

# The conservator-restorer perspective

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Members of the Malta Association of Professional Conservator-Restorers (MAPCo-Re) are mainly trained in the conservation-restoration of materials and objects of archaeological or art-historical interest; in addition some members have attended short courses specifically on industrial heritage, as part of their continuous professional development. Other members have experience of interventions on industrial heritage in its broader sense, defined as:

...sites, structures, complexes, areas and landscapes as well as the related machinery, objects or documents that provide evidence of past or on-going industrial processes ... whether ancient or modern – depend on natural sources of raw materials, energy and transportation networks to produce and distribute products to broader markets. It includes both material assets – immovable and movable –, and intangible dimensions such as technical know-how, the organisation of work and workers, and the complex social and cultural legacy that shaped the life of communities and brought major organisational changes to entire societies and the world in general (ICOMOS-TICCIH, 2011, pp. 1-2).

MAPCo-Re members are bound to follow the Code of Ethics and any Professional Guidelines which may be provided by the Maltese Warrant Board for Restorers and Conservators in terms of the Cultural Heritage Act (Chapter 445, Laws of Malta), as well as the Code of Ethics of the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorer Organisations (ECCO). Many of the clauses in this Code of Ethics are reflected in the joint ICOMOS-TICCIH Principles for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage Sites, Structures, Areas and Landscapes: The Dublin Principles.

Cultural Heritage may be tangible or intangible. Industrial Heritage also 'includes many intangible dimensions embodied in the skills, memories and social life of workers and their communities' (ICOMOS-TICCIH, 2011, Preamble). Conservator-restorers must strive to the best of their ability to study and document cultural assets while clearly identifying their values to better preserve them. 'By turning back to the past we can seek to understand how we have arrived to the present' (ERIH, n.d.).

The concept of intangible heritage is extremely important and must be carefully documented and projected to future generations, because it may become increasingly difficult to retrieve in the future. Such documentation, archived materials, building details and specimens of industrial products should be preserved by the best means possible (TICCIH, 2003).

One must also balance caution with intervention, as excessive caution may in practice result in neglect. Conservator-restorers are bound by their formal training to be cautious before intervening. Before any intervention is undertaken one should document and analyse as much as possible the site's materials, composition, production, function and deterioration. As the intervention will invariably leave its mark on these cultural resources, this must be undertaken responsibly and professionally.

Many people believe that rarity may be used to prioritise or protect heritage, but this should not condition conservator-restorers, as one must take actions to the highest standards and knowledge to better preserve all cultural materials for present and future generations (ECCO, 2003, Article 7).

In 1984 the ICOM Committee for Conservation stated that:

the activity of the conservator-restorer (conservation) consists of technical examination, preservation, and conservation-restoration of cultural property: Examination is the first step to determine and document the significance of an artefact, its original structure and materials, and the extent of its deterioration, alteration, and loss. Preservation is action taken to retard or prevent deterioration of or damage to cultural assets by control of their environment and/or treatment of their structure in order to maintain them in as nearly an unchanging state as possible. Restoration is action taken to make a deteriorated or damaged artefact understandable, with minimal sacrifice of aesthetic and historic integrity (ICOM, 1984, Article 2.1).

Following preliminary studies of a specific project by a multi-disciplinary team, 'only a well-trained experienced conservator-restorer can correctly interpret the results of such examinations and foresees the consequences of the decisions made' (ICOM, 1984, Article 3.5), within a proposed intervention. 'As in the case of the surgeon, manual skill must be linked to theoretical knowledge and the capacity simultaneously to assess a situation, to act upon it immediately and to evaluate its impact' (ICOM, 1984, Article 3.7). The conservator-restorer must proceed with an intervention only if s/he is competent within that specific field, and should collaborate with other professional colleagues in the best interest of cultural heritage (ECCO, 2003, Article 6), while following legal, administrative and financial obligations (ICOMOS-TICCIH, 2011, p.4).

The conservator-restorer is also bound to intervene minimally and should only use 'materials and procedures which, according to the current level of knowledge, will not harm the cultural heritage, the environment or people' (ECCO, 2003, Article 9). Interventions should not interfere with or inhibit any future examination, analysis or treatment (if possible). They should also be, as much as possible, compatible and completely reversible (ECCO, 2003, Article 9). Any changes, additions or

reconstructions must be clearly documented and visually identifiable when observed closely (ICOMOS, 1964, Articles 12, 13). This can be done by physically marking these changes, where possible, for example with a date and/or the initials of the organisation or person responsible for the intervention.

The Nizhny Tagil Charter for Industrial Heritage emphasises the importance of functional integrity and respect towards the authenticity and value of the whole site/cultural material. Values may be linked to the purpose of these resources, which may be studied while still being preserved in situ. Relocation or dismantling from the original context is only acceptable when the destruction of this context is inevitable due to overwhelming economic or social needs. The reuse of an industrial site is generally acceptable as long as the historical significance and fabric are respected. This can be done by respecting the original patterns of circulation and activity or through providing a space for the projection and interpretation of the original use. Such projects should be undertaken and contribute to sustainable development and possibly provide economic regeneration to the surrounding areas (TICCIH 2003, 5.v). This is relevant to many such facilities within historic industrial areas in Malta.

In the Maltese context, there is still a need for more public awareness of the cultural value of industry. This potential is in the hands of those who own, preserve, conserve and/or administer it. Their responsibility is substantial, but also rewarding, if they seek the collaboration of professionals willing to work in a multidisciplinary manner. MAPCo-Re looks forward to seeing this happen and to contributing to this process.

## References

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