

# **Marketing of Heritage Conservation Services Based on the Example of the Maltese Conservation Market**

**The postdoctoral (habilitation) thesis defended by Izabella Parowicz in 2015**

The author of this research first came in touch with hands-on conservators in 2004-2005, during her one-year long internship spent at the Malta Centre for Restoration and Heritage Malta. She was then working as an assistant to the Head of Conservation and Restoration Projects Management Office – the office, unique of its kind, used to serve as an entity liaising between the conservators employed at the Malta Centre for Restoration and its customers, the owners of historical objects, both private and institutional ones. For 8 months, she was in charge of managing projects in the area of textile, books and paper as well as architectural conservation, she also assisted at managing projects pertaining to the conservation of paintings, polychrome sculpture, wooden objects, as well as glass, ceramics, stone and metal objects. One of her responsibilities was to act as a go-between on behalf of the owners of historical objects who wanted to enquire about the progress of conservation works they commissioned. While performing her duties, her attention was drawn to the fact that some of the conservators had certain difficulties regarding the communication with the owners of historical objects; there were also conservators who – probably in view of their numerous professional duties - seemed inadequately concerned about the quality of this communication. As a result, appropriate customer care was sometimes disregarded. This observation has inspired the author to investigate the issue of communication between the conservators and their customers and, more generally, the issue of marketing conservation services within the framework of a research project. Since a thorough literature review revealed an extensive research gap in this field and, to the author's best knowledge, academics specializing in cultural management and cultural marketing had not dealt with heritage conservation services, it appeared necessary to investigate the questions pertinent to marketing conservation services both from the theoretical as well as the empirical point of view.

Due to the author's own professional experiences and to the objective prerequisites for ensuring the feasibility of the research, she decided to embed it in the context of the conservation market in Malta. Consequently, the decision was taken to entitle the research as follows: . The latter is relatively young, as the local professional services in this field have only been offered in Malta on a larger scale since 1999. In this period, an increasing public interest in these services has been observed. Simultaneously, the number of business entities providing expert conservation services has been growing. This provided a good opportunity to investigate the historical development of these services in light of the existing legislative and organizational frameworks, to examine the communication between the providers and beneficiaries of these services (as perceived by both parties concerned and by the general public), to identify marketing instruments applicable to conservation services and to draw up a set of respective recommendations that could be considered useful for the Maltese conservators.

Another very important reason for choosing Malta for the purpose of this research was this: a significant proportion of cultural heritage has remained in private hands there. The Maltese cultural assets suffered relatively little from World War II damages. Besides, unlike in Central Eastern European countries for example, where the private owners of historic residences, especially the aristocracy, were expropriated and their arts collections were confiscated by the state, the Maltese people, representing practically all social spheres, have managed to retain their family inheritance over generations. The latter, due to its material and/or sentimental value, is very much appreciated and taken care of by its owners. That is why it was relatively easy to isolate and to research the national conservation market and to scrupulously investigate its participants' most typical set of behaviour. Carrying out such a study in a country in which the heritage ownership issue has been severely distorted as a result of

historical developments, would be less, if at all, feasible. The results obtained in those European countries in which the expropriation or confiscation of historical objects took place could also be rather ambiguous from a sociological point of view. In these countries, many former owners, or heirs, of historical objects, who should be the natural, most obvious and perhaps most conscientious customers of conservation services, have lost or been dispossessed of their inheritance and, automatically, their interest in these services is either reduced to treatment of the few objects still remaining in their hands or, in extreme cases, does not exist at all. Over time, demand in the conservation market has been deformed and diminished there.

