

Preventive conservation and maintenance of architectural heritage as means of preservation of the spirit of place

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Abstract

The safeguarding of the spirit of place depends on the connection between people and their heritage. Maintenance and monitored based preventive preservation involves more people and local craftsmen in the process. The paper investigates some examples of different implementations of maintenance services in Europe according to the Dutch model of Monumentenwacht, namely in Belgium, in Denmark and in Hungary. Their role as stimulator of enhancement of traditional crafts is examined, as they are considered to contribute to preservation of local intangible heritage and to community involvement. The role of such organisations as (independent) supporters to heritage owners or site managers is highlighted.

1. Introduction

Preventive conservation is generally¹ considered to imply measures to minimize the deterioration and damage of heritage, thus avoiding major restoration interventions. Although maintenance has been advocated already by the Athens charter in 1931 and formalized with the Venice Charter (1964, art.4), preventive conservation has only gained importance in the last fifteen years.² Regular monitoring, control of major causes and routine maintenance with small repair are its core activities. Maintenance of large building stocks requires an important and “diluted” human resources, it has the potential to call for a large community participation activity. The local public involvement is twofold; on the one hand, owners of buildings become the main actors. On the other hand, specific traditional craft skills for executing “small repair” on historic local material are required, in view of preservation of material authenticity.

The preservation of the spirit of place is based on local identity elements, hence maintenance as part of a daily link with the environment appears to be a great potential. While this attitude is largely known for more tradition-linked societies, in Europe it is not as obviously present, yet it exists. The present paper investigates the connection between crafts and maintenance in some countries that established a “Monumentenwacht” organisation.

2. Traditional crafts and maintenance

2.1 Crafts in the conservation of built heritage

Crafts are retained to be often highly specific to the locality in which they are produced, especially in relation to the availability of materials as well as particular needs.⁴ Due to the “familiarity with materials”, local craftsmen contribute to repair and

¹ Different national (Park Service USA, National Trust England, GCI) and international definitions (ICCROM, World Monuments Fund, UNESCO) comply with this baseline.

² Kathleen DARDES et al. (2000), *Preventive Conservation – A discussion*, GCI Newsletter 15.2., Summer 2000.

³ Setha Low, Yi-Fu Tuan? Definition of spirit of place

⁴ Lucy DONKIN (2001), *Crafts and Conservation: Synthesis Report for ICCROM*, 21 June 2001, p.12

maintenance with local resources. Several documents⁵ underlined this link, so since the EC conference in Fulda in the early 1980s the importance of the relation between crafts and preservation of the built heritage in Europe has become evident. Consequently, crafts-training centres were founded and their know-how used in conservation projects.⁶

The specific relation between crafts and maintenance has been clearly “where building materials are perishable as with wooden, thatched and earthen structures.”⁸ This refers to parts of the world where monuments and vernacular architecture are built in such materials and their conservation is carried out in traditional cycles of repair. Crafts are an obviously discernible and intrinsic element with high social relevance in traditional societies sharing a cyclical perception of time. In the post-industrial fragmented western societies with a linear perception⁹ of time the obvious practical and social role of crafts is less evident if compared with the importance of material evidence. However, their latent role could re-arise with “grassroots spirit” where people in a global society seek for local identity and its preservation through cultural legacies.¹⁰

2.2 Maintenance in “Monumentenwacht”

Preventive conservation in heritage is more known from the world of museum conservation practices (GCI), from where most of the definitions derive. However, preventive conservation of built heritage exists since the 1970s in Europe as a maintenance service for monuments and valuable buildings. It is called “Monumentenwacht” (MW) or “monument watch”¹¹.

The first organisation started in 1973 in the Netherlands on request of a group of monument owners. Annual inspection, report and advice about appropriate maintenance were and are the main tasks of this non-governmental organization. Teams of mostly two inspectors, with experience in building and restoration projects perform yearly inspections of buildings, from roof to basement in order to provide to the owner a thorough report on the condition of the building, with specific advice and timeline of actions to be undertaken.

Despite a first critique from the contractor’s side that MW was stealing their job, it soon became clear that the reality is rather the opposite. Since the *watchers*’ main and only duty was to inspect, and not intervene, by spotting all the work to be done they steered activity in the sector.¹² Dealing with historic structure, traditionally produced pieces of material or traditional, locally developed crafts were needed to preserve the material authenticity of the place.

