

# Global Village: Global Legal Visions for Cultural Heritage?

Sharon Little

Foundation Little-Ragusich, Conservation-restoration of Cultural Heritage

1235, ave. De Laune  
 Québec, Québec, G1S 3K2, CANADA  
 001-418- 681-3335  
[selittle@videotron.ca](mailto:selittle@videotron.ca)

Legislated laws in daily life provide a mechanical reference base for the adequate functioning of the general population. Without such laws there would be chaos. It would therefore stand to reason that the adequate and continuous safeguarding of our cultural heritage would also require the legislation of appropriate laws. Taken one step further, the legislated status of the conservator-restorer would afford protection to the general public with respect to the conservation-restoration of its cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural heritage, conservator-restorer, conservation-restoration, laws, safeguarding

## INTRODUCTION

Now, almost everyday, we are reminded of the problems of cultural heritage and the law, within our global village community. Does it not therefore make sense to try and develop cultural heritage laws based on global legal visions? And do not two legal maxims support the dynamics of our present day situation?

- *Where the law is uncertain there is no law*
- *Law hateth new inventions and innovations*

My interest in art and law was spiked as far back as 1969 when I was part of the second BA graduating class of Native Studies at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. Studying art from the cultural perspective and the concepts of *Indigenous Law* were introduced to me through this program. Interest in this area allowed me to represent Trent University in 1972 on a 6-week WUSC Seminar to Peru (World University Services of Canada). This was an international seminar for *Underdeveloped Countries* now referred to as *Developing Countries*, which since indicates the emergence of some positive changes in perception. My individual research project at the time was *agrarian reforms* which also lead to the study of indigenous material culture.

Each of the 40 participants had their own personal topic, collectively covering, economic development, education, health, politics, etc. We were a young and idealistic group of students out to solve all of the problems of Peru. Even then I can vividly remember visiting numerous small shops in Lima to see archaeological textiles displayed for sale in 1 metre high piles. However, we had all been previously briefed: no illegal activities or we would be immediately returned to Canada! Indeed, over the years positive inroads have been made and are continuing. My Peruvian

student colleagues studying the ethics of business, during recent MBA exchange programs between Laval University, Québec, Canada and the University of Lima in Peru, return to Peru and attempt slowly to integrate ethical business practices and perceptions.

It was therefore most likely an ordained co-incidence, that the topic of my first term paper was concerned with international cultural heritage law, when I embarked on a MBA in international administration, in 1998. Based on the assumption that the *law is never perfect and always will be a reflection of the times* I hope that I will be able to influence *your perception* so that in turn you may be empowered to positively influence the perceptions of others, especially your respective politicians and bureaucrats, in the development of adequate cultural heritage law. Lest we forget that while laws are created in the political arena, the drawback is that laws are financially expensive to create and implement. Hence, some government Ministers would rather spend their budgets on highly visible vote generating projects.

To illustrate the dynamics at play, I will first refer to various cultural heritage laws and secondly relate the issues that promote the legalized status of the professional conservator-restorer. As I am a Canadian Citizen and a resident of the Province of Québec and therefore more familiar with the Canadian/Québec legal statutes, many of my references will be cited from these territorial areas. The essentials however, could be extrapolated and placed within the context of the global village.

## 1. SAFEGAURDING CULTURAL HERITAGE

### 1.1 PROVINCE OF QUÉBEC

#### 1.1.1 MUNICIPAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL:

It is possible for municipalities and churches to enact

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various laws regarding their local cultural heritage while being consistent with their Provincial Laws.

#### 1.1.2 PROVINCIAL:

Cultural Property Act 1972 (Loi sur les biens culturels du Québec, 1972).

On December 21, 1998, Mr. Alain Lacoursière, now working for the Ministry of Surêté Québec, forwarded a document to the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications (MCC) requesting improvements to the existing provincial cultural heritage laws.

