

Austria: State of the Art - ARCCHIP ARIADNE 12

Wolfgang Huber

Bundesdenkmalamt, Landeskonservatorat für Oberösterreich, Rainerstrasse 11, 4020 Linz, e-mail: ooe@bda.at

At the beginning of my State of the Art-contribution I want to throw a glance on the history and the general situation of safeguarding cultural heritage in Austria.

In the year 1850 the K.K. Central Commission für die Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale (Imperial and royal central commission for researching and preserving of monuments) was founded as the first professional and competent organisation of safeguarding in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy -without sovereignty, that means without jurisdictional or lawful power,

During the following period work was done by honorary conservators, for instance the well-known Austrian poet Adalbert Stifter, his name is connected with the preservation of many mediaeval monuments, for example of the very famous late-gothic altar of Kefermarkt in the northern part of upper-Austria (Oberösterreich), near the Bohemian border.

At the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century the important Austrian art historian Alois Riegl gave the safeguarding and protection a new theoretical fundament. His name is connected with the conception of "Kunstwollen", which means, that every period has its own artistic or stylistic idiom, which can't be measured in terms of a hierarchical system of values or quality. It was also Alois Riegl who propagated the so called "Alterswert" (the value of aging, the value of the use and its marks) in his pioneer work "Der moderne Denkmalkultus" (the modern cult of monuments). The object of safeguarding must not be beautifully restored but it should bear the signs of its age. "Conservation not restoration" was the program as well of Alois Riegl as the German Georg Dehio.

When Riegl was charged with the function of a Conservator General at the beginning of the twentieth century, he formed a statute of safeguarding of monuments based on the delineated safeguarding ideology. Institutionally practiced research, resulting in a scientific inventory, was the eminent precondition of safeguarding.

This conservatory method became the maxim of safeguarding of monuments in Austria as well as in the other parts of the monarchy. It also became the theoretical and practical foundation of the Austrian law on protection of monuments (Denkmalschutzgesetz) of 1923. It enabled the young republic to fulfill the safeguarding competence and duties on legal base. In spite of some amendments, the essence of this act remained the same till now: the centralistic conception of the Austrian federal office for the care of monuments (The Bundesdenkmalamt) with its branch offices in the federal states stood the test. This central competence of the state is able to keep safeguarding apart regional interests and politics. This form of administration guarantees also a concerted standard of methods and judgement.

Since the Austrian statute does not intend an active position of safeguarding - it is not possible to order specific actions or steps of intervention-, it is only possible to react passively to substantial threat, the Austrian federal office now has to operate under altered conditions:

After a positive development during the last decades safeguarding now is confronted with a new situation, in which neo-liberal demands for less influence of the state and the expansion of private rights threatens the intentions of this institution and tries to bring about a change towards a service-orientated company. But it seems that this contemporary phenomenon is not only limited to Austria.

Therefore the Austrian federal office combines three essential functions:

- Protection in form of administrative public authority
- Research
- Preservation, safeguarding of monuments (including information and workshops in practice and development)

The organisational scheme of the institution and its departments is as follows.

The head of the office is the president as the supreme decisive organ assisted by his bureau.

The Conservator General is in charge of scientific matters and has to arrange and coordinate all professional agendas.

The third agent in the headquarters is the Director of Architectural matters, concerned in particular with architectural conservation and the examination of considerable architectural interventions and alterations.

At the next level there are the central departments, for example the archaeological section, the inventarisation section, the section for historic gardens, the center for Art conservation or the center for architectural conservation.

Each federal country (Bundesland) is administrated in all materia of protection and safeguarding by the Landeskonservatorate (safeguarding offices of the federal country).

There should be an active interchange between the central and regional sections.

Now to the topic of this workshop.

Two of the above mentioned sections in the Austrian federal office of the care of monuments, namely the center of art conservation (Restaurierwerkstätten Kunstdenkmale) and the center for architectural conservation (Restaurierwerkstätten Baudenkmalpflege), are organized as laboratories practicing safeguarding, conservation and restoration on a high scientific and handicraft level, developing and testing old and modern technologies and methods.

The first one, the center for art conservation, is mainly concerned with exemplary restorations to improve the standards and to fix the level of restoration. The other, the center for architectural conservation, established in the conveyed cartusa of Mauerbach near Vienna, is engaged to explore and to determine the measure of conditions and proportions of the architectural object and of interventions in its system - in contrast to similar institutions in other, especially romanic countries, which are rather working like schools for studying historic architectural forms. The ideology is based on the long-lasting effect of the use of appropriate traditional materials as an encouragement and stimulus to the craftsmen and conservators, rather based on high quality craftsmanship supported by natural scientific methods than on highly sophisticated technologies.

There are workshops offered to handicraft people working on building sites to improve the acceptance of the object and its structure, the handwriting of the ancestors and to learn again the old techniques by support of natural science and by assistance of safeguarding. Interdisciplinary symposions and workshops are held to combine scientific analysis and art historical, aesthetic demands.

This multidisciplinary method is trained by specific projects, for instance architectural surfaces, conservation of windows, lime-techniques, stone-conservations and more.

The results are documented and published in notebooks for architectural conservation.

Seminars are held in collaboration with the University of Technology in Vienna. They are supposed also to show how to conduct building examinations and analysis and to ply the individual craftsmens' trades under the direction of experienced master craftsmen. In addition, practical

training courses for traditional crafts and building techniques are offered for masons, stonemasons, painters, blacksmiths, joiners and other crafts. These training programs are of increasing importance.

At the moment, there is no regulation in Austria concerning the on-the-job training for students who have chosen monument preservation or safeguarding as their elective curriculum. Therefore there is no academic degree for special studies in safeguarding of monuments.

But there are some partners, who impart and teach practical knowledge in conservation:

The Vienna Polytechnic (Technische Universität) with its natural scientific institutes, the faculty of architecture and the institute of art history, safeguarding an industrial archaeology.

The technical college for revitalisation in Krems.

Restoration Institutes are established on the two Universitys of Art in Vienna (the former Akademie der bildenden Künste (Academy of Fine Arts) and the Akademie der angewandten Künste (Academy of Applied Arts).

The association of restorers (Österreichischer Restauratorenverband, ÖRV) Austrian section of the IIC is a professional association representing their members and organizing symposions on results and technolgies in restauration which are published in a respectable journal.

Finally, I want to show some pictures demonstrating the practice of the center of architectural conservation and an example of safeguarding from my personal practice. Having a degree in art history, I am working as an adviser in safeguarding in the province of Upper Austria.