

Inauguration of UNESCO Chair for preventive conservation, monitoring and maintenance, 24-25 March 2009, Leuven

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In late March the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation (RLICC) at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium (K.U.Leuven) inaugurated the UNESCO Chair on Preventive Conservation, Maintenance and Monitoring of Monuments and Sites, hosting a two-day international seminar. The seminar celebrated an achievement that stands as recognition of the Centre's international prestige and impact on the education in the field of built heritage conservation, spanning over more than three decennia. The UNESCO chair is established at the RLICC, in collaboration with *Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen* (MWVI) and the University of Cuenca (Ecuador). Gathering over 180 participants of more than 20 nationalities, the event consisted of a first day of key-note speeches and of a second day of three thematic seminars, each accompanied by a collection of related posters.

Honoured by the presence of the K.U.Leuven rector, Prof. M. Vervenne, of representatives of the Flemish Government Minister-President, Mr. K. Peeters and of the World Heritage Centre Director, Prof. F. Bandarin, the inaugural speeches have stressed the significance of the PRECOM³OS UNESCO Chair for the field of conservation. The Chair is aimed at promoting international collaboration, training and research activities related to the emerging concept of preventive conservation, through the establishment (since October 2007) of an open network that allows the exchange of



experiences among its worldwide-spread members.

The RLICC was established in 1976 in Bruges by Raymond Lemaire (1921-1997) under the umbrella of the College of Europe and has been part of the K.U.Leuven since 1981. Raymond Lemaire was the main author of conservation milestones such as the Venice Charter as well as the initiator of groundbreaking conservation and restoration projects in Belgium and abroad. Bringing together architects, art historians, civil engineers, archaeologists, sociologists and other young professionals with an interest in conservation, the RLICC offers an advanced international and interdisciplinary two-year study programme in the conservation and restoration of historic monuments and sites, under the presidency of Andrea Bruno and the directorship of Prof. Koen Van Balen, the UNESCO Chair holder.



Inauguration of the UNESCO chair and appointment of the chair holder

Left
Prof. Koenraad Van Balen and Rector Marc Vervenne
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Right
Rector Marc Vervenne and Dr. Alex Valck representing Janssen Pharmaceutica Fund
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The RLICC is joined in the establishment and management of the Chair by another important Belgian actor in the field of conservation, the *Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen* (Monuments Watch Flanders), an independent advisory body based on voluntary membership, founded in 1991 as a bottom-up approach policy of the Flemish government. As shown by its president, Prof. Luc Verpoest and by its director, Mrs. Anouk Stulens at the inauguration, *Monumentenwacht* has its philosophical foundations in the 1964 Charter of Venice, which states that the significance of the built cultural heritage can only be sustained if the physical assets are maintained appropriately and systematically. Also Bénédicte Selfslagh (ICOMOS International) argued that in the Venice charter most of the principles of preventive conservation were already stated. L. Verpoest reminded the audience that the Charter fostered an architectural approach to conservation and restoration, conceiving of heritage as an essential component of today's built environment. In other words, conservation is “in defence of architecture” and preservation is regarded as heritage development. He argued that if conservation can be too conservative, preventive conservation is very much progressive and even avant-garde. The sustainability of the *Monumentenwacht* approach is a case in point. Starting from the realisation that “prevention is better than cure” and that maintenance is only implementable through awareness of the owners and of the public, *Monumentenwacht* assists its members through on-site advice, regular condition surveys to heritage sites, long term maintenance planning and through maintenance reports to be used for maintenance grant applications. Four main conservation goals are thereby achieved: the retention of authentic material, cost-effective management, public involvement and raised awareness.

As the third main partner in the UNESCO Chair's establishment, the University of Cuenca (Ecuador) was represented at the inauguration by the rector, Prof. Fausto Cardoso. Through the collaboration project Development of Management Tools for Preservation of World Heritage Cities, the Cuenca University provides a specific input to the PRECOM³OS network, bringing to the fore the conservation issues pertaining to World Heritage (WH) sites in the developing countries.