On April 24, 2004, lawyer Suzanne Ouellet, (recently appointed as judge to the Superior Court of Québec) and lawyer Roger Pothier, of Pothier Morency (formerly Pothier Delisle s.e.n.c.) presented a paper at the (LIC) ICOM-CC interim meeting in Athens, Greece. They stated in their reference to the Cultural Property Act, 1972: “such classification affords a certain amount of protection to cultural property from demolition alteration and improper sales.” [1]

In September 2005, public briefs were accepted for the Public Consultation on Québec Religious Heritage. Two professional conservator-restorers Anne Lapointe and myself, submitted individual briefs on the topic of legal issues. Another professional colleague Gina Garcia made reference to the Law 181, in her brief. I was also involved with the legal aspects of the brief of the Conseil de quartier Saint-Jean-Baptiste and provided some documentation to the Québec Regional Group of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC). All of these briefs may be consulted on the Québec National Assembly web site: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/37legislation2/commissions/cc/depot-patrimoine.html>

It was comforting to see two suggested questions pertaining to legal aspects outlined in the public invitation:

- #3. Are the existing statutes and regulations that govern the protection and management of our religious heritage (*Cultural Property Act, Act respecting Fabriques*, municipal regulations) adequate? If not, what amendments would you propose?
- #6. Should Québec look beyond its borders to glean ideas on how to protect and enhance the value of its religious heritage? If so, where should it seek inspiration?

Indeed, one of the four conclusions of the public hearing on religious heritage was the need to create adequate legislation to protect religious heritage in the Province of Québec. [2]

More precisely: Alain Lacoursière of Surêté Québec outlines three problems with the Québec Cultural Property Act, 1972 [3]:

- In 1972 there was a 35 million dollar theft from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. One of the paintings, which had since been purchased by an individual *in good faith*, has been located. However, no law exists that allows the police to seize the painting.

In France, the national objects of museums and churches do not have this immunity.

- Article 2919 of the Quebec Act specifies a 3 year statute of limitation. After this time period, an individual who has purchased an object *in good faith* is not required by law to hand over the object, which had been previously stolen.

In Italy, the time limit for the statute of limitation is 100 years.

- In Quebec, only church objects used for sacred religious rites have *full* legal protection. Hence chalices and ciboriums are protected but not the paintings.

In Sweden, religious objects and churches are protected by Swedish national law, the *Heritage Conservation Act (1988:950)*. [4] For example:

Chapter 4, Ecclesiastical furnishings,

Section 7:

- Every parish is to keep a list of furnishings as referred to in Section 6.

- Two persons shall be appointed in every parish to be responsible for keeping the list.

Section 8:

- The diocese is to verify at least every six years that all listed objects still remain. After each verification, a copy of the list shall be sent to the County Administrative Board.

Section 9:

- In the case of a listed object not belonging to any individual or family, permission is required from the County Administrative Board in order

1. to dispose of it,
2. to delete it from the list,
3. to repair or alter it, or
4. to move it from the place where it has long since belonged.

Section 10:

- If there is a serious danger of an object being damaged, the County Administrative Board may take possession of it until further notice or take some other necessary measure for its protection or care.

As professional conservator-restorers within the Province of Québec we are anxiously awaiting the new laws on safeguarding our religious heritage. Internationally, I am also certain, that many of us here today could testify to the fact that as professional conservator-restorers we are often confronted with the *fait accompli* of returning to consult on cultural heritage only to find that it has been sold, stolen or just given away etc. In one particular scenario related to a consultation project with my professional work as Chief of Textile Conservation for the Centre de conservation du Quebec, Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec, I was informed by several congregations of sisters that their respective priests had ordered them to send their historic vestment collections, made of heavy silk velvet and silver and gold threads, to missions in Africa. Fortunately one crafty sister confided to me that she had safely hidden one of the most ornate series!

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As conservator-restorers would we not be more efficient at our jobs if the objects we treat were protected by adequate cultural heritage laws? In 1983 much time was spent on convincing a local priest to keep the collection of ecclesiastical textiles of King Louis XIV<sup>th</sup> of France, a gift to La Nouvelle France (Québec) in 1715. Likewise, follow through on an emergency treatment for mould infestation was complicated as the priest had wanted to give the collection to the Salvation Army (second hand non-profit store) as it was all just too *old fashioned*.

## 1.2 FEDERAL CANADIAN INDIGENOUS LAW

Throughout my *Indian Law Course* at Trent University in 1971, the lack of indigenous rights stemming from the visions and perceptions of the colonial explorers was highlighted. Generally speaking, the Spanish under the influence of Francisco de Vitoria (1485-1546), who is referred to as the father of the law of nations, considered some basic indigenous rights; the French came second; and the British took third place, in affording no indigenous rights.

The degree of protection of Canadian indigenous cultural heritage is still questionable if we start by analyzing the present day Indian Act (1876) modified in substance in 1951. Section 90 deals with cultural heritage, and introduced in 1920 due to the interest in totem poles that developed out of the Emily Carr paintings, has been virtually unchanged since 1920, hence leading us to question to what extent are we still stuck in our colonial perceptions.

