

# The Impact of Conservation-Restoration Education on the Development of the Profession

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

23 May 2018,  
exactly 20 years after the founding day  
of ENCoRE in Copenhagen!

Centro Conservazione  
Restauro Venaria Reale, Turin

ENCoRE

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**Keywords:** Conservation-restoration; image; education; profession; legislation; society; Portugal.

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## **Abstract**

In order to contribute to the knowledge concerning problems faced by those who complete a master's degree in conservation-restoration and intend to enter the labour market, the Portuguese case is presented. Thus, the formative offer and the legislative requirements are introduced as well as a real situation in which the majority of works are treated by those who do not have sufficient education in conservation-restoration. The article also discusses the lack of visibility of conservator-restorers and the image they have as artists when they are recognized. It is argued that this image leads to restoration being considered an activity that is accessible to all, an idea that is fed by numerous short courses; volunteer programmes; and even some undergraduate and graduate courses that do not meet the basic requirements of ENCoRE. Finally, the ways in which a conservator-restorer can enter the labour market as well as the changes that seem to be underway in this field are mentioned.

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## Introduction

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**W**hen someone, after five years of study, completes a master's degree in conservation-restoration and tries to enter the profession in Portugal, what do they face? Unfortunately, they encounter a complex situation in which educational requirements have lesser importance than could be expected and find it difficult to have their education recognised as an added value compared with the amateurs and handymen that thrive across the country. It is likely that the situation is the same in many European countries, but no detailed assessment seems to have yet been done. Therefore, this paper intends to show how the transition from school to the labour market takes place from the perspective of one of the three Portuguese schools that are members of ENCoRE – the Instituto Politécnico de Tomar (IPT).

## Conservation-Restoration Education and Legal Requirements in Portugal

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Since 2001, Portuguese legislation (República Portuguesa, 2001) requires five years of higher education in conservation-restoration to enter the conservator-restorer career in public institutions under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, in accordance with the general guidelines of ENCoRE. The law does not expressly mention the number of years of education that is required; rather, it requires the possession of a *licenciatura* degree which, before the implementation of the 'Bologna Process', corresponded to a five-year degree programme.

A few years later, in 2009, another law stated (República Portuguesa, 2009) that conservation-restoration interventions in classified heritage works (or those in the process of classification), regardless of their ownership, must be preceded by a preliminary report with the grounds for the proposal 'prepared by an authorized specialist with an adequate higher degree and five years of professional experience following graduation'. Moreover, the law established that this was also the required curriculum for 'those who take the responsibility for conservation-restoration works or interventions in moveable heritage', even if it does not contain any provision relating to immovable heritage. Although there is no explicit reference to conservation-restoration education, the requirement that training and experience 'should be relevant in the intervention area of speciality' has been interpreted as meaning that preliminary reports and supervision of interventions should be the responsibilities of conservator-restorers with five years of academic study and five years of professional experience in the case of classified (or in the process of classification) moveable heritage (Remígio, 2010).

The necessary education in such cases is provided by the three Portuguese institutions that are members of ENCoRE by means of three-year bachelor's degrees and two-year master's degrees. Located in central Portugal, the IPT has offered conservation-restoration education since 1989 (Coroado, 2014), and its courses form a coherent set that is strongly oriented to practice (Cruz and Desterro, 2016). Further south, the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, also public, has offered conservation-restoration training since 1998 and is mainly oriented to conservation science

(Pina, 2014). In the north of the country, the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, a private institution, has also offered practice-oriented conservation-restoration courses since 2002 (Barata, 2014). In addition, these two latter institutions, part of the university education system, offer doctoral programmes in conservation-restoration, for which IPT has no legal permission to do so because it belongs to the polytechnic system.

## Legislation and Practice

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Notwithstanding the legal provisions, recent graduates of a master's degree face a reality in which education requirements to access the profession are less important than could be anticipated.

Firstly, the legislation has a very limited application scope. On the one hand, public institutions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture with conservator-restorer posts are rare (Figueira, 2015). Therefore, because those positions are seldom renewed, it is unlikely that someone can now join this public career. On the other hand, classified heritage (or heritage in the process of classification) corresponds to a small number of works. In general, heritage works are not included in any protection plan, and their owners, mostly individuals or local private institutions, are free to assign any intervention. Moreover, there are many small businesses operating at a local level that are often responsible for these interventions, either due to geographical proximity and personal connections or because they are willing to

work for less. In the case of movable heritage, their creation is not subject to any technical or academic requirements. Consequently, anyone, even those without any qualification in conservation-restoration, can provide *restoration* services as they are usually advertised. In some cases, there is no established business. Rather, there is only an individual who does casual work.