The importance of the long term perspective on heritage conservation has been already seized and implemented by UNESCO, by introducing the Periodic Reporting about the state of conservation of World Heritage Sites. As announced by director Francesco Bandarin, the 2nd cycle of Periodic Reports, to be implemented as of 2010, constitutes a substantially improved long-term tool, compared to the first cycle. He stressed that maintenance and monitoring are neither independent, nor specifically heritage-related fields (think for instance about their importance in health care) and that they should be conceived as ‘flows,’ whereas restoration should remain a punctual, exceptional intervention. While noticing that the word ‘monitoring’ is actually missing from the World Heritage (WH) Convention, Cristina Cameron (Canada Research Chair on Built Heritage) stressed that one of the research challenges for the conservation of WH Sites is the continuously evolving notion of both the conception and



the perception of what heritage is (from the isolated building to the streetscapes, neighbourhoods and landscapes). Therefore, the credibility of WH sites should derive from their being paradigms of conservation and management. These exceptional sites should be models but this is unfortunately not always the case. One of the main problems is to ensure the retaining of the properties that motivated their inscription on the WH List in the first place. To this aim, C. Cameron put forth three main challenges for research and action: technical conservation, management and social involvement. The conservation of what often are so fragile resources has to deal with diverse menaces, ranging from the effects of climate change, such as the disappearing of water tables to the socio-economical problems of development, especially affecting the sites of the WH List in Danger.

The presentations and discussions during the second day of the inauguration have been structured in three thematic seminars, the main issues thereof having already been launched during the invited speeches of the first day afternoon. The first thematic seminar “Recording, documentation and information system for monitoring for preventive maintenance” was chaired by Mario Santana Quintero (Assist. Prof. RLICC, K.U.Leuven). The chairman's introduction put forth the problem of the “gap” often existing between what heritage conservators and users need and what technology users provide, in terms of the heritage documentation relevance. Only if it is correctly used can heritage documentation play an effective role in the safeguarding of the significance and integrity of heritage places, by providing timely and sufficient information for preventive maintenance strategies, argued M. Santana. The performance of heritage records and the ways to assess it was also addressed by Bill Blake (UK, ICOMOS Heritage Documentation committee). He maintained that an appropriate response to information requirements should be informed by understanding not only the significance of heritage places but equally the performance of capture techniques. Combining direct and indirect recording techniques (i.e. selective or conversely un-differentiated as to the points of capture) requires metric skills that must be developed and maintained within any organisation active in managing heritage assets.

With no less than seven other paper contributions, the first thematic seminar touched upon a variety of issues related to the use of documentation in preventive conservation. These included reviews of state-of-the-art surveying techniques such as image-assisted total stations, terrestrial laser scanning, digital photogrammetric solutions with off-the-shelf digital cameras and thermal imaging systems, as presented by José Luis Lerma, (Assoc. Prof., Polytechnic University of Valencia), or the panphotographic documentation - immersive and interactive panoramic images, as presented by Tito Dupret. Aspects of structural monitoring have been discussed by Koen Van Balen and Luc Schueremans (K.U.Leuven), introducing non-destructive monitoring techniques such as the hydrostatic levelling systems for accurate measurement of differential settlements, acoustic emission techniques, 3D-laserscanning or geo-electric measurements, illustrated through various case-studies.

Special issues related to scale, the quantity and nature of the collected data are raised when an entire city is at stake, as addressed by Veronica Heras (RLICC, K.U.Leuven), analysing the case of heritage documentation management in Cuenca (Ecuador) and the potentialities of databases and of heritage-applied GIS. The difficulties posed by implementing preventive monitoring and conservation in an extensive and complex archaeological site (such as the *Archéoforum* of Liège) were discussed by Nancy Verstraelen and Jean-Marc Léotard. They highlighted the potential conflict between conservation on the one hand and the ongoing archaeological research and public visitation of the site, together with the interferences induced by the surrounding urban milieu, on the other hand. At the scale of the individual monument or group of monuments, a special contribution was made by Friedmund Hueber (Chair of the Austrian Council of Monuments). He emphasized the importance of monument evaluation plans that are independent of any project. Prepared in advance and addressing the monument directly, instead of merely evaluating the impact of the proposed changes, the evaluation plans should foster preventive conservation by generating more certainty: among the owners as to the building's potential marketability; among the restoration project designers who can base their project on an already-authorized evaluation plan; finally among the public at

large, by eliminating the impression of arbitrariness associated with value assessments that are carried out after the projects' elaboration. Methodological improvement of heritage assessments is also the main goal of MAKSin, a new recording system developed by *Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen*, presented by Veerle Meul. To increase the effectiveness of the evaluation reports for conservation planning, the system relies on a sharper priority ranking of conservation strategies, focusing conservation efforts on the parts that are not only most valued but also most at risk.

