EDITED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PROFESSIONALISM IN THE BUILT HERITAGE SECTOR, ARENBERG CASTLE, LEUVEN, BELGIUM, 5–8 FEBRUARY 2018

Professionalism in the Built Heritage Sector

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CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group
Boca Raton London New York Leiden

CRC Press is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an **informa** business

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'Reflections on Cultural Heritage Theories and Practices' book series

3. Innovative Built Heritage Models
   Edited by Koen Van Balen & Aziliz Vandesande
   ISBN 978-1-138-49861-7 (HB)
   ISBN 978-1-351-01479-3 (eBook)

4. Professionalism in the Built Heritage Sector
   Edited by Koen van Balen & Aziliz Vandesande
   ISBN 978-0-367-02763-6 (HB)
   ISBN 978-0-429-39791-2 (eBook)

CRC Press/Balkema is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Typeset by V Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Applied for

Published by: CRC Press/Balkema
Schipholweg 107C, 2316 XC Leiden, The Netherlands
e-mail: Pub.NL@taylorandfrancis.com
www.crcpress.com – www.taylorandfrancis.com

ISBN: 978-0-367-02763-6 (Hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-39791-2 (eBook)

Professionalism in the Built Heritage Sector – Van Balen & Vandesande (Eds)
© 2019 Taylor & Francis Group, London, ISBN 978-0-367-02763-6

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© 2019 Taylor & Francis Group, London, ISBN 978-0-367-02763-6

Profession(s) and professional(s) in the conservation process

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ABSTRACT: The issue of professionalism in the Built Heritage Sector opens to reflections on the relationships between the quality of conservation activities and its impacts on local development. The broader framework encompasses both the need of a multidisciplinary toolkit and the long-term approach to preservation activities, i.e. preventive and planned conservation. The process, in turn, is composed by a set of activities, each one requiring special competences/skills and the related professionalism(s). Actually the process includes also the valorisation phase, in an integrated vision. It is also important to highlight that competences and professionals are often differently recognized in the different countries, both from the qualification and the legal point of view: therefore a section of the paper deals more in detail with a case study, which is the authors' national context. Dealing with profiles, capacities and skills required in the different phases of the process, the reflection moves to the open questions about traditional recognized professions and the skills required nowadays: as may gaps are detected, a new professional frame is needed, as well as new matching profiles and courses in education and lifelong learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

The paper proposes some reflections on the detected needs for qualification in the professions involved in the activities concerning built heritage. As these needs are triggered by developing changes and new targets in the sector, the first section of the paper tries to present the theoretical framework, which the authors are referring to in the research they have been carrying out for several years, especially testing through action-research methodology the proposed shift from traditional restoration to planned conservation, as well as the operators' willingness to update their organizations, tools and skills.

The following section deals with the observed evolution of actually implemented skills: this evolution is often more rapid than the changes of mind and the reform of standards, leading the definition of the professions to be someway outdated.

This issue, even if generally recognized as being the same in the different countries, surely ends into practical aspects and problems, which depend also from the specific context.

Section 4 deals with the Italian context as an example, in which it is possible to describe in detail the detected criticalities as well as the opportunities and trends, in order to end into conclusions that are likely to hold beyond the national borders. On this basis, section 5 tries to discuss some alternative hypotheses of a paradigm shift in the qualification of professionals, referring to EQF levels, in order to answer the detected needs.

2 CHANGES IN THE BUILT HERITAGE SECTOR

The Built Heritage Sector went through a deep process of change in the last decades, more or less in all the Countries, even if many differences can be detected, not only between the North and the South of the world, or Western and Asian cultures, but also among the Countries which subscribed the same fundamental charters and use to cooperate in many international research and education programs. As the discussion goes deeper in the roots of the opinions and practices, the approach to conservation is often detected not to be the same, and the subsequent inputs to practice appear far different, leading to sensitivities, choices and activities definitely diverse. Nevertheless some common trends can be observed in this diversity.

The first question deals with Conservation itself, as it may be thought of as "Preservation" or as "Heritage", that is meaning conservation as a complex planning activity (Ashworth 1997); furthermore, Conservation could be referred to "architecture" or to "(built) heritage". These uses of different terms entail subtle paradigm shifts, which open a set of challenges concerning practices, required hard and soft skills, and educational programs (Stovel 2008).