Also, for technical reasons, Malta appeared to be one of the best-predestined European countries for the purpose of such a research. Its relatively small size (316 square km) allowed carrying out a comprehensive study of the issue of conservation marketing and of the contribution thereof to a more sustainable preservation of national cultural heritage. Malta's small population (452,515 inhabitants) allowed carrying out a study on a representative sample of local people and to gather results that distinguish themselves with a large explanatory power. This was a great advantage as far as reaching the goals of the research is concerned, as carrying out an analogical countrywide research on a comparably representative proportion of population would not be feasible in any larger European country. The particular cultural, economic, historical and social circumstances pertinent in the case of Malta, and the insular character of the latter, were obviously taken into account. Nevertheless, since it was desired that the results obtained be relevant for the providers of conservation services regardless of their location, an additional survey was conducted among conservators providing their services worldwide so as to be able to verify the local findings in a global context.

Another advantage pertaining to choosing Malta as the location for this research was that, in this country, the conservation services market is only minimally regulated by the state (such regulations concern only built heritage and are discussed in chapter 4). Data were available concerning the purest possible form of market, wherein the decisions of both parties taking part in a service encounter, namely private providers of conservation services and individuals being their private customers, are not burdened with any external restrictions imposed by law or third parties, or by bureaucratic constraints. Malta therefore offered the perfect conditions for analysing marketing relations; observations made in such conditions were of inestimable worth for drawing up theoretical principles for marketing of this branch of services, which had so far not been analysed from the above point of view.

This study consists of a theoretical analysis grounded in the field of marketing research. In chapter 2, the research methodology applied for the purpose of this project is discussed. In particular, data collection methods, research techniques as well as selected research design selected are presented and their applicability in this particular case is analysed.

Chapter 3 of this research deals with the theoretical aspects of conservation marketing. Based on a scrupulous analysis of the existing literature in kindred areas of services marketing, theoretical frameworks of marketing conservation services are generated. The extent to which the interdependencies and rules typical for the discipline of services marketing are applicable to the very particular, unique field of conservation services are examined. The most important dissimilarities between any other types of services and heritage conservation are identified, as well as the main reasons for which an exclusive marketing approach should be applied in the latter case. These theoretical frameworks are additionally grounded in the empirical research presented in the subsequent chapters.

Subsequently, the Maltese conservation market is analysed. Chapter 4 deals with the supply side analysis thereof. At the outset, the historical development of conservation services in Malta is thoroughly discussed taking into consideration the evolution of the respective legislation. The institutions and business entities active on the conservation market are described, including their personal and professional capacities, existing potential, know-how, their development

opportunities and constraints faced as well as the array of services offered. A preliminary study of existing and potential users of conservation services, their awareness level (as perceived by the conservators) and methods of their targeting are conducted. The marketing activity undertaken by Maltese conservation business entities are discussed.

The next two chapters are dedicated to the demand side analysis of the Maltese conservation market. Chapter 5 discusses the results of the survey carried among the general public in Malta. The aim of this survey was to examine the extent to which Maltese people are familiar with heritage conservation services, their respective level of awareness as well as their willingness and need to use these services. In the chapter 6, focus is put on the existing customers of the Maltese conservation business entities. In particular, the impact of using conservation services on the customers' behaviour and attitude towards heritage preservation is analysed. A comprehensive profile of Maltese customers of conservation services is drafted, and their expectations and awareness level is presented.

As Benhamou (2011) rightly notes, publications regarding heritage goods may be considered problematic, because studies available are usually limited by the very specificity of national situations. The explanatory power of the comprehensive, multifaceted research of the conservation market in Malta would obviously be weakened if the findings could not be juxtaposed against analogical data concerning other countries. Therefore, in chapter 7, the results of an additional, extensive international survey carried out among conservators worldwide are presented. This supplementary analysis helps to determine which of the findings of the research made in Malta are typical of the entire conservation branch and which of them may be specific to this small, insular country in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

In chapter 8, the findings of the research are summarised. In particular, the results of both surveys carried out on the demand side of the Maltese conservation market are confronted with the supply side analyses conducted both locally in Malta and globally. Eventually, a set of recommendations for applying marketing tools by providers of conservation services are sketched out.