⁵ Several documents stress the significance of crafts for the preservation of the built heritage (Amsterdam Convention 1975, Burra Charter 1979), while it is most strongly advocated by the Charter for the preservation of Vernacular heritage 1999 in the Guidelines in Practice: “The continuity of traditional building systems and craft skills associated with the vernacular is fundamental for vernacular expression and essential for repair and restoration of its structures.”

⁶ The examples are plenty, the most representative are: Deutsches Zentrum für Handwerk und Denkmalpflege, Propseti Juhannesburg Fulda E.V. (Germany), Handwerkskammer Kassel (Germany), S. Mikovini Public Secondary School (Slovakia), Gaudi Institute, Barcelona (Spain). Information retrieved from UEAPME, SEMA (2000): Promoting creation and development of sustainable employment in the rare crafts sector, European Commission, pp.43-44.

⁷ Cfr. “Traditional buildings preservation and building crafts conservation”. www.traditionalbuildingcrafts.org

⁸ DONKIN (2001): 15.

⁹ Stephen DAHL (2002), *Communications in Cultural transformations, Cultural diversity, Globalization and Cultural convergence*, <http://stephweb.com/capstone>, London, p.11.

¹⁰ The role of grassroots in maintaining control over housing, urban sacred spaces and neighborhood real state in relation to sense of place was researched by Manuel CASTELLS (1983), *The city and the grassroots*, Berkley, University of California.

¹¹ Not to be confused with the International Monument Watch organization based in N.Y.

¹² Anouk STULENS (2000), *Monument Watch in Flanders: an outline*, in: “Proceedings of the First International Monumentenwacht Conference”, Amsterdam, 15-16 September 2000, p. 15

3. Examples

3.1 Belgium – Flanders

Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen

The Belgian non-profit organisation started in 1991, on the example of the Dutch model. However, the Belgians set the organisation up in a slightly different way, so start it from the regional¹³ level where an umbrella organisation – Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen (MWV) was created to take over the coordination and training activities of five separate independent provincial organisations. They execute the inspection and write the reports for their members. The starting funds were provided by the King Baudouin Trust as well as from the different provincial authorities. Today the organisation's income is manifold, 70% of budget comes from the Provinces, 20% comes from the Flemish Region and 10% comes from membership fees.

The service is offered to members of the organisation who are owners or managers of listed monuments or of valuable historic buildings. Further major differences refer to the profiles of inspectors since the Belgian teams are always composed of one architect with specialisation in restoration and a craftsman with practical experience. Since 1997, the special profile of “interior inspector” was introduced for people dealing with inspection of interiors and movable objects. Beside inspecting buildings, one of the core activities and objectives of MWV is awareness raising. It is primarily achieved through the communication with building owners, usually taking place over a cup of coffee after the inspection but also through seminars and information campaigns addressing a wider audience. Lately MWV has started two new fields: the inspection of historic boats¹⁴ and of archaeological sites¹⁵.

The meaning and success of MWV is proven by the increasing number of its members; the 4700 in 2006 grew to 5130 in 2007.¹⁶ The raise in awareness and involvement of owners can be traced also in the increase of the number of non-listed buildings: in 2006 these represented 44% of all owners, whilst in 2007 it grew to 48%. Here we need to recall that the Flemish legislation on cultural heritage contributes greatly to the increase of the maintenance attitudes as it foresees special grants for maintenance of monuments.¹⁷ However, several Provinces instituted themselves special granting systems for the maintenance also of non listed buildings, provided that they become MWV members.

Training in traditional crafts

Research on crafts in Europe has already pointed out that Belgium has developed clear structures connecting maintenance and traditional building crafts.¹⁸ Between 1995 and 2001 the Flemish Centre for Craftwork (VCAR) and restoration was in charge of training as apprenticeship and promoting crafts, however, after its dissolution three organisations took over its task.¹⁹

¹³ We notice here that Belgium has a federal system, where the two regions, Vlaanderen and Wallonie, work separately and independently. Thus the regional level here is an equivalent for national level. For more reading <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/belgium>.

¹⁴ The inspection of historic boats started in 2008 with a team of two specialists.

¹⁵ The archaeological inspection is under preparation, the feasibility study was carried out in May 2008.

¹⁶ Statistics from Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen vzw, *Jaarverslag 2007*, Antwerpen, p. 27.

¹⁷ Cfr. Myriam GOBLET et al. (2001), *Belgium*, in: “Policy and law in heritage Conservation” (ed. Robert PICKARD), Council of Europe.

