

## **Commentary on the ICOM-CC Resolution on Terminology for Conservation**

### **A reminder of the scope of this document**

As stated in the attached ICOM-CC Resolution, our scope is to facilitate communication in the international professional and public fora and in the literature, since the same word may currently have different meanings in different places.

It is not our intention to interfere with the local conservation terminologies already in use in many countries, some of which are clearly defined in a national professional code of ethics. It is also not our intention to be prescriptive, or to re-formulate conservation principles.

The ICOM-CC Resolution concerns four fundamental terms. The first is the “umbrella term” (Conservation) that encompasses all the measures and actions on the tangible cultural heritage. The other three terms (preventive conservation; remedial conservation; restoration) define three groups of actions which our professional community has widely recognized as very distinct in their aims, although many examples exist of single actions that achieve more than one of these aims. These three components constitute the whole of what we do, or aim to do.

### **The working method**

The Task Force (see composition below) was created by the ICOM-CC Board after the Board and Coordinators meeting (Los Angeles, October 2006). The Task Force worked primarily by e-mail to produce the first draft resolution which was presented to the ICOM-CC Board (Paris, November 2007). After revision, the text was sent to the WG coordinators. 19/23 responded. Their suggestions and comments were discussed and integrated during the recent meeting of the Task Force (Rome, March 2008). The present Resolution is the 23<sup>rd</sup> revised version!

#### *Note about the language issue:*

The text was formulated in English, by a group of predominantly non-native speakers. This was seen as strength rather than a weakness for the Task Force, since it represented the international forum that was our target. It is important to note, however, that the French and the Spanish versions (i.e. the other two official languages of ICOM) will be translations of the initial English document, not reworkings.

#### *Note about the Task Force:*

The Task Force represents different disciplines and cultures. Although most of the members were European, they have all been exposed to multicultural contexts.

#### *Note about the WG coordinators:*

The consultation with the WG coordinators was an essential step of the process. The purpose was to gain their point of view and experience as “coordinators” of multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary groups of professionals.

### **The approach**

The approach taken to prepare this terminology was to focus on the “actions and measures” which are applied to the tangible cultural heritage. There is no intention of discriminating between these (i.e. to express a judgment on their relative importance or on the order in which they should take place). There is no attempt either of describing the conservation decision-making process (including investigation and documentation) which is a fundamental preliminary to any actions or measures, and which is referred to and highlighted in the introduction of the Resolution.

The conservation “actions and measures” are identified and organized according to 4 (four) basic criteria:

- a. their aims, i.e. whether they address future deterioration, current deterioration, or past deterioration

- b. their impact on the materials and structure of cultural heritage items, i.e. whether they are direct or indirect
- c. whether they can be applied to only one cultural heritage item at a time or to a group of items
- d. whether their results can be seen or not on the cultural heritage items (i.e., whether they “modify their appearance” or not)

As much as possible, ambiguous terms were avoided, and a parallel sentence structure was adopted to illustrate the link between the different definitions. Definitions were also kept short (maximum 5 lines), in order to be usable and also easily understood by the larger public.

## **Deciding on the Words**

Distinguishing between the aims of “actions and measures” at first led to the following proposal: “Preventive conservation”, “Curative conservation” and “Restoration”, with “Conservation” as the all-encompassing word, the “umbrella term”.

While the words “Preventive conservation” and “Restoration” did not raise major discussions during the consultation process, this was not the case with the words “Curative conservation” and “Conservation”.

### **(a) From Curative conservation to Remedial conservation**

There was major disagreement about the term “Curative conservation”, with the following reasons given: it is seldom used in English; it is too close to the word “curator” with possible misinterpretation on who should do what; it is too close to the medical field; it gives the idea that we can return the object to an optimal physical condition.

Most frequently proposed alternatives were

- ✓ “Interventive conservation”: this could not be adopted since the word is connected with the nature of the action (i.e. direct) rather than its aims, and applies also to “Restoration” actions.
- ✓ “Stabilization”: this was not adopted since stabilization can also apply to “Preventive conservation” actions. It is also difficult to associate “stabilization” with some of the “curative conservation” actions such as “disinfestation” or “desalination”.
- ✓ “Remedial conservation”

The Task Force adopted “Remedial conservation” as the best alternative for the following reasons: it is well known in English, and it gives the idea that the action is to arrest a current damaging process or to improve the state of conservation. Although the term is also close to the human health field, as per the Webster dictionary, it gives the idea of correcting a situation rather than solving it.

#### *Note about translation*

It is important to note that in French, the translation will be “conservation curative”, and in Spanish, “conservación curativa”.

### **(b) “Conservation” as the umbrella-term**

In order to decide on the umbrella term, the final choice was “Conservation”.

The Task Force considered also “Conservation-Restoration” which was suggested during the consultation process. The pros and cons of both words were carefully examined, in particular:

“Conservation-Restoration” is the word used in the European ECCO code of ethics. It is in line with the ICOM-CC document defining the *profession* of the “Conservator-Restorer” (Copenhagen, 1984).

“Conservation-Restoration” implies that conservation and restoration actions are intrinsically linked.

However, it is only a historical compromise on a professional title (between south and north Europe). The word is somewhat clumsy and heavy, not user-friendly, and therefore not easy for communication with non-professionals, such as journalists or the public.

On the other hand, although “Conservation” cannot be used as a stand-alone word in French and possibly in other Latin languages, and although it does not embrace intuitively restoration, it is already widely used in English as an umbrella term. It is adopted by the specialized institutions such as AIC, GCI, ICOM-CC, IIC, CCI, etc. It is also the term being adopted in the current work of the European Committee for Normalization: CEN T/C 346 Conservation of Cultural Property, and its Working Group 1 on Guidelines and General Terms. It is also the word which was most supported during the consultation process.

In the end, the Task Force adopted “Conservation” as the umbrella-term.

#### *Note about translation*

It is important to note that in French, the translation will be “conservation-restauration”, while it will be “conservación” in Spanish

### **Other terms?**

In the consultation process, there were a few suggestions to consider other actions and therefore other terms which were also in use in the field, such as “reconstruction”. The Task Force considered that any actions such as “reconstructions”, “restitutions”, “copies”, etc. are out of the scope of this document because they cannot be considered as actions “on” the tangible cultural heritage, even though we recognize they may sometimes indirectly benefit original heritage items.

#### *Note about CEN glossary*

It is also important to note that the CEN/TC 346 WG1 definitions of terms will include a whole range of terms well beyond the main four terms being considered here, and that these will embrace second-order terms such as those above. It is expected that the CEN work on terminology (on which ICOM-CC is collaborating) will be open to public consultation later this year.

### **Issue of the “conservator-restorer” definition of the profession**

Although we used the term “conservation” as the umbrella-term, the resolution makes specific reference to one of the conservation professions, i.e. the “conservator-restorer”. This term refers to the document produced and adopted by ICOM-CC in 1984: “The conservator-restorer: a definition of the profession”. Considering the importance of this document, and until it is revised, the Task Force decided to keep the use of the term

### **Final note**

As with any terminology, the one adopted in this resolution will evolve and change in the future, according to the needs of a professional community itself adapting to changes in approaches to safeguarding cultural heritage in different cultures.

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