

Value supported decision-making in paper conservation: Research announcement

Tomada de decisões baseada em valores na conservação de papel: Perspectivas de investigação

Toma de decisiones y valores en la conservación del papel: perspectivas de investigación

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ABSTRACT:

This research announcement outlines the fundamentals, initial reflections, objectives, and methodology of a research project developed jointly by the University of West Attica, Greece, and the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. It presents the variability of the concept of value in the context of the preservation of cultural assets, the diversity of the terminology and the scarcity of specific discussions in the area of paper conservation. It outlines the conceptual contribution based on the relationship between values, historical evidence, and layers of data in cultural objects, as well as on the impact of conservation procedures on their interconnections. Finally, this article supports both the societal and material approach to decision-making in preservation and conservation through the interdisciplinary investigation of paper-based objects to understand them as complex artefacts.

Keywords: *Value-led conservation. Decision-making. Concepts. Paper conservation.*

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RESUMO:

Este artigo descreve os fundamentos, reflexões iniciais, objetivos e metodologia de um projeto de pesquisa desenvolvido em conjunto pela University of West Attica, Grécia, e pela Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brasil. Apresenta a variabilidade do conceito de valor no contexto da preservação dos bens culturais, a diversidade da terminologia e a escassez de discussões específicas na área da conservação de papel. Delineia a contribuição conceitual baseada na relação entre valores, evidências históricas e camadas de dados em objetos culturais, bem como no impacto dos procedimentos de conservação nestas camadas. Finalmente, o artigo apoia a abordagem social e material para a tomada de decisão em preservação e conservação por meio da investigação interdisciplinar de documentos gráficos, compreendendo-os como artefatos complexos.

Palavras-chave: *Valores em conservação-restauração. Tomada de decisões. Conceitos. Conservação de documentos gráficos.*

RESUMEN:

El presente artículo describe la fundamentación, reflexiones iniciales, objetivos y metodología de un proyecto de investigación desarrollado entre la Universidad West Attica, Atenas, Grecia, y la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais, Brasil. Aborda la variabilidad del concepto de valor en el contexto de preservación del patrimonio, la diversidad de la terminología y la escasez de discusiones específicas en el área de conservación de papel. Presenta una contribución conceptual basada en la relación entre valores, evidencias históricas y de datos/informaciones presentes en objetos culturales, así como en el impacto de procedimientos de conservación en dichos datos. Los autores defienden el abordaje social y material para la toma de decisiones en relación a la preservación de la complejidad en los artefactos gráficos.

Palabras clave: *Valores en conservación-restauración. Toma de decisiones. Conceptos. conservación de documentos gráficos.*

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1 Values in the context of preservation of cultural heritage

In 1901 a manuscript containing the old statutes of a religious brotherhood in the region of *Minas Gerais* (CAMPOS; ALMADA, 2020), Brazil, was donated to the state archive (*Arquivo Público Mineiro*) with the justification that it no longer had any value for its institution of origin due to the loss of its legal function and because it was “moth-eaten”. It is an illuminated manuscript made in 1725, a representative of the art of calligraphy from the Brazilian colonial period, which had already significantly deteriorated and lost some of its constitutive elements. In its trajectory over time, the manuscript underwent a series of changes in its material structure, whether due to direct intervention or the negligence of those responsible for it. The care and refinement given to it during its creation reveal a position of honour in the society set of values in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which required special procedures to preserve it. According to Campos and Almada, “the passing of time meant that the book lost its position and thus no longer received the care necessary for its preservation, opening breaches for the attack of insects, excess of humidity, or even the disassociation of some of its elements” (CAMPOS; ALMADA, 2020).¹ When it was incorporated in a public collection, another set of values, such as aesthetic, documental, and historical values, were attributed to it, which were sufficient to justify the care taken for its preservation.

