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YES WE CAN DO IT: The Implementation of a Preservation Strategy – Chamber of Deputies' Brazil

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Abstract:

The Chamber of Deputies boasts a huge and significant collection related to the legislative history and memory of Brazil, which comprises library books, manuscripts, rare books, audiovisual materials, museum items and oversized panels from Athos Bulcão, Oscar Niemeyer and Di Cavalcanti.

Since its beginning, the preservation service faced many problems most of them related to lack of credibility, reliable knowledge of Institution's collections and resources.

Aiming to change this scenario a broad preservation strategy was adopted, including the implementation of preventive conservation measures, the development of a learning heritage program, the employment of the risk management tool and the assessment of the collections' significance.

This paper will describe each action taken during the last five years, showing how vital it was the implementation of an inclusive and coordinated plan to achieve long-term preservation of collections in a traditional political institution.

Keywords: preventive conservation, significance, risk management.

Introduction

The Chamber of Deputies is located at the Palace of the National Congress, Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. The palace, designed by the well-known architect Oscar Niemeyer, was created in 1960 and became a UNESCO heritage site in 1987.

The Institution boasts a significant and historic collection related to the legislative history of Brazil, which comprises around 250,000 of library books, 1,000,000,000 of manuscript documents, 4,000 rare books, 2000 art objects, including furniture and paintings, 800,000 items of videos, films and photographs and important oversized panels, from Athos Bulcão, Oscar Niemeyer and Di Cavalcanti, which are integrated to the architecture of the building.

The preservation service is responsible for the conservation, protection and care of all collections ensuring their maintenance for future generations. Since its creation in 1983, the service faced many problems such as:

- Lacking of support, trust and credibility from the managers and stakeholders of the Institution;
- Preservation was seen as a tertiary consideration at the Institution as any political crises always had a huge impact on the resources;
- Managers tended to be very conservative concerning the necessary changes. It was believed that restoration of individual items were more important than preventive conservation measures;
- Conservators did not have a well-designed picture of the Institution's collections and their problems. Most of the preservation projects ended not being well planned nor developed satisfactorily.

This chaotic situation showed conservators that a broad preservation strategy should be adopted to promote a better understanding of the preservation service role, the significance of collections and the importance of building teamwork. On top of that, it was vital to establish credibility and implement a process to better identify and manage risks to the collections, making the best use of limited resources.

Heritage learning program: Preservation campaign "Art all over the House"

The heritage learning program began in 2012 and was based on a post-graduation monograph (Farias, 2012) that evaluated the perception of staff regarding to the preservation of the legislative memory.

The results of the monograph showed that there was a severe lack of communication among the preservation service and staff, stakeholders, managers and other departments of the Institution, demonstrating that 77% of the people did not know which department was responsible for the care of collections although the service had been created 25 years ago. In addition, 71% had never heard anything about the work developed by the preservation service. Surprisingly, 81% agreed that the Institution have significant collections even though 78% could not recognize most of the important items.

The campaign entitled "Art all over the House - this heritage is also yours" had the objective to create a sense of belonging within staff, visitors and contractors, disseminating knowledge and awareness towards the importance of the Institution's collections.

The campaign included lectures, theater plays and various promotional materials such as institutional video, posters, booklet, banners and folders. Besides that, an illustrated magazine for children was created, including a Braille version.

Approximately two thousand people participated in the program, which brought more visibility to the preservation service. As part of the learning program, in 2013, 14 and 15, it was developed workshops for the restoration of the museum's furniture, painting and objects with the collaboration of staff and contractors. These events besides enable the treatment of more items provided to the participants and their co-workers a better understanding of the process and how it is important to follow the preventive conservation measures.

The heritage learning program when associated with preventive conservation measures and the preservation policy strengthened administratively the preservation service, clarifying everyone's responsibility in relation to the collection's care, leading to a greater investment in conservation projects and cooperation among the areas. From that moment, the maintenance of collections was recognized by the Chamber of Deputies, not as a secondary activity, but as one of the essential activities necessary to reinforce the institution's identity.