¹⁸ UEAPME, SEMA (2000): 69.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.44.

The *European Centre for Restoration (ECR)* in Zolder (Limburg region) is an NGO that offers three types of courses: a yearly basic course for anyone well-motivated, another for workers who then become craftsmen of the centre itself and specialised courses. The courses thought embrace several traditional building techniques, including also bricklaying, repointing mortar, roofing in slates, thatched roofing, straw roofing, plaster techniques, glass restoration, traditional smiths' works. Although the courses are thought in small groups and not as apprenticeship form, the continuous man-to-man transfer is ensured. The second profile of the workers is the one directly related to maintenance since these professionals are then employed in maintenance work. The link with the inspection work of MW is direct as the works identified by MW as urgent repair are then carried out by the "ECR maintainers", while further repairs are also undertaken by other trained craftsmen. However, we stress that ECR bears a clear social stamp as it provides training for unemployed and thus fluctuates with the unemployment index.

EUCORA is the other Flemish NGO providing the same trainings as ECR, in Bruges. A third NGO, Argonaut, is specialised in training in basic crafts needed for the conservation of ships. Here as well, the social engagement is strong as the primary task is providing training for unemployed. Trained for small and basic repairs of ships, these people are then involved in the maintenance. Its activities are a potential for enhancement of crafts in view of the developing MW inspection of historic boats.

Overview

The Flemish context shows the feasibility of linking maintenance and crafts in a structured way. This is enforced by the subsidy system of the Flemish region since the craft centres received grants through the Building sector while the Flemish institute for immovable heritage (VIOE) contributes for courses related to conservation. Considering the abovementioned regional subsidies for maintenance of monuments as well as the provincial subsidies for non-listed buildings, we notice a clear raise in awareness on the cost-efficiency of maintenance by the authorities. A collateral effect is the increase in craft skills demand as well as in the participation of owners.

3.2 Belgium – Wallonie

Cellule de maintenance – IPW

The French-speaking region of Belgium had also developed a MW type of NGO in the early 1990s²⁰ but later converted it into a service (*Cellule de Maintenance*) of the regional institute for heritage (*Institut du Patrimoine Wallon - IPW*). At present the major maintenance activity is related to the assignment of maintenance subsidies for monuments, buildings on the "safeguard" list and buildings in legal procedure to be listed. The service is very strict in defining what maintenance works could be subsidised: these can be "preventive or curative works, provisional or definitive, with the scope to prevent further degradation of a built good and without compromising its future restoration."²¹ This way, owners learn to differentiate between intrusive and non-intrusive interventions, while small timely repair with traditional techniques and materials is recommended. In order to receive a subsidy, owners have to submit a report on the works to be carried out on their building. This can be done by any

²⁰ Jean Marc NENQUIN, Presentation of maintenance of heritage in Wallonie, held in Mons on 18 June 2008.

²¹ Ibid.

contractor or worker, although often the service helps defining clearly the problems or describing the first building inspection, even though “inspection” is not their first task.

Centre la Paix Dieu

Envisioning sustainability and integrated conservation, the IPW promotes traditional crafts through training in the appositely established centre “Paix Dieu”, where the specialised craftsmen can be sought. There are approximately 40 different profiles trained, the types differ from short term to longer cyclical trainings. The different crafts trained span from generalist to very rare and specialised. General ones encompass masonry and stonecutting, wood carpentry, lime mortar preparation, repair of facades, repairing joints. More specialised comprise the traditional roofing with slates, the carpentry and roofing with *colombier*, the *cimentier-rocailleur* in parks and cemeteries – traditional for regions influenced by the late Renaissance *rocaille* art.

The trainings are offered to professionals in the construction sector, practitioners, authors and managers of projects, researchers and scientists. The annual statistics for the last eight years prove the great increase in interest in traditional crafts. The number of stages increased rapidly from 1999 to 2001 from 3 to 31 and up to 35 in 2007. Similarly the number of participants increased from 19 in 1999, to 162 in 2001 and up to 302 in 2007. An interesting shift regards the profile of the participants: while in the beginning 63% were craftsmen and only 11% each for workers and architects, in 2007 we find architects as the major participant group (30,6%) and workers (20,6%), that balanced the presence of craftsmen who kept a steady presence but are today only 16% of all. In view of promotion proactively, Centre la Paix Dieu has set up special short term seminars for municipality employees to introduce in practice the maintenance work and the related crafts needed.