Secondly, even in the case of classified works or those in the process of classification, the legislation is not always applied. Some assert that is the most common situation (Remígio, 2017) and a Facebook group has been created to report, among other occurrences of heritage carelessness and damage, these cases in which the legal protection fails (<https://www.facebook.com/forumdeconservadoresrestauradoresdenuncia/>). These claims are reinforced by the conclusions of a survey conducted, in 2015, by the professional association of conservator-restorers among enterprises with conservation-restoration as its main economic activity (Pereira, Marçal, and Borges, 2017). The results suggest that there were 'significant shortcomings in the implementation and enforcement of the legislation', including 'the absence of preliminary report in an exaggerated number of tenders' and the existence of 'preliminary reports signed by technicians without proper qualifications for the purpose'. The survey also showed that the share of conservation-restoration firms in tenders decreased during the period concerned (2011–2014) due to the increased number of proposals submitted by enterprises operating in other areas, such as urban rehabilitation (Pereira, Marçal, and Borges, 2017). Probably, the situation resulted from the serious economic



crisis that affected the country and its significant negative impact on civil engineering enterprises, which saw heritage rehabilitation as a solution to their problems (Vieira, 2012).

## **The Image of Conservation-Restoration**

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The problems with the legislation and its enforcement are aggravated by the public image of conservation-restoration.

Indeed, although higher education programmes have been offered in Portugal since 1989, conservator-restorers do not have a status equivalent to that of the majority of other graduates, the lack of visibility being one of their key characteristics. Besides, when they are recognised, especially in the context of movable heritage, they have an image of artists, for which academic qualifications are not essential.

Concerning visibility, a significant case is the Vasco Vilalva Prize awarded less than two years ago to the conservation-restoration project of the church and tower of Clérigos, in Oporto, which are together classified as a National Monument. In the press release concerning the award, the awarding institution (the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian) mentioned itself, the members of the evaluation panel, and the institution responsible for the monument; praised, among other aspects that justified the award, the respect for physical integrity, the use of traditional techniques, the restoration of lost dignity and values, and the use of suitable conservation and restoration methodologies; but they did not mention anything at all about who developed

the project, established the methodology, and actually did the job. In fact, neither the conservation-restoration firm nor the conservator-restorers were identified. Nobody seems to have cared about them, and the omission remained in all the news that reported the case. In contrast, the honourable mention awarded to a work of architecture in the same prize edition was publicized with the name of the architect author of the project (Cruz, 2016).

Another illustrative example of this lack of visibility is provided by a book published in 2014 by the governmental service responsible for conservation-restoration, which describes the 25-year intervention on the Templar rotunda at the Convent of Christ site in Tomar, classified as World Heritage (Dias and Frazão, 2014). While the historical studies spread across four chapters, the texts, written by several authors, describing the conservation-restoration intervention, are compressed into one chapter that corresponds to no more than 18 per cent of the 350 pages that make up the book.

When there is no such lack of visibility, such as in the case of movable heritage, there is the problem of conservator-restorers' activity being perceived by Portuguese society as an artistic activity performed by artists. First of all, the problem manifests itself in that the conservation-restoration courses are incorporated, in the national classification system of education, in the fields of 'crafts' (IPT and Universidade Nova de Lisboa) and 'fine arts' (Universidade Católica). But the problem is also noticeable when some conservation-restoration intervention is publicly praised, and the media values almost exclusively the aesthetic

aspect that results after the intervention i.e. the unbelievable result and the alleged recovery of the original splendour, only possible due to the extraordinary talent of the participants. Obviously, in general, the Portuguese are not only unaware of the conservator-restorers' high-level qualifications, but they are also unaware of the values embedded in a work of art, the importance of authenticity, and the minimal intervention principle, for instance. Symptomatically, they refer almost exclusively to 'restoration' rather than to 'conservation' or 'conservation-restoration'.

Sometimes, however, the conservator-restorers themselves or their institutions give fuel to these ideas. An example is the title 'The Art of Restoration' given to a book compiled by the Portuguese conservation-restoration authority to outline the activity carried out in the institution (Albuquerque and Pais, 2007).

In part, the present situation results from the fact that until the 1970s, the activity that used to be referred to as restoration, including in official institutions, was performed almost exclusively by technicians with low-level qualifications, those who had learned the craft from another restorer through a master-apprentice system. In the rare cases in which this did not happen, the restorer was someone with training in Fine Arts and, often, some experience as a visual artist (Figueira, 2015).

## Restoration That is Accessible to All

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The greater value attributed to restoration than to conservation, the perception of restoration as an artistic activity, and the emphasis placed on the final artistic result easily gave rise to the idea that restoration is accessible to everyone, especially to those who have some talent.

In less demanding contexts with scarce resources, namely in some rural parishes, the treatment of works is usually assigned to someone without qualifications who just wants to help. A well-known case is that of the eighteenth-century wall painting in a church near Beja, very crudely repainted with enamel paint, explained by the parish priest as follows: 'I called an old man who said he was a painter and who stayed in the local nursing home. I commissioned him to repaint the walls. I wanted to improve that and so I did. I know nothing about such thing as heritage' (Carita, 2012).

This is an old case, dating from the beginning of higher education courses in Portugal (even though released much later); however, regardless of the important awareness-raising efforts of the church, similar situations continue to occur. One of these recent examples, widely reported in the press, is the case of thirteen life-size nineteenth-century sculptures freely repainted as part of a hobby course for retired people, in which nobody, including the instructor, had any conservation-restoration qualifications. Of course, the results were disastrous – to such a point that the professional association of conservator-restorers took a formal position (Borges, 2014) and the case was classified

by the church cultural heritage service as a 'criminal act' (Ecclesia, 2014). However, the treasurer of the brotherhood responsible for the space publicly declared that he was pleased with the results and regretted that not all sculptures in the sanctuary had been treated (Lusa, 2014).