In other words, the approach to conservation got broader, and conservation is no longer understood as purely targeted on the physical side of things, nor it can be separated from the promotion of knowledge and public enjoyment, that is from

the effort to increase the opportunities of acknowledgement and use of the cultural heritage value. Pietro Petraroia defined this process as the "relational dimension of protection" (Petraroia, 2010). Consequently, the public intervention should not be limited to strictly protective activities, but it has to encourage initiatives aimed at fostering the engagement of a broader public in the use and enjoyment of cultural heritage. Therefore conservation became a part of an integrated process, so that it could no longer be practiced without community involvement (Van Balen & Vandesande 2015; Göttler & Ripp 2017) and a conscious care of the relationships with the territorial context. Projects involving heritage became more and more comprehensive, often exploiting heritage assets as the pivot of dialogues between different sectors. The introduction of the concept of trading zone, that is a form of cooperation despite the divergences existing amongst the stakeholders coming from the various sectors (Gustafsson, 2011; Balducci & Mäntysalo, 2013) enlightened the role of cultural heritage in building social cohesion. The collaboration among different sectors, beyond making more resources available for integrated activities, boosts the exchange of good practices and abilities, and creates networks, which also entails audience development. On the basis of some practical experiences detected in various European Countries, it has been argued that investments from different sectors such as the labour market, creative industries, new agriculture and so on, can converge into cultural heritage projects through negotiations that involve heritage and non-heritage-related goals, producing value just because people and supply chains get connected (CHCfE, 2015: pp. 195–197). It is self-evident that professionals involved in these kind of projects need the traditional competences of the field, but have also to develop several other skills, or at least to learn how to deal with many other languages and disciplines, which did not use to be considered in preservation activities.

Besides such broader vision and more comprehensive approach, a second remark refers to the diversity of heritage assets involved in protection end enhancement processes. As heritage became the subject of more than the traditional "authorised" discourse (Smith 2006), experts' competences got challenged, and several fields of specialization are now often recognized, beyond the traditional fields of arts, architecture, archaeology. Furthermore, the attention paid to landscape issues generated a special sector, in which practitioners and academics developed new skills, nourished on one side by the tradition of landscape design, but on the other side by an holistic approach to the care of territories. Landscapes are therefore a matter of visual and functional issues, where the involvement of communities plays a more and more acknowledged role. In this frame, the competences of professionals tend to mismatch with their educational profile, being acquired through a process of on-the-field specialization and lifelong learning (Williams 2013).

A third point is the implementation of techniques based no longer on experience and traditional practices, but on scientific research. Conservation became a field, in which the support of hard sciences, such as Chemistry and Physics is customary and in some contexts enforced as mandatory. The awareness that conservation requires a more and more sophisticated toolkit developed everywhere. Maybe some cultural environment is more keen to support advanced technologies and new materials, while in other environments traditional crafts are still more supported, but nobody can doubt that conservation is nowadays the product of a multidisciplinary collaboration. This surely happens in the sector of artworks and movable heritage, as a conference organized by ICOM-CC heralded (ICOM-CC 2010), but it happens also in the field of architectural conservation, in which many processes are now carried out by means of advanced digital techniques. Conservation science, after a long lasting experience, has been at last recognized as a special field, although challenging because of its highly interdisciplinary character. It undoubtedly requires that fundamental competences are developed to bridge the areas of specialization (Golfomitsou 2015).

A fourth kind of change has been produced by the push towards preventive conservation, which in the museums required a new profession to arise, entailing a vision, a set of required skills, the need for new education programs (Boersma 2016). On the other hand, a shift towards preventive and planned conservation developed in the built heritage sector, in which the implementation of skills, in other words intellectual capital, has a pivotal role (Della Torre 2013). Research on this topic supports the concept of a positive impact produced for the employment of maintenance small businesses, thus contributing to a strong sustainable development (Vandesande, Moioli & Van Balen 2014).

3 EVOLVING SKILLS AND TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

To summarize the above described changes and challenges, it seems that the common feature is the tendency to specialization and higher skills. The question arises about the compliance of traditional professional standards with the new requirements.