The close collaboration between the IPW and Paix Dieu enables a consecutive proactive attitude, where assigned grants drive the demand of specialized skills. A direct circuit of information and advice is created that enhances the participation of stakeholders, thus a sustainable conservation.

3.3 Denmark: Raadvad Centre and Center for Bygningsbevaring²²

A “monumentenwacht” type of organisation was started in Denmark in 2000, within the at-the-time Raadvad centre for Crafts and restoration, a partly-governmental organisation. Based on the Dutch model, the “MW” was integrated as one of the action fields on the Centre named “House Examination System”. After structural and organisational changes took place in 2001, the core activities of the Centre, together with the MW service were integrated in the new institute Center for building care (Bygningsbevaring). The name Raadvad remained to the new structure that also partially deals with preventive conservation by offering brief inspection services.

The Centre for Building Care continued with its former activities, with primarily the training of craftsmen as well as the inspections and maintenance. Although the organisation became private since it lost the support, the inspection service continued. Due to the profit nature, the clients pay every working hour as well as the travel of the inspectors, there is no membership subscription. The main advantage recognized by the owners regards the independent and objective opinion and advice on the needed interventions. While contractors usually only point out the work to be done,

²² Information is provided from the contributions of Jørn ANDREASEN (2001), *Experience with the Danish monumentenwacht*, in »Monumentenwacht Conference Proceedings 2000«; Søren VADSTRUP (2001), *Addendum Denmark, Raadvads Bygningssyn – progress in 2000 and 2001*, in: »Monumentenwacht Conference Proceedings 2000«. Interviews and email with Robert LAU (2008), May-June 2008; Interviews and emails with Søren VADSTRUP (2008), June-July 2008.

the inspectors provide also information on "life-expectancy" of the building, so to help cost-efficient and sustainable planning. Inspections are carried out on any kind of building, listed or not, on demand of the owner.

The inspectors are craftsmen who received a particular training at the Centre, yet they do not carry out the works. This is done by independent contractors, several of which were trained at the Centre. In fact, the main training focus is on traditional building crafts, namely stone masonry, blacksmith, bronze gilding, wood carpentry. By training 120-130 pupils per year, the centre contributes to promotion of small trade, while it raises awareness on the significance of small repair, in view of preserving authenticity of material.

Managers of the centre critically pointed that the promotion of crafts is not necessarily tuned with maintenance as craftsmen aim at profit which is easily achieved through large restorations. Fine-tuning of aims – retaining as much as possible of authentic material - occurs only with craftsmen trained in small-repair philosophy.

3.4 Hungary: Mamég

The most recent implementation of MW took place in Hungary, where in 2006 the Mamég non-profit NGO was started based on the Dutch model. Its inspectors have the background of "monument maintaining technician", a locally developed profile,²³ as well as from different crafts. Despite their training, the inspectors do not perform major maintenance works since the main principles of "monumentenwacht" is to inspect only. Consequently, other skilled labour is involved. On the request of the owner, specialists are indicated, thus Mamég collaborates closely with the rare specialist in water-logging constructions. As to the traditional crafts, the main crafts that Mamég experts identify²⁴ as most related to their work are: smiths, roof makers, bricklayers and carpenters.

4. Maintenance as incentive to the preservation of crafts and their role in preserving the spirit of place

Which are the values of crafts and maintenance as to heritage? And what can be their contribution to the preservation of the spirit of place?

Heritage Value

Crafts have intangible qualities that are "inextricably bound up with the structure, values, history and identity of the communities in which they are practised"²⁵. Different dimensions heritage values²⁶ and authenticity can be sought in the crafts area: in the technique (both the learning process and the production process), in the materials, in the design, and in the spirit and feeling that it conveys as to sense of belonging to people and place. Maintenance as activity covers certain areas as well, namely the technique and the materials. Depending on the level of social "embeddedness" in the society that developed them, they comply with the

²³ The term "m_emlék_r" defines the specific profile of a technician trained for the protection and maintenance of monuments. A school providing this training exists in the city of Veszprém since a decade ago. Cfr. www.mameg.hu

²⁴ Interview with Marta Gerlei, Mamég, June 2008.