Preservation policy

The preservation service, conscious of its responsibility, attempted to implement the preservation policy in 2011, but the policy was only put into practice in July 2012, with the publication of the internal norm "Ato da Mesa no. 49".

The creation of the preservation policy established guidelines and responsibilities for the long-term of collections, with the objective of reducing the potential risks that could have impact on the heritage, ensuring their permanence and integrity for future generations. It provided principles for the management of collections and development of projects, bringing much more credibility to the preservation service and increasing collaboration among staff.

Once the preservation policy had been implemented, the preservation service, with the participation of other administrative units, created the "Preservation Guide of the Chamber of Deputies", including information and adequate procedures for the maintenance and safe access to the collections. The guide addressed topics related to handling, transportation, physical forces, dissociation, environmental conditions, emergency preparedness, security and reproduction. At the same time, campaigns to promote the policy dissemination were launched, aiming to increase teamwork and commitment.

Risk management tool

The importance of using an appropriate tool to assist the conservators to better identify risks and manage priorities was crucial. No more assumptions should be made and the preservation management of collections should be based on true data. Furthermore, with the crises that have been affecting the public administration in Brazil, it was of utmost importance to make a more efficient use of limited resources. Therefore, in 2012, the preservation service decided to implement the Risk Management tool for the preservation of cultural heritage (ICCRUM, 2016).

The use of this methodology represented a significant contribution to the security and conservation of collections, as it allows the establishment of priorities for preventive actions in a well-founded and transparent way. It also provided an effective tool for improvement and decision-making (Pedersoli, 2010).

The collections' survey considered the ten agents of deterioration, their causes, mechanisms and propagation routes and was based mainly on *The Conservation Assessment: A Proposed Model for Evaluating Museum Environmental Management Needs* (1999), by Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the recommendations of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

Divided into two sections, the questionnaire surveyed general information about the collections and conservation conditions. The first section, filled out by the collections' managers, comprised the characteristics of the collection, typology, size, cataloging form, use and access and the selection of items in order of importance and priority. The second part was carried out by conservators, through observation and on-site study. It evaluated the physical structure of the storage area, environmental conditions, lighting, biological infestation, maintenance, cleaning, housing, transportation, handling, disassociation, security features, alarm system and fire security.

The risk management methodology adopted by the Chamber of Deputies provided a framework to help examine, describe and especially reflect upon the different decision-making mechanisms, enabling an integrated view of the problems and providing up-to-date data for the elaboration of more efficient conservation strategies. These approaches, when associated with the degrees of significance assisted on the establishment of priorities and better allocation of resources for the collections safeguarding.

Teamwork

A multidisciplinary method helps providing different perspectives on problems and reach solutions based on a new understanding of situations. In the risk management project, the collaboration and involvement between managers and conservators during the implementation of the risk methodology was extremely relevant, not only for the evaluation of collections' significance, but also because, from that moment on, it allowed the preservation service to strengthen fundraising for conservation projects, especially in the implementation of actions established jointly by the work group.

At the beginning of the risk management, all collections' managers, which were previously sensitized through the learning campaign developed by the preservation service, were eager to collaborate. Subsequently, librarians, musicologists, registrars, architects, contractors and conservators used their technical knowledge to generate creative ideas for the preservation of the legislative memory.

One of the positive results of this process, in the long term, was the review of the compartmentalized management model used for many years, which was gradually replaced by the systemic view "(...) coexistence and permanent exchange of information as a way to enhance our experiences in the process of heritage formation and preservation". (Hollós & Pedersoli, 2009).

Significance

An essential requirement for the implementation of the risk management tool is the evaluation of the significance and values of cultural assets. As stated in *Significance 2.0 – a guide to assessing the significance of collections* (2009): "Significance defines the meanings and values of an item or collection through research and analysis, and by assessment against a standard set of criteria. [...]. The assessment process explores all the elements that contribute to

meaning" including historical, social, artistic or aesthetic values as well as rarity, context, provenance and others.

Significance is a vital tool in the sustainable management of collections as it provides criteria and information for conservation and decision-making. It is strictly related to the vision and mission of the institution and promotes exchange of ideas and experiences, contributing for a better understanding of the overall value of collections.