It seems that some years ago the proposed solution was to introduce a new profession, while the other standards were still satisfactory. Therefore in the 1980's the profile of the Conserver-Restorer

made its debut. The document issued by the ICOM Committee for Conservation, met in Copenhagen on September 1984, states that "Certain professions related to conservation, Conservation Architects, Scientists, and Engineers, and all other who contribute to conservation, are not mentioned in this document since they are already governed by accepted professional standards".

Since then the profile of Conserver-Restorer, so called because the same professional is called, "conservator" in the English speaking countries, and "restorer" in those where Romance and Germanic languages are spoken, has been further developed and better and better investigated and described in terms of competences and qualification levels (ECCO 2011). Anyway, the open question is whether the professional standards related to the other professions relevant to conservation, i.e. Conservation Architects, Scientists, and Engineers, can be still accepted as compliant with the up-to-date requirements. A second question could be if other professions could be required by the complexity of the above described integrated process.

To deal with these two questions, it will be useful to refer to a real context, i.e. a defined national framework. This choice could reduce the range of the conclusions, but this is the way we can implement experience, detect the influence of cultural and legal framework, and also contribute to the overall picture drawn by the papers contributed in this volume.

4 NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: THE CASE OF ITALY

The Italian case is undoubtedly relevant given the role Italy has always had in establishing protection and conservation practices, from the very beginning of the story of the involved disciplines. The long and uninterrupted tradition had a radical and tormented evolution in the last decades, starting in the 1990's. The fundamentals of protection had been deeply discussed already in the 1960's. Since then many new challenges had been faced at the technical level, e.g. because of several severe earthquakes, nevertheless the framework successfully founded with the foundation of the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro was still standing, in a balance among Brandi's theory and a lively practice, which found a long-lasting reference in the Venice Charter and then in the Italian Charter issued in 1972. Nevertheless, in the 1990's several new pressures arose, starting a series of reforms, through several steps, which could be described as a trial-and-error process, or the result of antagonist forces and lobbies.

The reforms of public procurement rules encompassed special norms for the works concerning protected cultural goods, and offered the opportunity to introduce new systems to qualify contractors, to require the presence of conserver-restorers when working on works of art or decorated surfaces of buildings, besides the presence of archaeologists to control excavations. Secondly, in heritage field there was a push toward a more effective management, introducing the issue of the economic performances of cultural sites. These innovations happened in the context of many other new technical trends, including the attention paid to energy efficiency, and the other impacts of European directives (Nypan 2001), and also in an unstable political frame, which contributed to make the related debates more bitter and sometimes tragic.

Therefore, the Italian context is a good example to analyze the criticalities and the mismatches, which professions encountered, and still suffer, through the renovation of preservation practices.

In the authors' perspective, conserver-restorers gained a respected role in Italy, even if through a difficult reform of the related labor market. The question if qualification had to be referred to individuals or to enterprises was very critical in the field, as this profession asked to be recognized as very qualified and similar to a liberal art, but undoubtedly it involves the engagement of cooperators, whose number, stable employment, personal qualification were problems difficult to be framed into rules. Furthermore, once qualification is given by studies in universities or recognized institutes, the problem to regularize the position of many already established practitioners had to be taken into account.

This reform was therefore not easy, and even today many threats are detected. The education of future conserver-restorers is still a new story in the universities, and the labor market is far from being satisfactory for young professionals. Nevertheless the role of the conserver-restorer is definitely established, as well as the related profession and the criteria for education and recognition.

A system of categories has been adopted to describe similar operations in public works, and these categories are used to qualify the skills of enterprises. One of these categories, that is OS2 A, is reserved to the kind of works carried out by conserver-restorers, as they concern the protected works of art, archaeological remains and the decorated surfaces of protected buildings. According to Italian laws these works are strictly reserved to qualified conserver-restorers, of course under the control by ministerial offices ("Soprintendenze"). In the private sector the same works have to be carried out by professionals with the same qualification, but the only tool to enforce this provision is the surveillance by the Soprintendenza, which cannot suggest the name of the contractor, but can prevent that works are procured to unqualified

workers. The qualification of these kinds of contractors is guaranteed by the professional curriculum of the conserver-restorer in chief.

Public works on protected buildings and structures are regulated in a corresponding category, that is OG2. In this case qualification is not related to a single professional, but to the company, which acquires this qualification because of the amounts of the relevant works carried out. Sometimes the system can fail, as the workers hired by the contractors can be not stable, often subcontracted, not always formed on conservation techniques. Therefore in self-presentation enterprises tend to stress the experience of their workers and the internal long-life learning programs, on safety as well (Pennati & Masper 2012). On the other hand, the market of works on private protected buildings is not controlled.