This led Mireille Bonin a jurist with Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada to offer new legal alternatives in order to better protect both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Canada's indigenous citizens. She presented and published her proposals at the first published session of LIC - ICOM-CC, at the 14<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting held in The Hague, in 2005.

In brief, elements of the *Nunavut Act (1993)* (negotiated land claim) which are specific to protecting indigenous cultural heritage, could be introduced into present day autonomous indigenous community law pertaining to the reserves. This could be done by the indigenous peoples themselves under the power granted to them by the *First Nation Land Management Act 1999*. This Act allows the indigenous peoples the authority to govern their reserve lands. In the future, the protection of their cultural heritage could then become further enlarged through their comprehensive (land) claims.

The important element to be retained is that by linking the protection of cultural heritage to the land, the indigenous populations could immediately start to protect their cultural heritage. [5]

## 1.3 CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Canada has ratified certain international conventions and agreements such as:

- The 1954 Hague Convention, & 1999 (the two protocols coming into force in Canada on March 1, 2006)

(The 1954 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict)

- Canadian, Cultural Property Export and Import Act, 1977
- UNESCO 1970 – (Canada ratified 1978)

Unfortunately Canada has not yet ratified the *UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995)*. To date, 28 States are Parties to the convention and Greece is in the process of submitting their final documents. So it will soon be 29 nations that have ratified this vitally important convention.

During a discussion, in January 2003, with David Walden, Secretary General of Canada for UNESCO, he expressed that a priority of UNESCO is to encourage the ratifications of international conventions, such as the UNIDROIT Convention (1995).

The recent *ICOM code of ethics for museums (2006)* stipulates under section 7 number 7.1 (International Legislation) the UNIDROIT Convention (1995): "Museum policy should acknowledge the following international legislation that is taken as a standard in interpreting the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums." [6]

In September 2004, a workshop held by UNESCO in Cape Town, South Africa, for participants from east, central and southern Africa concluded with a communiqué issued at the end of the workshop, whereby the participants "urged their respective governments to ratify all the international instruments relating to the protection of cultural property, that is, the 1954, 1970, 1972, 1995, 1999, 2001 and 2003 Conventions and Protocols. They urged their respective governments to revise and update their legislation on the protection of cultural property with a view to strengthening its implementation. The governments were also advised to prepare national strategies for the proper administration, management and protection of cultural property. To this end they should develop and establish national inventories for movable cultural property incorporating the Standard Object ID as a minimum standard. They are also enjoined to identify and coordinate the efforts of national stakeholders in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property." [7]

Similarly, one of the recommendations coming from the conference *Illegal Trade: Fighting illicit traffic in cultural goods within the European Union*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, November 8-9, 2004 was: "The existing international conventions, notably the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, are important instruments in the fight against the illicit traffic in cultural goods that should be ratified by all Member States." [8]

A few months later, and adding more impetus to the issue, was the suggestion of one of the invited guest speakers to the 14th Triennial Meeting of ICOM-CC, September 12, 2005. Else van Dijk-Staats, deputy Mayor of The Hague and Municipal Counsellor of Cultural Affairs, proposed the creation of an international *Think-Tank*, located in The Hague, which would look into the legal issues of

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protecting cultural heritage, a main issue being that of combating the international illicit trade of cultural heritage, which is increasing at alarming rates.

The recent issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Property* vol. 12, number 4, 2005, devotes 50 pages to all kinds of *known* chronicles that occurred in 2004 alone.

In Canada the famous Yorke case took 10 years to resolve (1988-1998). It went to the Supreme Court of Canada under the privacy statutes of the Canadian Constitution but was denied a hearing and became the first Canadian conviction. Two years of community service and a \$10 000 fine cost the Department of Canadian Heritage about \$102 000 on the case. [9]

Situations such as this led David Walden to professionally support the Canadian ratification of the UNIDROIT Convention (1995). In his paper presented to the Canadian Museums Association on *Legal Affairs and Management Symposium*, Toronto, November 1998, titled *UNIDROIT and Cultural Property Protection a Canadian Perspective*, David Walden concluded his paper with: “Canada has been successful in returning cultural property under the terms of the 1970 UNESCO Convention through criminal prosecutions under the *Cultural Property Export and Import Act* and the detention and forfeiture provisions of the Customs Act. To become a State Party to the UNIDROIT Convention would require legislative amendments, but these would be relatively straightforward and would not require changes in the philosophy of, or public policy objectives for, the protection of cultural property.” [10]

