultural heri-

<sup>11</sup> Charter; Cultural heritage actions to refine training, education and roles. <https://charter-alliance.eu/>

<sup>12</sup> COMPETENCES FOR ACCESS TO THE CONSERVATION-RESTORATION PROFESSION, © E.C.C.O. 2011 – European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations A.I.S.B.L. / Confédération Européenne des Organisations de Conservateurs-Restaureurs A.I.S.B.L.E.C.C.O. European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations, 2nd Edition pdf version ISBN 978-92-990010-7-3 Layout by Sebastian Dobruskin (SKR-SCR, Switzerland)

tage and its specificities. However, by having an established and controlled system of appropriate legislation and lifelong education, which is the responsibility of each individual country, we can consistently provide the essential foundations for the protection of the profession of conservator-restorer.

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