Projects on protected buildings require to be designed and directed by an architect, according to a law dating back to 1925 (Regio Decreto 2537/1925), recently confirmed by several judiciary sentences: in particular the sentence 21/2014 of the Consiglio di Stato states also that the EU Directive 384/1985 did not lead to a complete legal equality of the titles of engineer and architect. It can be argued that a provision issued before the Athens Charter was founded on a vision, which does not hold any longer today: namely the idea that restoration could be a matter of history of styles and reproduction, not yet involving important technical issues related to treatments, durability, compatibility, performances of aged elements and so on. On the other hand, the enforcement of this old law is still positive as far as it states that conservation works have to be designed and directed by a highly qualified technician, with a degree obtained after five years of university studies, preventing the entrustment of conservation projects to technicians with only a high school degree. Although in Italian schools of architecture, a minimum number of credits in architectural conservation/restoration is guaranteed, most teachers and professionals have an approach oriented to transformation and design from scratch, not to historical conservation, and they tend not to acquire specialized conservation skills. The number of architects in Italy is exorbitant, as in 2016 they were more than 150,000, that is 2,5 per 1,000 population: to compare, architects in Europe were 0,96 per 1,000 population, but only 0,45 per 1,000 in France, 0,57 in UK, in Germany 1,33. Out of those 150,000, only few have got the special skills required to carry out a project on a protected building implementing the required techniques. Nevertheless, to be qualified as an architect is a sufficient condition to work on protected historic buildings. The comparison with the well-known exclusive French model centered on the "architectes en chef des monuments historiques" is definitely ironic.

The above cited 1925 decree, restricting the competence to architects, excludes from the field the civil engineers (opening some problems about international degrees, which go beyond the scope of this paper). In fact, only few courses for civil and building engineers in Italy encompass courses of conservation; sometimes courses on rehabilitation and retrofitting are included, but based on a vision that does not include the recognition of cultural values. In other words, the habits and the professional skills of engineers are often directed to other targets, not to conservation. As technical issues are always central in interventions on built cultural heritage, these kinds of conflicts are very frequent, often following an already written script on the uncertain compliance with very strong requirements. The most obvious cases are those of energy efficiency and structural analysis.

The implementation of energy efficiency requirements triggered the development of a niche in the market, as certification was enforced as mandatory. Related competences gained through specific courses, opened to technicians of different levels, became an important resource for professionals during the crisis of the construction industry in the last ten years. The balance among retrofitting and conservation in case of protected historic buildings has been a topic of fruitful research in Italy as well, but the related techniques are still mastered only by a small number of cultivated engineers and architects, often holding a higher qualification.

The problem of understanding the structural schemes and resources of ancient buildings is a recurrent topic in a country subject to high seismic risk. Safety levels, correct procedures to evaluate the safety of historic structures, most effective and compatible procedures (diagnostics, monitoring...), devices to strengthen them against seismic hazards, have been discussed very times, and have been the object of sometimes conflicting norms and laws. Nowadays, in Italy there are many technicians who have no sensitivity for historic values, but also a number of structural engineers and specialized architects with qualified skills related to built heritage, who are able to tie together the respect for historic authenticity and a deep understanding of the structural behavior of masonry and wooden structures.

A specific issue is related to the qualification level required to be an officer in the ministry, with the function to be an architect but also a controller. To be hired for this function, since ten years ago, a post-degree qualification is required, that is a two-years school of specialization degree, or a phd diploma. This decision had been the subject of a judicial appeal, but it was confirmed.

Conservation scientists have of course high qualification: they usually get specialized in the field of cultural objects through experience, which they use

to develop at scientific research level, also publishing case studies, in which diagnostic technics are applied. Universities and research centers play a role in this market, influencing the professional arena.

In the last years, continuing a trend started in the 1990s, Italian politicians dealt with cultural heritage as a matter of valorization instead conservation. The prevailing issue seemed to be the number of sold tickets, but also the introduction of accountability in the management of cultural services, through an innovation of the competence profiles, which required a multidisciplinary approach, searching a balance between the traditional theoretical-historical knowledge and the new requirement of juridical-economic-management competences (Montella, 2009). This process is consistent with what happens at international level, as also the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage recommended the implementation of new business models to get cultural heritage to work for broader societal and economic benefits (EU Commission 2015).