Chaired by Alain Bourdin (Institut Français d'Urbanisme, Université Paris VIII), the second thematic seminar was dedicated to the social aspects of preventive conservation. A. Bourdin pleaded for the creation of multi-actor forums, where specialists and non-specialists work together to produce collective knowledge, in the form of a common vision, a project coalition that must exceed the limits of the site itself; acknowledging and assuming the consequences of gentrification or other social and economical disorders inevitably linked to urban rehabilitation projects. This implies a "moderate staging" that prefers "conscious conservation" (conscious about its inevitable consequences) to "authenticity." Similarly, more modest, gentle and clever tactics to safeguard monuments were advocated by Hsien-yang Tseng, (RLICC). Through four cases of negotiating with demolition in Taiwan, he stressed the need of emphasizing the common instead of the competing values, of raising the public awareness and confidence in the legal system, especially in a context of contested identities such as the post-colonial one. These ideas were generated by the study of apparently paradoxical situations such as the case of a contested ruler memorial, in which listing may have accelerated demolition; the case of the leprosarium that revealed facing unhonourable history to be a painful lesson; the cases of Japanese colonial houses when the state became itself the promoter of demolition; or the case of individual civil houses in which listing may accelerate intentional demolition for fear of 'freezing' development. Consequently, H. Tseng proposed conceiving of "safeguarding as the management of urban desires."

In the case of vernacular architecture, preventive conservation and maintenance implies the transmission of immaterial, 'traditional' construction knowledge, as shown by Mariana Correia (Oxford Brookes University). To know how to maintain you must know how to build, you must understand the rationality of the original construction, argued M. Correia. Since most of the times, new materials and building techniques are proven unsustainable in traditional built environments, the challenge consists in generating awareness about and social involvement with the (re)use of traditional construction knowledge. Also the contribution of Meiping Wu (RLICC & Southeast University, Nanjing, China) touched upon ancient traditions in preventive conservation and maintenance. While before the 1950s, in China craftsmen were crying their services on the streets and owners were often building and maintenance experts themselves, after the 1950s, the state became the owner, communities were lost and conservation work has been under the government's auspices with the consequent decreased community effort and the loss of traditional preventive attitudes.



An interesting perspective on social values was proposed by Randall Mason (University of Pennsylvania) who addressed the fundamental yet little considered question, whether conservation is indeed an end in itself or rather the means to some other end (such as reconciliation, social well-being, prosperity, cultural comfort)? Social values are viewed as the non-heritage values of heritage places. They may be 'positive,' attracting new audiences to the heritage places (such as a contemporary art exhibition in an historical site) or conversely, 'negative,' running contrary to the wish to preserve (such as the sites of racial persecution or the places associated with other painful events). Since, as noticed by Marco Acri (University of Nova Gorica), for 'heritage people' community involvement is often a means to fund raising, one has to insist asking the question of what is actually being targeted: community development or heritage preservation or, in C. Cameron's words: is it conservation for revitalization or is it revitalization for conservation? Moreover, a more thorough understanding of what communities actually are, of what affinities bring individuals together, should be at the core of any attempt to approach communities through heritage with a positive and efficient reciprocity, argued M. Acri.

The third thematic seminar was dedicated to legal and economical aspects of preventive conservation, and was chaired by Nigel Dann (University of the West of England) and Terje Nypan (*Rijksantikwaeren*, Norway). T. Nypan started from the necessity to distinguish and eliminate the confusion that is often made between two different categories of heritage: protected buildings versus valuable but not protected buildings. Legislation is often insufficient in order to ensure that the second category of heritage gets sufficient reward for the many, highly profitable uses it is usually put to, including concerts and spectacles, conferences, shopping, production, books, maps, branding, leisure and outdoor activities. One also has to be aware of the inherent limitation of economic studies when it comes to heritage, since monetary value is not the main value of heritage. T. Nypan also addressed the often inadvertent impact of the EU directives on cultural heritage, such as by forbidding the commercialization of traditional wooden tar treatments, which rendered the maintenance of traditional wooden structures problematic. There is room he argued, to contribute to improving the EU directives on built heritage so they become less prescriptive and allow for more creativity.

N. Dann's reflections focused on the economical implications of preventive conservation, deeming it aspirational indeed, but nonetheless necessary and achievable. Heritage resources, just like natural resources are non-renewable; therefore it is essential to prevent any unnecessary loss. The inherent concerns for futurity and equity reinforce the essentially sustainable nature of preventive conservation. While informed management appears the key issue, it is however often frustrated by many drawbacks such as: financial short term thinking; the



fact that you actually get nothing 'new' from preventive conservation; the status of maintenance as a relatively low-stated profession; the fact that maintenance is relatively unattractive to contractors because of its limited scope compared to that of restoration for instance. In the end, in the UK at least, maintenance remains the individual owners' responsibility, since it does not seem to save the state any money. Indeed, government policies are sometimes at odds with conservation principles, more often than not being reactive rather than systematic and the public benefits of maintenance are not sufficiently evaluated. Here and there however, successful initiatives such as "Gutterclear", a maintenance service for places of worship in the Gloucestershire area, have shown that unsubsidized service in preventive conservation can be effective.