The history of this manuscript is a paradigm of how values attributed to objects change over time and how they are related to their utility. Similarly, it reveals how the notion of values is prevalent in the management of cultural heritage and has a very important bearing on decision-making in all fields, especially in conservation (AVRAMI *et al.*, 2000; DE LA TORRE *et al.*, 2002; MASON, 2002; AVRAMI *et al.*, 2019). The term value-led conservation reflects that importance. According to Muñoz Viñas, function, significance, and meaning carry similar connotations in the cultural management context, so that “value-led and functional conservation are very similar in their grounds and principles” (MUÑOZ VIÑAS, 2005, p. 180). Several values are mentioned in the relevant literature: historical, artistic, aesthetic, societal, religious, political, economic, and educational, to name just a few. Cultural heritage is ascribed to these values consciously or unconsciously by various groups of people with different motivations (economic, political, cultural, and spiritual, amongst others) (AVRAMI *et al.*, 2000). Several authors discuss conflicts among competing values, and the fact that often enhancing one of them through a specific type of conservation treatment may reduce

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another, as shown by Muñoz Viñas (2005, p. 181) and Avrami *et al.* (2000, p. 8). However, the exact meaning of the terms used for the appeal of the various values is often implied and rarely accurately defined.

A number of theories have introduced value systems, yet their fields of application and the definitions of the various values vary. The two most important historic theories relevant to the conservation of cultural heritage were introduced by Alois Riegl (*Moderne Denkmalkultur: sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*, The Modern Cult of Monuments: its Essence and Origin) (RIEGL, 1982) and Cesare Brandi (*Teoria del Restauro*, Theory of Restoration) (Brandi, 1963). Riegl's values theory (*Denkmalwerte*, Monument Value) was developed for monuments and Brandi's for works of art.

It is interesting to take a closer look at the definitions of certain values by both authors. For example, Riegl's Historical Value (*Der historische Wert*) considers a monument as a document of the past (documentary value). In order to function as such, it must be preserved/restored so that all aspects of its materiality continue to bear all original information for historians and other specialists. In other words, Historical Value is best served when the monument remains unchanged through time (RIEGL, 1982). On the other hand, Brandi's understanding of the Historical Case (i.e. the Historical Value) is based on respect for historical evidence: "Restoration should aim to re-establish the potential oneness of the work of art, as long as this is possible without committing artistic or historical forgery and without erasing every trace of the passage through time of the work of art" (BRANDI, 1963 *apud* SCHÄDLER-SAUB, 2011, p. 33). This understanding of Historical Value is different from Riegl's definition. It parallels Riegl's Age Value, which is related to the changes caused by the passage of time.

Searching the literature, the reader can come across other definitions of Historical Value. Michalski and Pedersoli Jr. (2016), in the context of risk assessment, provide the following definition of Historical Value: "The item [bearing the value] is directly associated with and contributes in a fundamental way to the understanding and appreciation of the country's history over a particular period and in a given region" (MICHALSKI; PEDERSOLI JR., 2016, p. 55).

2 Values in paper preservation and conservation treatments²

The previous discussion highlights the fact that the definitions of the various values in the cultural heritage context may be quite different, and that a generally accepted terminology is lacking. Furthermore, theoretical literature that explores the use of values in aiding book, archival material, and paper conservation decision-making is limited. Historically, it may be perceived that ideas which move preservation practices are implicitly linked to values attributed to objects, such as the religious (the predominant value in the Medieval Age), the educational, the monetary (in the case of collectionism in the Modern Age), or the documentary. A landmark in the attribution of social value to the document and the book is the creation of the National Archive of France in 1794 (CASTRO, 2012). Although we can perceive that ideas are implied in actions, the specialized literature has hardly discussed concepts and values. Searching for relevant articles published between 1970 and 2020 in *Restaurator*³ using Scopus with the keywords “value”, “decision”, “ethics”, “theory/theories”, and “concept” (in title, keywords, and abstract), the returned results were thirty-seven, zero, one, six and nine, respectively. A more careful perusal of these articles revealed that none of them was on a topic relevant to values of cultural paper-based objects and how values can assist decision-making in paper conservation. In *New Approaches to Book and Paper Conservation-Restoration* (ENGELS et al., 2011), forty-two articles present new perspectives in the discipline, however conceptual discussions are lacking. Only one paper is on a topic relevant to values of cultural paper-based objects and how values can assist decision-making in paper conservation (SCHÄDLER-SAUB, 2011, discussed below). Four other papers just touch the topic of ethics and values, with no substantial contribution to our subject of interest.

