



The Challenges of Developing Heritage Conservation Studies in Science and Art Faculties

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Abstract

Higher education of heritage conservation is still prevalently accomplished in art institutes, while it has not so much similarity to other fields art programs. In some countries it is divided into two branch of “science for heritage conservation” and “restoration profession”. However, there is generally a need for studying various international experiences and planning new strategies for a more proper system of education that best suit the nature of conservation science. Moreover, the division of work between an artist (the restorer) and a scientist would not be practical in many cultures and regions. Iran has long entitled conservation experts as engineers, although conservation is still being taught mostly in art universities. However, it gradually approaches towards science and engineering educations along with programs in the field of architecture and urbanization. Masters in Conservation is taught at three public universities and a non-governmental university playing a major role, not only in Iran, but also throughout the West Asia region, with graduation of almost 110 conservators per year. On the other hand, in Sweden, the University of Gothenburg has also systematically addressed the academic training of conservators through the framework of science education. This paper, while reviewing the innovations in teaching conservation as science education, compared its advantages and disadvantages with the education at the faculties of art and humanities. For this purpose, a review of the policy documents and the syllabus of conservation programs from 1980 to 2017 has been done based on the experience of the author as the candidate of professorship in these universities and later the faculty member and head of conservation department at IAU-CTB with regard to the international ethical documents of heritage profession. This comparison indicates a remarkable difference between the concept of caring with minimum intervention as the main objective of conservation with the concept of creativity as the focal point in art education. This shows the necessity for a revision at a wider level through interdisciplinary cooperation at the regional and global levels that seems to be more properly accomplished in the framework of a faculty of built heritage engineering and environmental sciences.

Keywords: Syllabus, Conservation, Iran, Sweden, Curricula Session

1- Introduction

Since the ancient times to the early 20th century, the conservation of monuments and antiques was done by groups of local artisans. It is difficult to determine whether they were practically in the process of renovation or doing the restoration loyal to the originality [1]. During the 1970's, some artisans met international renowned Italian conservators in international projects in Isfahan and Persepolis. They completed their training by participating in courses in Italy. After their return, they undertook an important part in the process of implementation of new methodology as well as training apprentices in their workshops. These people, along with other artists who continue to traditionally repair objects in museums and historical archives, were evaluated by the government and, depending on their skillful qualifications, they received degrees of art equivalent to academic degrees. They also acted as lecturers at universities. However, the qualifications of these individuals have always been the subject of debates in universities.

Beyond this traditional craftsmanship, there is a conservation education system in three levels: undergraduate, postgraduate and Ph.D. Nowadays, conservation study programs are conducted at art universities. Considering the scientific aspects of heritage conservation and the historical context of the centuries of restoration in artisan workshops, the education in art faculties brings opportunities and threats. This paper examines this situation, and compare it with the opportunities for Heritage Conservation education in the field of the Faculty of Science (Engineering, Engineering). For this purpose, a very brief comparison between the present syllabus of Object Conservation M.A. and a Conservation M.S. is also provided.

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2- Historical evolution of conservation education in Iran

In 1976, a new faculty of art was established by the Al-Farabi University (Later Art University) in Isfahan in order to provide conservation scientists and conservation artists. In the following years, the (Pardis) faculty established several other departments for painting, architecture, crafts, photography and industrial design. Later it become independent from the Art University and acted under the title of Art University of Isfahan (AUI). Only three of those who shaped the idea of conservation department are still working in the Iranian academies and were interviewed for this study: Mohammad-Taqi Ashouri, Mansour Falamaki, and Rasool Vatandoust who themselves have studied humanistics, arts and science abroad in Paris, Rome and London. In spite of some of the differences between their ideas, one can see the summery of the views in the training curriculum for M.A. in conservation that were issued in 1990 respectively [3]. It should be noted that conservation education was officially launched since 1976, but because of the revolution the curriculum of this period is not available at present. The impressions and expectations of the conservation education in the abovementioned syllabuses are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Analysis of the M.A. Program for Object Conservation [3]

Education Content		Number of Courses	Units	Teaching hours	(%)	
Science	Scientific Theoretical Units (Chemistry, Physics, Biology, etc.)	3	6	102	7.7	19.3
	Laboratory work	1	3	153	11.6	
Conservation Workshops		2	9	459		34.7
Arts	Art history and Theory	2	7	149	11.3	11.3
	Art Practical Work	-	-	-	-	
General Units		-	-	-		-
Research Work	Research Method	2	4	85	6.4	34.7
	Thesis	1	8	374	28.3	
Total		11	37	1322	100	

The initial inspiration of conservation education was a postgraduate orientation to those who, after completing the undergraduate studies, were reluctant to pursue research and specialization in the field of historical conservation. A limited number of course work and then a thesis was included in the program which would result in a master's degree. A short time after the approval of the master's course, a new headline for basic education was approved, and immediately the admission of undergraduate students began [4]. It was apparently the first major change in the nature of conservation education. Three decades later, other colleges began to provide conservation education in parallel with the AUI. Two methods of conservation education were gradually formed throughout the country. While the new art schools in cities such as Tabriz and Zabol began their work by accepting undergraduate students, at the Non-Governmental Azad University in Tehran, a group of the same founders of the conservation department who at this time had left Isfahan, followed the idea of conservation education as a postgraduate orientation. In 2007, two new events transformed the conservation education for the third time. The IAU set about starting the first PhD degree in the country. At the same time, they were reviewing the M.A. degree program (still based on the ideas of 1976) to provide the necessary infrastructure for a bachelor-to-doctorate program. The revised program was approved by the Ministry of Science in 2007 for execution in all faculties of the country.