The analyses of the Chamber of Deputies' collections significance were divided into two distinct stages, for which a specialist with experience in risk management was hired. The first stage of the process collected data of all collections using a questionnaire based on diverse publications about the topic. The second stage consisted of a forty hours workshop with all collections managers to discuss the value of the heritage asset and how it was distributed among their components.

The key attributes were divided into eight categories (Table 1), which were used as indicators during the process of analysis of the degree of significance. These attributes were then given a score according to their degree of importance for the fulfilment of the institutional mission (Table2).

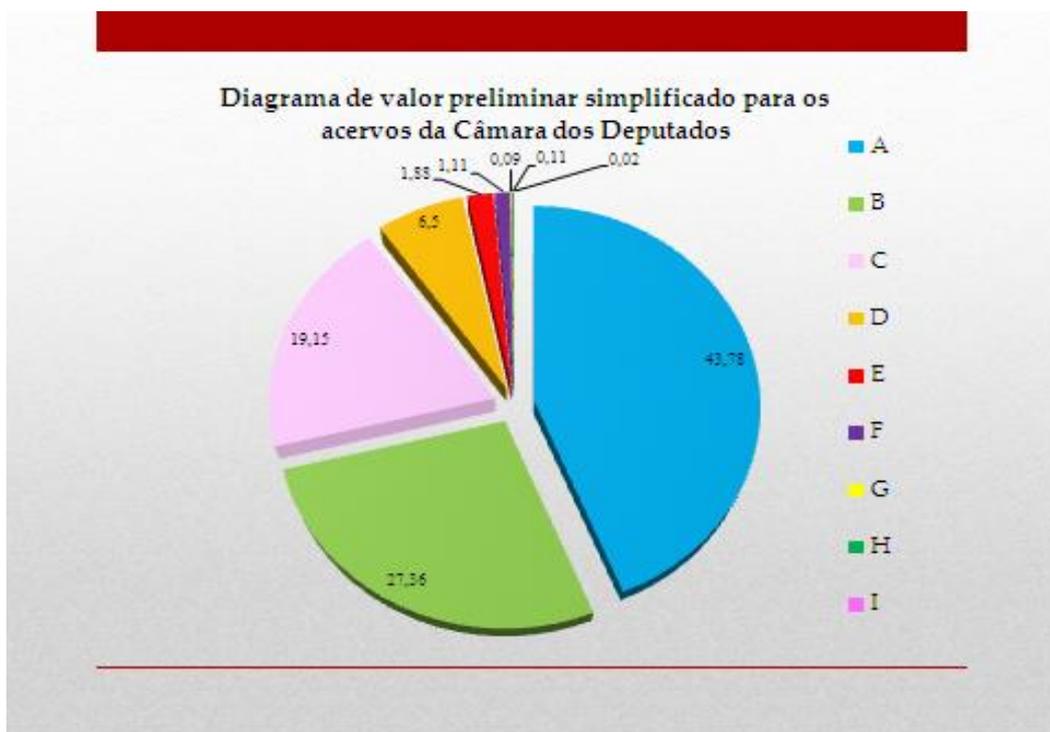
Attributes	Definition
Historic value (HV)	Item or collection directly related to topic; strongly contributes to the understanding and appreciation of both the Chamber of Deputies' and Brazil's history.
Social value (SV)	Strongly contributes to a sense of cultural or political identity of current Brazilian society; may contain information or symbols that identify the participation and recognition of the society in the legislative process.
Legal value (LV)	Item or collection with legal value that may subsidize the main and support activities of the Chamber of Deputies and its developments.
Technical/scientific value (TV)	Carries information and/or data that contribute (or can contribute) to education and / or academic studies, and may also constitute a technical-scientific reference on specific topics or areas of knowledge.
Artistic/historic value (AV)	High artistic quality or design, representative of artists, styles, artistic movements or recognized design.
Economic value (EV)	It has significant market value.
Rarity / uniqueness (RV)	Unique or rare items of exceptionally high quality or items that are exceptionally well studied and document a particular typology or style, record or other material cultural asset.
Provenance (P)	Every object that has its creation, origin and history well documented and admittedly linked to the Chamber of Deputies and its activities.

