

PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION

The Implementation of Preventive Conservation Measurements in German Museums and Collections

A project of the University of Applied Sciences Berlin (FHTW Berlin), class of conservation and restoration and *ausstellungsmanufaktur* hertzer Berlin.

Dipl.-Rest. Alexandra Jeberien MA, Research Assistant Preventive Conservation
FHTW Berlin, Wilhelminenhofstrasse 75 A, D - 12459 Berlin, Email: jeberien@fhtw-berlin.de

Introduction The project looked at the implementation of preventive conservation measurements in German cultural institutions, e.g. of historic collections, and at art, history or archaeology museums.

The project was developed and instituted by the class of conservation and restoration; University of Applied Sciences Berlin (FHTW Berlin) and was financed through the European Social Fund and the Berlin Senat for Economy.

It ran from May 2006 to October 2007.

Objectives The main objective of the project was to document and assess the implementation progress of preventive conservation at museums and historic collections in Germany. Besides parameters concerning light and climate control, pests and air pollutants, information regarding the use of recent preventive instruments, like disaster planing and risk management was noted. Also, difficulties in establishing the principle of preventive conservation in operational practice were recorded.

The second aim of the study was to present and explain the positive features of preventive conservation to those working in the field, e.g. administrative, academic and technical staff.

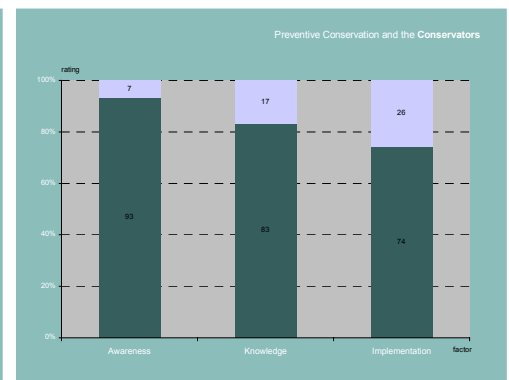
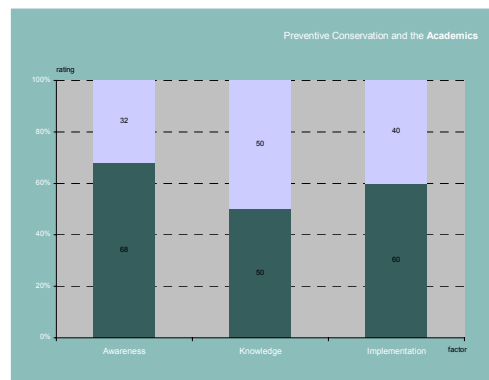
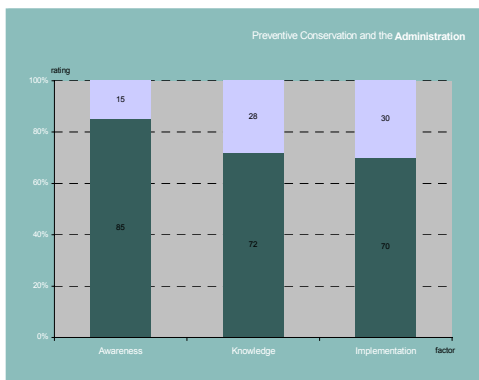
Methods A representative sample of German collections and museums, especially those in some stage of re-organisation or construction, were asked to participate in the study.

Information on the implementation of preventive measures was collected via questionnaires that were developed specifically for this project. Interviews were carried out directly at the institutions and on site. They included all staff levels, as there is administration, academic, scientific and custodial staff, collection managers, conservators and conservation technicians. This way, difficulties and strong objectives implementing preventive measures were immediately noted.

Results After evaluating collected data it is possible to state the following issues: The awareness of the necessity of preventive measures is very dependent on the level of employees. Administrators and conservators have a very good understanding for preventive conservation, however, this is not true within the academic and scientific circles.

Secondly, preventive conservation knowledge differs widely among the institution's staff: while a comprehensive level of knowledge has been established with the conservation body, other staff members seem to have a much lower level of preventive conservation knowledge. Again, the academic / scientific staff members are among those with the widest gap in the principles of preventive conservation.

Those questions specifically regarding issues of implementation demonstrated that conservators and the administration level have the highest impact, while the academic and scientific body shows little commitment. The study also disclosed, although conservators have the highest institution's prevention knowledge, they are often not involved with decisions regarding preventive measures.



Conclusion The study gives an impression of the current situation on the status of preventive conservation at cultural institutions in Germany and German speaking countries - specifically the situations in which conservators work. Especially the knowledge about prevention and the implementation of preventive measures need improvement at all staff levels. Once all members understand the contents of preventive conservation principles it will be possible to draw an overall preventive strategy, which will contribute to minimize dangers and risks regarding the storage, transportation and presentation of cultural heritage.

So far, results of the study were applied on the development of an eLearning tool on preventive conservation. The tool will aid conservation graduates and experienced conservators keep up to date on preventive conservation issues. Therefore it completes conservation training as well as contributes to establish preventive conservation knowledge with administrators or academics in German museums and collections.

Acknowledgements The project was performed at FHTW Berlin - therefore Prof. Dr. Matthias Knaut is thanked for useful remarks and comments. Also Bernhard Wedow, *ausstellungsmanufaktur* hertzer, for helping with contacts as well as design and media support. I also would like to acknowledge those museums and collections, which contributed through participation in the project and offered insight into their working processes.