On the other hand, values connected with historical monuments, buildings, and site conservation have been more thoroughly researched and discussed. In search of relevant literature, the study and exploitation of publications and theories relevant to historical monuments, buildings and sites conservation can provide the fundamentals that could be applied to the field of books, archival material and paper conservation. Schädler-Saub (2011) used that approach. She discussed the value theories of Alois Riegl and Cesare Brandi, and how they can aid book and paper conservation decision-making. To quote one example from her study, by considering Riegl’s Age Value, she concludes that:

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we can emphasize the importance of all traces of time and use on historical books, and the psychological feeling of the observer engaged in the diversity and multiplicity of these traces, as long as they don't query the preservation of the books. In this "soft" version, in fact only the start of Riegl's idea, Age Value and Historical Value could co-exist without any problems (SCHÄDLER-SAUB, 2011, p. 24).

In this research, we will also follow a similar approach to discuss the impact of the conservation-restoration treatments on the paper-based objects' material and social data. One of the goals is to study and record the different definitions of the various values and propose a unified terminology and meaning for each of them. The other is to identify and analyse which values are involved with preservation and conservation-restoration practices of paper-based objects in the last fifty years, relating them to modern notions of damage. This information is intended to facilitate the interpretation of degradation (or the products and signs of the object passage through time) and the comprehension of which values are involved in the actions. Finally, we intend to create a model which clarifies how to move from damage to value-led conservation, collaborating and registering the decision making process, seeking to resolve a shortcoming identified by Mason (2002, p. 5):

[...] even though values are widely understood to be critical to understanding and planning for heritage conservation, there is little knowledge about how, pragmatically, the whole range of heritage values can be assessed in the context of planning and decision making.

To fulfil the objectives of this research, a review of the literature will be carried out looking at the concepts and values connected to paper conservation. We propose to identify the information discussed implicitly or explicitly in the articles published in specialized scientific journals, conferences recognised by the international community,⁴ as well as books and Ph.D. dissertations about the history and theory of paper conservation.⁵ The revision of preservation practices adopted by institutions holding paper based collections could also be useful, such as *Torre do Tombo* National Archive in Portugal (CORREIA, 2015), the National Library of Brazil (SLAIBI, 2019), the National Library of Greece, and other institutions investigated by Alexpoulou & Zervos (2016).

3 Historical evidence and t layers of data in paper-based documents

Considering the materiality of cultural objects, especially paper-based objects, and how conservation interventions may affect them, ZERVOS *et al.* (2011) introduced the concept of three layers of data that comprise the tangible manifestation of the object.

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The first layer, whether of a textual or visual nature, is the one that is inscribed or printed on the support. It is a message captured directly and its comprehension depends on the intellectual experience of the reader/observer. The second layer constitutes the form of the object and its material configuration, characteristics determined by the technologies and materials used for the registration of information. It can be understood through observation, though certain instruments capable of increasing the sensorial perceptions of the observer may be necessary. The third data layer resides in the physical and chemical structure and composition of the materials used (paper, ink, leather, fabric, etc.), which may be considered the DNA (or the “fingerprints”) of the object. Information about the geographic origin and manufacture of the object can be extracted from this layer, allowing dating, authentication, attribution, and studies of the passage of time and human action (ZERVOS *et al.*, 2011).

The historic evidence is present, in a tangible form, in these three layers of data. Correia (2015) systematized the analysis of fragments for the study of medieval liturgical books in Torre do Tombo National Archives in Portugal, but evidence can be perceived in any object. Inscribed in these objects are the marks of reception, such as marginal annotations, contemporary or later corrections, signs of depredation. Signs of collecting can be found in the alterations of formats, the complementation of drawings, and retouching of original images, as practiced by Renaissance artists (CASTRO, 2012), and also by seventeenth century Spanish penmen aimed at reusing models or sketches and the creation of albums to aggregate loose material (ALMADA, 2012). Usage marks are found in calligraphy manuals, whether in small holes and graphite blots on copied drawings for other supports or in the exercises for learning handwriting, once considered damage. Evidence about motivation for writing and bookkeeping practices are found in the folds of personal or administrative correspondence, in oil, perfume, or candle stains (DAYBELL, 2012), or in innovative methods in text corrections (ALMADA; MONTEIRO, 2019).