The idea of restoration being accessible to all also originated in a large offer of short courses for the general public taught by instructors with a wide range of academic and professional qualifications, often without any conservation-restoration qualifications. There are weekend courses and courses lasting several weeks, but with a workload of just two or three hours per week. There are courses without practical components and others that involve work on objects, sometimes owned by the trainees themselves or the host institution. There are isolated courses and courses offered as part of a broader programme with several leisure activities, especially in the so-called senior universities, as occurred in the abovementioned sculpture cases. There are even e-learning courses allegedly on the conservation-restoration of textiles, ceramics, canvas paintings, and sculptures, each lasting 35 or 40 hours. There are courses in all shapes and sizes.

These courses, which appear everywhere, contribute to a vicious circle, because they feed the idea that restoration is an artistic activity that can be accomplished by anyone, which in turn is responsible for the existence of these same courses. Moreover, they increase the number of well-intentioned people who may offer their services to their communities.

Volunteer programmes launched by some institutions, including museums with important responsibilities, have had

similar effects on the profession and may also be the origins of immediate risks to heritage works. Although these programmes sometimes clearly advertise only conservation-restoration supporting activities and not truly conservation-restoration actions, it is not clear if this actually happens and the volunteers are aware of the distinction.

At another level, the master's degree in conservation-restoration faces competition from master's degrees that claim to offer training in conservation-restoration but do not comply with the most basic requirements adopted by ENCoRE. Some of these master's degrees have designations in their titles (alone or combined with other designations) such as 'conservation', 'conservation-restoration', 'heritage conservation-restoration', 'conservation and restoration of cultural heritage', 'science of conservation, restoration, and contemporary art production', or 'artistic heritage conservation-restoration'. Other courses related to rehabilitation fail to consider conservation-restoration as a specific field requiring specific training or seem to lack both the necessary balance between the various subjects that are crucial to conservation-restoration and the indispensable practical component that provides the opportunity for contact with real works and application of the theoretical knowledge, as stipulated by ENCoRE. Fortunately, most of these courses, from several schools belonging either to the university or the polytechnic system, both public and private, have never ran or are not currently being offered, either due to a lack of students or a lack of permission to host the courses from the national authority, although some of them are active and contribute to the problems of the true conservation-restoration graduates.

In recent years, some conservator-restorers in Portugal have advocated the need for a professional order or, alternatively, the accreditation of conservator-restorers, but the professional order seems to be out of the question and the accreditation is unlikely to happen in the near future. Besides, its effect on the problem would be minor unless a change in the heritage consciousness occurs, something that requires time and persistence.

### **Entry into the Labour Market – Present and Future Prospects**

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Contact with former students of IPT suggests that, at present, the transition to the labour market occurs mainly in one of two ways: joining a large conservation-restoration enterprise operating at the national level (or regional in the case of the islands) or starting a small business, alone or in partnership with a course mate, designed to meet local needs.

Since the catchment area of the IPT for conservation-restoration is national, and students come from different regions of the country – where they tend to return after graduation – these small businesses are scattered across the country, and such conservator-restorers monopolise their locale using their personal connections. This physical proximity to potential customers makes it possible to moderate the effects of the unfair competition from professionals of other areas or mere amateurs, but it also makes it difficult for new graduates to start a business.

Market offers other than personal initiatives have been increasing significantly in recent times, and currently, job offers and recruitment by some of the major enterprises and some local institutions are frequent. The recovery from the severe economic crisis that recently affected the country and the fact that some of the largest companies have been extending their activity abroad are likely the main reasons. Moreover, there are other developments that may help improve the situation. Considering the importance of church heritage in Portugal, the measures that have been taken by its service of cultural heritage, namely the actions taken to raise awareness about heritage values and the care they deserve, probably will lead to greater caution in terms of choosing who will be responsible for future treatments. Besides, there is also the pedagogical effect of news about bad interventions that have been reported lately by the media with a critical tone (e.g. the case of the sculptures). We hope that this effect will mitigate the obstacles faced by new graduates in conservation-restoration.

## Conclusion

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In Portugal, despite the legal rules that have established the need for a minimum of five years of higher education in conservation-restoration for access to some careers and for taking responsibility for certain interventions in cultural heritage works, the legislation is of limited application, and the complete absence of academic requirements is actually the rule in the majority of cases. In addition, conservator-restorers have a status that is inequivalent to



that of the majority of other graduates. They lack visibility and, in the case of movable heritage, are viewed as artists who carry out activities that can be performed by anyone. As a result, recent graduates of a master's degree face unfair competition from many without any education in conservation-restoration, with clear negative consequences for heritage. The situation is also fed by those who attend the many short courses that appear everywhere, volunteer programmes, and even undergraduate and graduate courses offered by university and polytechnic schools that do not follow the basic requirements adopted by ENCoRE. However, some improvement in the situation appears to be occurring.

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