²⁵ DONKIN (2001) : 7

²⁶ We refer here to the Nara-grid developed at the Raymond Lemaire Centre for Conservation (cfr. Koen VAN BALEN (2008), *Experimenting with the »NARA-grids«, an evaluation scheme based on the Nara Document on Authenticity*, in: »APT Bulletin«, Special Issue«, 2008. To be published). The areas of authenticity in crafts have been identified also by Donkin (2001).

requirements of the UNESCO convention on Intangible Heritage as to preservation of social practices, rituals and events and of traditional craftsmanship.

Exemplary are the cases from traditional societies, such as the re-facing of the mosques in Mali, the maintenance of the “Courtyard of Idols” in Na-Yiri palace in Kokologho, Burkina Faso,²⁷ or the Gassho Style houses in Japan²⁸. The procedure of maintenance of a building intrinsically includes the traditional craft that has to be transmitted from members of the older knowledgeable group to their successors. At the same time, the procedure itself is a social event for community and bears its own cultural value as intangible heritage.

In Western societies this direct flow of knowledge from generation to generation is lost due to the individualisation of the society and the democratisation of opportunities. Nevertheless, the need for it still exists. The above examples showed that preventive conservation with survey inspections and consequent maintenance work does steer the need for crafts. Organised structures, such a Monumentenwacht, work with a bottom-up approach relating closely to the owners, firstly, enhance their participation, awareness and understanding. Secondly, by pinpointing the different scales of work to be done they can generate work for skilled professionals.

The different societies stress different dimension of values and different aspects of authenticity. The traditional emphasize the spirit and feeling value of it, while the post-industrial western one focuses on the authenticity of material and form. Yet, both inherently amplify other aspects as well.

Economic value

The relation between maintenance and crafts gains importance for their contribution to employment and economic growth. On the one hand, we have seen that contributes to job creation for unemployed, on the other it strengthens the local economic activities which can also help reviving, economically and culturally, historic centres.²⁹ Illustrative is the case of local crafts training and workshops in historic Cairo within the Aga Khan restoration and rehabilitation projects of Darb El Ahmar.³⁰

Linking local crafts to maintenance and small repair of built environment also the craft production starts targeting local clients, thus diverting from exaggerated production for tourism that often conveys industrialized mass production and cheap non-authentic crafts products.³¹

Role of maintenance and crafts as to the Spirit of place

The spirit of place embraces the unique, distinctive and cherished aspects of a place, and relates strongly to the sense of place and its impact on identity and sense of belonging. Preventive conservation of the architectural environment and the employment of crafts in it, address several of its aspect.

The connection with local history can be maintained through transmission of know-how, of traditional design, of the use of local materials based on tangible and intangible heritage aspects. Regular inspection and maintenance drives to the need of these crafts, so to preserve the material authenticity of the place. Involving the inhabitants, it enhances the link with the built environment through the sense of

²⁷ Cfr. Thierry JOFFROY, ed., (2005), *Traditional conservation practices in Africa*, ICCROM, Rome.

²⁸ mms://stream.unesco.org/culture/nhk/Shirakawa-go_and_Gokayama.wmv

²⁹ Meinholf SPIEKERMAN (2006), *Cultural heritage and urban development*, in: “Conservation in changing societies. Heritage and development”(eds. Teresa PATRICIO et al.), conference Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation, Leveun, 22-25 May 2006, p. 72.

³⁰ http://www.akdn.org/agency/akte_hcsp_cairo.html

³¹ DONKIN (2001) : 26-27.

responsibility – their rights and duties. The intrinsic aspects of the spirit and sense of place are thus strengthened.

Creating opportunities for economic growth and improvement of living conditions it adds an extrinsic value to these inherent aspects by offering the possibility to strengthen the bond with the place. As the examples above have shown, in the European contexts this demands for a well structured organisation and a democratic sustainability-bound policy.

5. Conclusion

Crafts are an important element of local identity, so to contribute to the spirit of place by addressing its social aspects as an activity as well as formal aspects by preserving the design and materials. In European contexts, maintenance helps preserving the authenticity of this heritage, of the material through small repair and, by employing crafts, the workmanship. Thus, maintenance represents a potential, but also a risk: with overdoing maintenance, crafts may gain in action but authentic material could also be lost.

In view of sustainability, “monument-health” inspection services could be established but they should remain supportive to the care takers as owners, site managers and craftsmen. Doing so this contributes to preservation of material authenticity but also safeguarding skills and craftsmanship for repair and maintenance embedded in local communities.