Old interventions are the result of the need to update objects according to uses and the obligation for perpetuation. It is not possible to discard these alterations without losing part of the history of the object and the motivations of its preservation and contemporary existence, since alterations are linked to attributions of meanings and values of each period of time and configure a situation which Inês Correia defined as “material discontinuities” (CORREIA, 2015, p. 7). In conservation-resto-

ration work, both present and in the past, the priority commitment is to guarantee the relative stability of the physical condition of the object for communication with future generations. In other actions, what matters is communication with the present time, in updates which refer to its social function. These interventions, and even those of conservation-restoration, can cause structural disturbances and possibly increase damage resulting from intrinsic deterioration processes.

4 The impact of conservation-restoration procedures on historical evidence

In concrete terms, conservation-restoration cause changes to the three data layers of the object, since it results in a transformation of the physical-chemical state and even in the removal of historical signs which are confused with damage. The historian Kathryn M. Rudy (2010) used densitometry to quantify the dirt present in medieval devotion books. Based on the material evidence, she was concerned with verifying the uses of the object and revealing aspects of the private lives of subjects who lived in the medieval period. However, since it was regarded as damage, in many cases the dirt was removed. In her words, unfortunately “manuscripts that have been cleaned refuse to divulge the secrets of their early users” (RUDY, 2010, p. 29). There are numerous cases of marks made by readers in marginalia or the dirt on the edges of books removed in previous conservation procedures which were propelled by the ethics in force at that time. Modification to codex structures, bleaching treatments, and inpainting or retouching for remaking images are other examples of how conservation interventions may seriously interfere with data intrinsic to the artifact.

Nevertheless, the physical testimony of the passage of the object through time may also be damage which effectively impairs its use and even its perpetuation. To recover or maintain data coming from historical signs, conservation-restoration interventions came to demand integrated action which allowed the physical recuperation of the object, but maintained the possibility of scientific use by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, etc. In this manner, scientific documentation became a defining element of the capacity to analyse the object after restoration. In the need to replace elements or remove previous additions, actions have to be registered in a systematic form and, preferably, related to values linked to the object in the present.

In contemporary perception, it is important to consider the artifact as a witness of the passage of time and of its capacity to adapt to the nuances of interpretation and valorization (CORREIA, 2015). It is not only the “original moment” of the object or its “primitive state” which are of interest; moreover, the return to an “original state” of the object, as well as materially impossible, is not desirable. It should not be forgotten that, as in the past, actions are motivated by some specific interest, whether in maintenance or updating, and are incorporated in the history of the artifact. It thus becomes convenient to think of the existence of a fourth layer of data present in the artifact, of an intangible and immaterial nature.

5 A societal and material approach to investigate the artefact in both conservation and humanities studies

Now considered undesirable, many practices were involved in the history of preservation and may provide information about the biography of the object and, possibly, about the history of values applied to it and the concepts which governed the interventions (CAMPOS; ALMADA, 2020). Studies of the science of conservation in general are often specific or restricted in scope and concerned with the characterization of materials, techniques, or even testing the effectiveness of products and procedures and may not present significant information for the investigations of a social type. On the other hand, humanistic studies have a difficulty in effectively using the material information of paper-based objects to reflect on society, although researchers such as Fernando Bouza Álvarez, Robert Darnton, Roger Chartier, Armando Petrucci, and Donald McKenzie have already defended and disseminated the importance of material data to understand written culture, as pointed by Almada (2020).