A historical perspective, addressing preventive conservation traditions in the Arab world was contributed by Dina Bakhom (Cairo), with regard to the centuries-old *waqf* system, a universal Islamic endowment system that remained operational in most Islamic countries well into the 19th century. When a built structure was endowed for certain social or religious use, maintenance and repair operations were among the first stipulations of the endowment, guaranteeing that the benefit of the endowed property will be continuously pursued. The contributions of Neža Čebren Lipovec (RLICC) and Angus Fowler (BAUDID Germany) investigated contemporary European contexts in which initiatives more or less similar to the Belgian and the Dutch *Monumentenwacht* have been or are being developed. N. Čebren focused on the organization Mámeg in Hungary, the newest *Monumentenwacht*, a network of free-lance 'monumentenwachters', called "monument maintaining technicians" in Hungary, comparing the economic and the legislative contexts, the motivations and actors that made the appearance and continuity of these institutions possible. She pointed out that, like in the Belgian case, also other '*Monumentenwachts*' started in relation to pre-existing crafts training centres.

These investigations trigger new perspectives on the principles of “minimal intervention” and “participative stewardship of heritage” through notions such as “grass root voluntarism” or “hedonic pricing.” A. Fowler’s contribution addressed the German case, namely the *Bauwacht* and the *Monumentendienst* and the possibilities and challenges for setting up a federal platform for preventive conservation, for generating sustainable markets for the conservation contractors and for reconciling long and short term heritage-related economical interests.

While the key-note speech of Webber Nodoro (Africa World Heritage Fund) pointed to capacity building as one of the main challenges for heritage conservation in Africa (weak institutional frameworks, inadequate training, a low level of information and awareness and gaps between decision making and the communities are typical problems), Rob Pickard’s (Northumbria University) presented approaches of the Council of Europe directed precisely towards the development of legislation and administration systems in the field of cultural heritage (the 2000 and 2009 guidances). The South-Eastern European experiences of the Council of Europe, in the framework of the Technical Cooperation and Consultancy Programme developed and followed a methodology consisting in heritage assessment, prioritized intervention list and preliminary technical assessment. As shown by R. Pickard, many of the Council of Europe’s recommendations and resolutions have been aimed at linking conservation with sustainable development: the 1966 resolution encourages individuals to perform maintenance; the 1985 Granada Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage refers to maintenance and mentions the importance of preventing dilapidation and of claiming compensations for deliberate neglect; the 2005 Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society speaks of maintenance and not of restoration; the 1997 Recommendation on sustained care of the cultural heritage against physical deterioration due to pollution and similar factors.

The key-note speech of Prof. Stefano Della Torre as well as the contributions of Stefania Bossi,



Rosella Moioli and Andrea Canziani, part of a joint research project lead by the *Politecnico di Milano* addressed the concept of “planned conservation” as a contribution to the development of the knowledge economy models, promoting culture as a new competitive context for the post-industrial society. S. della Torre stressed the role of the intellectual capital and the importance of “learning and unlearning”, as equally necessary processes informing planned conservation: keeping alive what is still alive, but at the same time “unlearning” traditional crafts that are betraying history. While S. Bossi examined the restoration company as productive actor in local development, R. Moioli investigated the opportunity of establishing a maintenance organization within the “cultural district” management plan. A. Canziani introduced the notion of the “learning-based cultural districts” as potential instruments towards culture-driven development, so that heritage becomes “an instrument for a sustainable and aware valorization.” Clearly, as pointed out by T. Nypan, cultural, geographical and socio-political differences have their influence on the possibilities of preventive conservation in different parts of the world, like for instance the old culture of maintenance in Belgium and even more in the Netherlands, where a large part of the landscape was created by human agency, or the fact that in Flanders, the monument owners only pay 16% of the real maintenance costs, while in many other countries, the state can not even pay for restoration. Possibly the strongest message of the different talks was the need of engaging the owners, the importance of communication training, of always asking who is actually going to benefit from preventive conservation?

Further information about preventive conservation and the mission of the PRECOM3OS network is available on-line at <http://precomos.org>.

More detailed information such as the key-note presentations and/or papers and invited speaker’s CV’s as well as the paper and poster abstracts of the three thematic seminars can be obtained by registering as a network member on the same web site.