

SUPSI

The Open-Air Sculptures of the City of Lugano: an application of preventive conservation management

The municipality of Lugano owns some 120 outdoor sculptures, constituting an important part of its cultural, artistic and urban identity. Common with other major cities, there is increasing awareness among conservators and administrators of public collections that preventive strategies for conservation are the most cost-effective. Strong political support of such strategies, together with regular and long-term financial resources remain however difficult to obtain. The project, associating the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI) with the collection's proprietors, aims to set up a long-term managerial tool for the preventive conservation of Lugano's collection of outdoor sculpture.

The municipality's task is daunting: their outdoor sculpture represents the work of more than 70 artists and dates largely from the 19th and 20th centuries; the collection comprises not only sculpture in bronze and stone, but in many other diverse materials such as glass, wood, plexi, concrete and resin. These materials deteriorate at different rates and in different ways, with some objects showing severe degradation.

Although a catalogue of the town's public sculpture was published in 1989, the first task of the multidisciplinary project team has been to establish an up to date inventory. Each sculpture is visited and all relevant information is recorded, including original materials and techniques, added materials, present condition and local environment; in parallel, archival research is carried out to establish provenance and ownership, authorship, conservation history and any recent conservation treatment. The information is stored in an Access database and will be fully integrated into the municipality's existing GIS (Geographical Information System) facility.

Initial results highlight clearly the present management difficulties.



The municipality is demonstrating a strong political commitment in favour not only of preventive conservation, but also of improved internal coordination between relevant departments. They are also aware of the potential positive fall-out for the image of Lugano, for recognition of its cultural heritage, for tourism and for an example in the field of responsible conservation management in line with current ethical concerns.

The research is showing increasingly how risk assessment can rapidly lead towards a better understanding of conservation priorities and needs, reinforcing typical preventive strategies such as regular inspection, small regular maintenance interventions, monitoring of special cases and sustained up-dating of documentation.

Publication

- Barberio S., Boissonas V., Brazzola C., James J., Küng A., *Caring for Outdoor Sculpture in Lugano, Switzerland: preventive conservation and long-term maintenance*, in *Pensare la prevenzione: manufatti, usi, ambienti*, atti del convegno di studi, Bressanone 13-16 luglio 2010, a cura di G. Biscontin e G. Driussi, Marghera-Venezia 2010, pp. 253-262.

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