Table 2: Analysis of the M.A. Program for Object Conservation [5]

Education Content		Number of Courses	Units	Teaching hours	(%)
Science	Scientific Theoretical Units (Chemistry, Physics, Biology, etc.)	3	8	187	27.5
	Laboratory work	1	2		
Conservation Workshops		1	4	68	10
Arts	Art history and Theory	3	6	102	15
	Art Practical Work	-	-		
General Units		-	-	-	-
Research Work	Research Method	3	6	323	47.5
	Thesis	1	6		
Total		12	32	680	100

This program expresses its goals for conservation education as something in between the two worlds of science and art.

It was also attempted to make a PhD joint program by participation of Isfahan University of Technology and The University of Isfahan (as two main science universities) in collaboration with the AUI. This plan was not finally implemented and the conservation education continued to be conducted at the Art University. However, it was a long time that scientists from various discipline such as chemistry, geology and, to a lesser extent, biology and physics, had been working in conservation education. By 2017, 11 scientists have worked in conservation departments in Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz and Zabol, as lecturers, academic members and head of departments while only three craftsman with First Degree in Art Diploma has experienced teaching in such faculties. In 2013 another revision is made to the M.A. curriculum which shows the continuous approach toward a more scientific nature.

Table 3: Analysis of the M.A. Program for Object Conservation [6]

Education Content		Number of Courses	Units	Teaching hours	(%)
Science	Scientific Theoretical Units (Chemistry, Physics, Biology, etc.)	3.5	7	238	31.8
	Laboratory work	2.5	5		
Conservation Workshops		1	4	119	15.9
Arts	Art history and Theory	1.5	3	51	6.8
	Art Practical Work	-	-		
General Units		-	-	-	-
Research Work	Research Method	3.5	7	340	45.5
	Thesis	1	6		
Total		13	32	748	100

3- Case study: science faculty of the University of Gothenburg

To achieve a more detailed analysis of this situation, it is good to consider conservation education structure in another university at the Faculty of Science. The University of Gothenburg offers objects conservation as a specialization to the Conservation M.S. program. Therefore, it is different from the Iranian degree program at first from its general scientific view toward the concept of conservation which is regarded in Iranian education system as two separate program (object conservation M.A., and Built Heritage Conservation M.A.). Both the syllabuses of Conservation in Iran [6] and Sweden [7] define the program as science and sustainability oriented. Accordingly, conservation program is consisted of compulsory and specialization elective courses. Each student must start by some compulsory courses and gradually present his/her individual study plan which consists of the aims for specialization, the list of elected courses for specialization can be from the list provided by the faculty



and any other related course which exist in the University of Gothenburg or other higher education institutes. This may end with accomplishing a specialization project.

It is clear that the goal of the education system is not educating conservation scientists (as complementary to the artist's restoration work), but precisely as the sole specialist in the restoration of historical works or buildings. The program in the University of Gothenburg consists of 120 higher education credits, which consists of 45 credit courses related to the main field of study (and complementary studies within the selected specialization), Elective courses outside the main field of study (maximum 30 credits), and Degree project (30 or 60 credits). Since it is a more open syllabus than the Iranian program it is not easy to summarize it in the above-mentioned tables. The following table consider the program according to the list of compulsory course works and research project.

Table 4: Analysis of the M.S. Program for Object Conservation (University of Gothenburg) based on the compulsory courses [7]

Education Content		Number of Courses	credits	(%)
Ethics	Sustainability, Conservation Integrity, History and Theory of Conservation	At least 2	37.5	31
Individual Program	Literature, Placement, Project		30 Maximum	Max 25
Research Work	Research Method	2	37.5- 67.5	31- 56
	Thesis			
Total			120	100

4- Conclusion

Based on what has been said the following results is obtained:

- More and more conservation program is shifting toward science in Iran. Since 1976 till 2013 the share of art courses is reduced from almost one third of the program to 6.8 per cent. While the science courses are now the second dominant part.
- The master program in conservation is highly relied on the students' research (45.5 percent in the 2013 syllabus and more than 50 percent in the Gothenburg program 2012), this shows the importance of individuality in conservation education which is different from creativity.
- Iranian education system provides the individual specialization training by presenting conservation workshop which does not focus on any specific direction and give opportunity to the student to elect his/her work with the supervision of the board. The Gothenburg program has also insisted on this individual choice. Although this may also be achieved inside an art faculty the main problem is the fact that conservation profession is highly linked to new approaches in science such as nanotechnology and laser which needs close work with scientists and research institutes and needs a common platform and language.
- It can be also concluded that object conservation is becoming an individual branch of knowledge (which may be entitled as Science). It has a multidiscipline nature but has gradually define its ethics and methodology. Therefore, it is no more under the category of art history. It is the case that conservation has historically define its goals which extensively relies on the analyses of the material structure of the artwork. This precise approach implies a scientific nature no matter it may use parts of humanistic or artistic technics for producing its desired data or practical necessities or not. This is achieved in various forms depending on the contexts as apparently in the Iranian educational system, the conservator-restorer expert is still regarded as a scientist artist while in another system the experts have become scientists with more cultural considerations.



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