Heritage professions therefore multiplied (Cabasino 2005), opening to several opportunities but also problems, once again searching the difficult balance between the basic skills of different professions involved for promotion, communication, storytelling, educational and tourism activities and so on, and the specific heritage contents and attitudes, which often go at risk.

The whole picture is going every day more rich and complex because of the digitization process. From survey (and HistoricBIM) to energy and structural analyses, to any activity carried out by the architect or the conservations scientist, to documentation, communication, advertising, pricing and ticketing, controlling, any activities related to cultural heritage tend to be digitized and therefore require new skills, which did not belong to professionals only few years ago. In other words, digitization is changing all the activities in conservation process, as in the meantime valorization introduces new activities, which thanks to information technologies can exploit and valorize conservation contents.

5 NEW SKILLS: A QUALIFICATION SHIFT?

In such a changing framework, it is possible to go back on the two questions about professional standards related to the adequacy of once established professions and the rise of new professions required by the renewed integrated process.

The answers are quite obvious, as we come from observing that daily practices are changing, and heritage related activities involve new operations and performances.

The first reaction to these challenges could be lifelong learning: professional could update their skills as their profession changes. But this could not be enough if the change were disruptive, as digitization risks to be, or if a legally enforced reform requires special competences for the sake of a better conservation, just as a better valorization required the implementation of new professions. In this case, the change may even put an established professional toolkit out of the market, requiring a definitely different set of competences.

The above described changes are typical of a kind of development in the Italian context, where technical innovation is not introduced to reduce costs, but to get new targets, enhancing the quality of both the process and the products. In this cases, the change induced on professions and crafts tends to a qualification shift, in which higher levels are required. For instance, it can be observed that conserver-restorers are now often hired to make operations, which used to be carried out by less qualified workers; or the answer to the observed low level of ordinary architects could be the requirement of a higher qualification, shifting to the post-degree level.

Therefore we can imagine that the answer to the posed questions could be a shift to higher qualification levels, while keeping the traditional professional schemes. The following doubt is if this shift is sustainable. Undoubtedly it entails a growth in intellectual capital, but it also entails higher costs.

The alternative solution should be setting up specific educational courses, based on a mix of competences and experience-based apprenticeship (Henderson 2016), to match with the requirements of the new heritage professions. Then a description of competences according to EQF framework (Boehlinger 2007/2008) is the way to prepare these proposals in order to make assessment and comparison feasible.

Proposals of this kind are not so common yet: the proposal called "House Master School" can be quoted as introducing a profile that attempted to give a relevant role to practical skills (Johansson 2008). In Italy, a good deal of work has been carried out on the intermediate figures of the specialized helpers of the conserver-restores, who are not required to master the whole theme of conservation-restoration, but are extremely able in accomplishing single tasks. For instance, some years ago in 2008 after an interregional research funded by ESF, some Italian regions introduced a set of professional profiles having different EQF levels: e.g. EQF 7 (Site Responsible for architectural conservation works), EQF 6 (Expert in diagnostics), EQF 5 (Technician specialized as building inspector, to be employed in the hypothesis of a planned conservation market inspired to Monumentenwacht models), EQF 4 (Mason and Carpenter specialized on historic buildings), and many others, also including professions related to museums. Each profile included a description

of activities, competence standards and training (Cannada Bartoli 2010).

Besides, more oriented master programs should be developed for the architect and engineer professions, which could enable a shorter post-degree path to get the special skills, which are required to work on historic buildings with proficiency.

6 CONCLUSION

To conclude, the topic of professions and professionalism makes several issues emerge about the existing gaps between theory and practice. While the advancements in knowledge and awareness in conservation suggest to implement specialized competencies, the contexts in which projects are carried out often risk to help the implementation of old and inadequate professional standards. This attitude is intended to reduce the costs, but in the reality it produces many problems, or what are called the costs of ignorance.

Therefore the remedial actions we could suggest in order to improve the market of competences in heritage industry have to be taken in the frame of an improved decision making. Otherwise, the problem of competences could be solved on paper, not in the reality.

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