The transit of theories, methods, and concerns, among history, anthropology, archaeology, material culture, and conservation is more than necessary and constitutes the foundation of interdisciplinarity. However, it is not always easy to be exercised. In the field of humanistic investigation, effective collaboration with conservation professionals expands the comprehension of the object and can contribute to theoretical and methodological advances. For conservators, partnership may bring to practice the perception that the materiality of the object is also a social and temporal construction (HÖLLING, 2017). The creation of standards of analysis of objects, or “guided observations” (CORREIA, 2015, p. 47), made available in the consultation rooms in *Torre do Tombo* National

Archive in Lisbon, is an example of how technical information related to the material structure of paper-based objects may be democratized, including the actual meaning of damage, as done by Inês Correia for the study of the *Alcobacenses Codices*. On the other hand, patterns of analysis are necessary which establish relations with social and historical aspects to help in decision-making about restoration. Correia proposes for the medieval codices a methodological approach which consists of three steps: 1. The characterization of the physical state of the work considering the various alterations suffered over time; 2. The interpretation of the cultural models and the experiences which allow its preservation over time; 3. Decision-making taking into account the two moments above and which considers the various “chronological layers”⁶ (CORREIA, 2015, p. 50).

The decision framework proposed for this research will contribute to this discussion. It will be applicable to cultural heritage conservation, with an emphasis on books, paper documents, and other archival materials, and based on the expansion of the data layer/information/value model. We will expand the layer/information model proposed by ZERVOS *et al.* (2011) with more layers relevant to the intangible manifestation of the object, introduce societal values in the scheme, and discuss the relationship among layers of data, information and values and their interplay. This approach will be helpful to clearly understand the paper-based objects as a complex artefact for different professionals and academics.

To give a first taste of this approach, a fourth layer of data will be added, tentatively labelled “external data”, comprising all the data collected from sources outside the object, such as historical and sociological research. This layer may contribute additional qualities and information to those already drawn from the other three layers. All the collected information and qualities can then be matched to various values, including the societal. We believe that the usefulness of this model lies in these connections since, by altering a specific property (by a conservation treatment or by a management decision), one can follow the connections and trace the changes to the corresponding value. In a few words, what we seek to achieve is an extension of the value-led conservation theory with the introduction of the data layer/information/value model.

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Conclusions

We know that there is no single response to the diversity of situations and interests concerning paper-based objects such as manuscripts, books, codices, archival material and engravings. For this reason, it is necessary to deepen the conceptual reflections on concrete experiences of conservation interventions, listing the values which are related to decisions. This knowledge will be useful to subsidise future actions, at the institutional or individual level.

Furthermore, the decision framework will result in better records of the material studies and the interventions on the object or collection that will impact on future investigations of the contemporary approaches to decision-making in paper conservation and preservation. We hope that this will also contribute to the development of material methods and practices in written culture history.

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NOTAS

1 Translated by the authors. In the original: “O passar dos anos fez com que o livro perdesse esse lugar e, assim, não recebesse mais o cuidado necessário à sua preservação, abrindo brechas para o ataque de insetos, o excesso de umidade ou mesmo a dissociação de alguns de seus elementos”.

2 Throughout this article, “paper artefacts”, “paper-based objects”, and “paper conservation” are used as generic terms referring to objects that are the targets of the conservation fields classified as “paper conservation”, “book conservation”, “archival material conservation” and “graphic documents conservation”. These objects mainly include paper documents, books, codices, paper-based archival material, paper-based photographs, engravings and graphic documents, mostly consisting of paper but occasionally of parchment, leather, and probably other materials, but not artistic works on paper, which are classified as works of art and may demand a different approach.

3 *Restaurator – International Journal for the Preservation of Library and Archival Material*. Retrieved Sep 14, 2020 from <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/rest/rest-overview.xml>.

4 The sources selected in advance are the journals *Paper Conservator* and *Restaurator*; conferences from ICOM-CC Triennial Preprints; *AATA Online*, a free research database containing abstracts of literature related to the preservation and conservation of material cultural heritage, published by the Getty Institute since 1983.

5 The authors to be consulted are: Sánchez Hernández; Solange Sette Darcia de Zuñiga; Paola Furia; and Maria Adelaida Allo Manero.

6 Translated by the authors. In the original: “bandas cronográficas”.