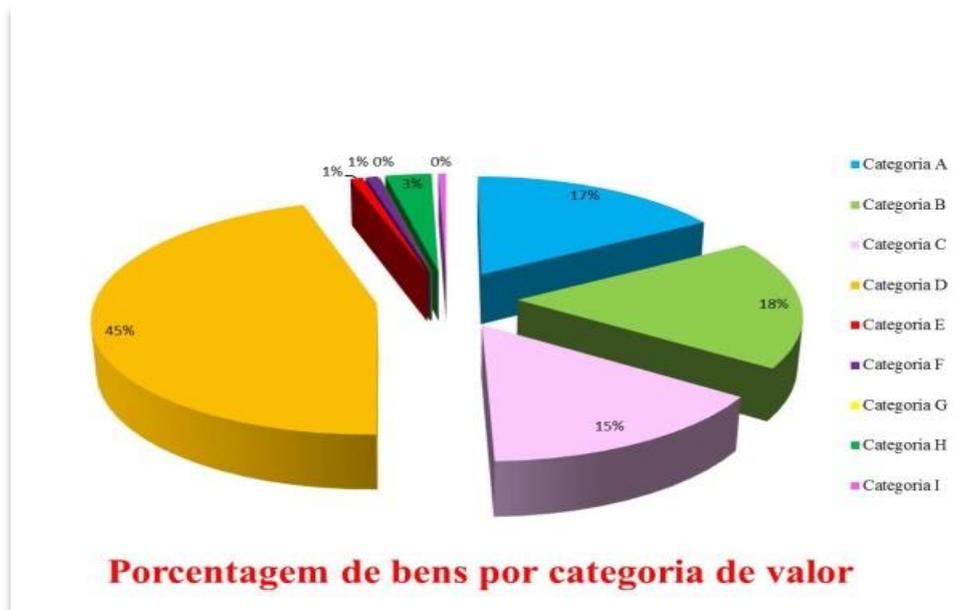
Table 1: Value attributes

Scoring	Scoring meaning
0	Item does not have this attribute
1	Very small presence of this attribute in the item
2	Small presence of this attribute in the item
3	Presence of this attribute in the item is average
4	High presence of this attribute in the item
5	Very high presence of this attribute in the item
6	Exceptional presence of this attribute in the item

Table 2: Scoring of value attributes

The next step was the calculation of the relative importance of all components and the creation of the value pie (fig.1). It demonstrates what is the percentage (%) of each category on the total value of the Institution's heritage (100%). The second graphic (fig.2) shows what is the size percentage of each category and the table below demonstrates each category in linear meters.





Conclusion

The issue of the preservation of collections has led to many discussions about the responsibilities inherent to their maintenance, as well as the challenges they face regarding management and conservation. Even submitted to legal frameworks that establish norms for their preservation, they are constantly being threatened by lack of resources, appreciation and all kinds of risks.

As conservators in charge of the collections care, it is our responsibility to use safe and appropriate tools that contribute to their long-term and enable a better fundraising capacity. The preservation service understands that it is often vital to seek critical reflection on procedures in use, as well as reviewing parameters, plans and actions, designing new strategies in order to remain relevant.

The many procedures required for the preservation of collections are a challenge, but they may also be seen as an opportunity for dialogue, interaction between different sectors and specialists to develop solutions for the unexpected.

The adoption of the risk management tool, although it was labor intensive and demanding for all parts involved, it was essential to help establishing priorities and better use of resources, providing reliable data and information that increased the credibility of the actions proposed and carried out by the preservation service. The heritage learning campaigns helped encouraging teamwork and created awareness about shared responsibility - also essential for the methodology development.

The significance assessment was vital to ensure proper collection management and guide the preservation actions today and in the future. Based on the mission and vision of the Institution, the attributes and scores were stipulated, showing to all managers, which are the most valuable collections and why priorities should be established.

Instruments like the risk management tool are not the sole answer to the conservation of heritage. Although it proved to be efficient to help the preservation service to better perform

its duties, the tool is only part of a broad preservation program that includes a policy, heritage education, teamwork and last but not least determination.

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