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PRIORITIES IN THE PROTECTION OF MUSEUM CULTURAL GOODS

Abstract: The paper covers the possible risk factors, especially taking into account the ten agents of deterioration of museum objects, described by the Canadian Conservation Institute. Guidelines are given to the responsible professionals in the museums who need to shape their own priorities in order to be able to respond to the challenges of all the risk factors for the museum cultural goods.

Key words: priorities, protection, museum cultural goods, museum documentation, destruction.

When we talk about protection as the first museological function, then we think of the categories within that function, such as: expert, legal and effective protection. The expert protection covers activities related to study and research, recording, creating documentation as an excess of value of the human mind. In this way, the information that the museum objects carry as cultural goods is protected. The legal protection is regulated by various legal acts and documents that guarantee the ownership of each museum object. The effective protection, in fact, is the factual physical protection of the objects as cultural goods in the museum institutions. All three categories need to be carried out in order to provide adequate protection of cultural goods in the museums.

The protection encompasses a complex of activities and standards that ensure removal or mitigation of the effects of the forces that cause deterioration of the objects and the information they carry. The protection of museum cultural goods begins with the act of collecting. Then, complex of activities follows, which should be in line with the international standards.

In terms of protection, museum cultural goods can be in two different conditions: regular, normal state, when activities are undertaken to provide environment for extending their life; and in a state of emergency, when certain risks arise which may cause destruction or damage to the goods found in museums, and thus destruction of the information that these objects carry.

The first state understands providing regular normal conditions, microclimate in the depots and in the exhibition space, taking into account the temperature standards (18-22°C), humidity (45-60%), strong brightness depending on the type of material the object is made of (50/150/300 lux) and UV and infrared rays (75 μ W/Lm). Also, in addition to securing microclimate conditions, activities are undertaken related to protection against theft, fire, biological agents, floods, earthquakes and other collapses, terrorist attacks, wars, etc. The ten agents of deterioration of objects in the museums, described by the Canadian Conservation Institute are:

1. physical forces;
2. thieves, vandals;
3. dissociation;
4. fire;
5. water;
6. pests;
7. pollutants;
8. light, ultraviolet and infrared;
9. incorrect temperature;
10. incorrect relative humidity.

We know that not all the necessary activities could be undertaken at once, so it is necessary to define priorities that will enable efficient execution of the task of protection of cultural goods. The priorities should be determined with an assessment of the risks that can affect the objects. So, the responsible experts in the museum institutions should perform risk assessment and in that way determine the priorities.

The activities to enhance protection should take directions towards the museum objects as cultural goods, towards the museum documentation in which there is an excess of value of the human mind and towards the staff - their training for the proper performance of the tasks in the field of protection of cultural goods.

It should be emphasized that gradual deterioration can occur at the stage where the objects are stored regularly in the museum institution, unless certain standard activities are undertaken and if there are no personnel with appropriate museological education. In this regard, the documentation too may suffer, or not meet the needs when it comes to dissociation. It can be manifested in two ways: firstly, inadequate action (irregular, imprecise, false data entry); and secondly, inaction (non-creation of documentation on cultural goods in museums). We

know that documentation is essential to all aspects of museum activities. The collections without adequate documentation are not true museum collections.

When it comes to emergencies, the ten agents of deterioration of cultural goods make the expected consequences from the disasters for the museum objects and documentation even greater. On such occasions there is a rapid destruction of the objects and sudden destruction of documentation. The institutions owning the cultural goods have prior responsibility for their care and protection. However, the non-governmental expert organizations such as the Blue Shield have an ethical obligation to contribute to their protection as well.

In the recent period, MNC of the Blue Shield in cooperation with ICOM and ICOMOS undertook certain activities related to various aspects of protection of cultural goods. Almost every year since 2002 we had forums on different topics, such as: elements for preparation of protection plans (2007); education of the professionals in the cultural institutions (2008); the storages and the protection (2011); the strategic priorities of the museums in Macedonia (2012) and others. This shows that the forums dealt with issues related to protection of the goods. The conclusions and recommendations of the forums were sent to the Ministry of culture and the cultural institutions. Some recommendations were taken into consideration. For example, activities have begun to rearrange the depots of some museums. However, many recommendations did not have any effect. Nevertheless, we have to be persistent in speaking out, so to persuade the stakeholders that things have to change. We are fully aware that all the needs of the cultural institutions, and therefore the needs of the museum institutions, could not be solved at once. Therefore, each museum institution should determine its priorities.

The ten factors of deterioration of objects in the museums, described by the Canadian Conservation Institute, should be taken into consideration here. While determining the priorities in providing protection of cultural goods in the museums, one should begin with assessment of the current conditions and the risk factors. Therefore, we need to know:

- What is the general security situation?
- How are the objects in the exhibition space protected?
- How are the objects stored in the depot?
- What is the situation with the documentation, its protection?
- What is the reason for the cultural goods to be in a state of risk?
- lack of furniture?
- lack of technical equipment?
- insufficient knowledge of what to do and how to do it? (education)
- insufficient initiative for this? (responsible leadership)
- insufficient understanding of the authorities outside the museum?
- failure to apply the standards for documentation keeping etc.?

Individual museums have certainly overcome some of the above shortcomings. But most are in an unfavorable situation. I would like to mention some of the priorities that may apply to individual museums. Of course, each museum institution determines its priorities on the basis of its own situation and conditions. But they must be related to some of the following guidelines:

1. updated protection plans;
2. exercises and simulations;
3. assessment of the risks factors for the museum;
4. list of priority objects;
5. staff training;
6. technical equipment of the depots and exhibition areas for control of moisture, heat, light;
7. unification and digitization of documentation;
8. reproduction of the documentation in three copies and dislocation;
9. directing the funds and activities towards the internal museum activity;
10. respect of the professional ethics.

The conclusion is that some aspects in the area of protection of cultural goods in the museums in Macedonia do not function from an organizational and financial point of view. Therefore, the following initiatives may be considered:

1. Establishment of an expert body within the Ministry of Culture specialized in the area of museums, which will be responsible to analyze the project proposals and monitor their implementation;
2. Establishment of a directors conference that will raise the current expert questions related to the museums' activities.

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