Ratification would therefore mean that objects could be quickly returned to their rightful owners, avoiding high costs and any possible deterioration to the condition of the objects as under the UNIDROIT Convention (1995):

- Stolen objects would apply
- Cultural objects would apply
- No designation would apply
- Time limits would apply
- Courts must order their return

Pursuing the legal issues on her part, Lyndel Prott since her retirement as Cultural Legal Advisor for UNESCO has returned to her native Australia and is teaching a course with Patrick O’Keefe on Heritage Law. This course has been developed under the directorship of Amareswar Galla, of the Graduate Studies in Sustainable Heritage Development, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, at The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

Legal issues in conservation have also gained in popularity in Québec. During 2005, La Société des musées québécois gave 1 and 2 day courses on The Legal Protection of Cultural Heritage.

Indeed it was invigorating to be part of the debates held during the *Intercultural Symposium on Aboriginal Art in an Interdisciplinary Perspective* at the Museum Tinguely of Basel, Switzerland in September 2005. At this time it was debated whether *indigenous artistic creations* may be

considered as *art* and therefore be permitted exhibition space in *fine art galleries*. The consensus was that future museums be called *Cultural Heritage Museums*. It was truly encouraging to find that the professional museological perception was moving towards eliminating the prejudices of the colonial mentality.

The recent analysis of the ICOM News (2006) supports this perception of respect and encourages the practice of mediation for the repatriation of cultural heritage throughout the world. [11]

## **2. LEGALIZED STATUS OF THE PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATOR-RESTORER**

Within the European Community much has been accomplished through E.C.C.O., the (European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers’ Organisation) and the APEL project (Acteurs du Patrimoine Européen et Législation) which was launched by ECCO in October 1999.

The APEL project found that, “the analysis of the legal systems for the protection of cultural heritage and the census of the situations that conservation-restoration professionals must face, reveal some serious gaps. These are likely to compromise the effectiveness of the protection measures set forth in the legal systems and the quality of conservation-restoration services and projects.” [12]

“Most of the countries are provided with laws for the protection of the cultural heritage but there is a widespread lack of specific regulations for conservation.” [13]

APEL went on to state that “these recommendations and guidelines set forth the minimum measures that national legal systems should formulate in order to recognize the precise nature of conservation-restoration of cultural heritage and, therefore, the need for a high level of qualification in order to practice this profession.” [14]

The APEL publication dates to 2001 and already in Athens, 2004 at the first ICOM-CC interim meeting of Legal Issues in Conservation, authors Georgios Panagiaris and Vasilike Argyropoulos informed us that the submission of a model text, concerned with the legalized professional order of the conservator-restorer, which could be incorporated into the various European state legislations, is scheduled for 2010. [15]

At the same Athens 2004 meeting regarding conservator-restorers, lawyers Suzanne Ouellet and Roger Pothier both spoke of our professional obligation: “Members of your profession have, in my opinion, a particularly important role and responsibility in this domain not only to wake “public consciousness” but also in performing aptly and diligently their various tasks.” [16]

They continued to state with reference to the Canadian/Québec scenario: “The principal weakness (that may be seen by many as strength) is the absence of effective power of your associations at every level: admission, for-

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mation and discipline. This is particularly explicit in section 44 of the Code of Ethics". [17]

"In Quebec, more than 220 000 professionals (figures 1990) are organized under a general law called the Professional Code. These professionals are distributed within more than 40 professional corporations or Orders." [18]

"In this system, the state, through the various Orders or organized professions, exercises a relative control on an increasing number of activities or professions to insure competence; integrity; and quality of services. The associations under the name of Orders have the powers to control access; exercise professional standards; and evoke disciplinary measures to their members. They are invested with a mission of public utility and endowed with the privileges of public power." [19]

"In Canada professional orders are related to the provincial and territorial ministries' of education. The Quebec Government, with the advice of the *Office des professions* is empowered to grant the statute of a professional order to an association in taking into account five criteria:

- 1) the knowledge required to engage in the activities of the persons who would be governed by the order which it is proposed to constitute;
- 2) the degree of independence enjoyed by the persons who would be members of the order in engaging in the activities concerned, and the difficulty which persons not having the same training and qualifications would have in assessing those activities;
- 3) the personal nature of the relationships between such persons and those having recourse to their services, by reason of the special trust which the latter must place in them, particularly because such persons provide them with care or administer their property;
- 4) the gravity of the prejudice which might be sustained by those who have recourse to the services of such persons because their competence or integrity was not supervised by the order;
- 5) the confidential nature of the information which such persons are called upon to have in practising their profession." [20]

Both lawyers felt that the Québec legal system could provide a source of inspiration to other areas. If implemented in Québec it would take approximately 3 years to complete the legal process.

Time is of an essence. Speaking for the majority of my fellow Canadian conservator-restorers colleagues, we have had the privilege of working within some type of government organization or organization that receives its funding through government sources. However as we are now starting to notice, both nationally and internationally, some government monopolies are not as financially generous.

Recently the Federal Government of Canada reduced the budget of the Museum Assistance Program (MAP). This program had for many years injected large capital funds into the conservation-restoration community. MAP was also very instrumental in developing professional con-

servator-restorers positions throughout the Canadian landscape, many of which are now threatened due to lack of immediate funds or compressed as baby boomer conservator-restorers retire.

The development of new management trends also acts as a double whammy. Changes to the management trends were substantiated by a discussion in March 2006 with Professor Frédéric Potok, a specialist in Public Administration from the University of Moncton. He pointed out that the general trend towards training in public administration is developing the capacity to *think out of the box*, emphasizing that the classic approaches towards problem solving are outdated.

One of the results of *thinking out of the box* implies that the future trend of government management will become much more strategically oriented and less operational, the operational being contracted out. Hopefully, in the long term, a balance will be obtained so that a permanent and solid base of professional expertise maintains continuity, as public administrators cannot furnish this type of professional critique.

However, the point to be made is that as professional conservator-restorers throughout the world we must position ourselves quickly with respect to this future trend, otherwise the cultural heritage community and the general public will be left to hire not always the most qualified conservator-restorers for the job, often due to cost efficient measures. Together during the past few decades we have built up a dedicated professional team of international conservator-restorers. It would truly be a great pity to have this international team diluted due to a lack of some kind of professional order.

During an interview in 2004 with Michel Sparer, Director of the *Office des professions* du Québec, he suggested a possible *combined order of cultural heritage professionals*. This would help to offset the low number of conservation-restorers while allowing each specific sub-group to maintain its own criteria. A combined group could also help to clarify, facilitate, and rectify the rash of legal cases plaguing our museums etc., hence providing extended protection to the general public's entrusted collections.

Ouellet and Pothier have very aptly concluded on our situation: "The conservators' associations seem to have adopted – maybe as a result of necessity – an essentially voluntary way of promoting high standards of excellence and ethics. Maybe the time is ripe - in the jurisdiction where the legislation is compatible with the principles previously exposed – for your associations to aspire to be recognized as a professional Order with some degree of control on the members. Alternate ways are also conceivable... After all, the professional standards enacted in your Code of Ethics show that conservation professionals share, and maybe are eager to accept, very elevated norms in the exercise of their professions. Are they prepared to accept obligatory guidelines, is a completely different question?" [21]

*Global Village: Global Legal Visions for Cultural Heritage?***RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to expand the knowledge base of legal issues in conservation-restoration and create a momentum for the appropriate development of cultural heritage law, which could include some type of legalized professional status for conservator-restorers, it is therefore proposed that:

- Legal issues in conservation-restoration, be included in the curriculum content of all conservation-restoration programs.
- The fundamentals of writing briefs and lobbying be included in the curriculum content of all conservation-restoration programs.
- Conservator-restorers encourage and promote the creation of adequate cultural heritage laws.

Lobbying can take many forms, telephone calls and letters to your local and state politicians, interviews and discussions, conferences, written articles and books, submission of briefs, presentation of courses, endorsing petitions, etc. "But as everybody knows, perhaps professional conservators more than any others, national legislation and international treaties are and will probably always be insufficient without competent and diligent professionals supported by a well-informed public opinion." [22]

**CONCLUSION**

We must *step out of the box* throughout our global village community - the old colonial legal mind set is no longer fashionable, feasible nor reflective of our present time. This will also require a painful and conscientious look at the mind set regarding the repatriation of cultural heritage.

As human beings we all have the same basic needs and our collective heritage is part of those needs. Contemporary governments must also learn to think out of the box when it comes to resolving cultural heritage issues. Cultural heritage issues need to be taken seriously, understanding that their respect can have positive social, economic and political consequences. From a legal framework, without the vision of respect acting as a catalyst towards the creation of appropriate laws to safeguard the attributes of our cultural heritage we become nothing but denuded societies. The ball is truly in our court. You are strongly encouraged to be professionally involved and active in sending the required messages, remembering that:

- *Where the law is uncertain there is no law*
- *Law hateth new inventions and innovations*

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