



Preventive  
Conservation  
in Historic Houses  
and Palace  
Museums:  
Assessment  
Methodologies  
and Applications

SilvanaEditoriale

# **Preventive Conservation in Historic Houses and Palace Museums: Assessment Methodologies and Applications**

Conference of the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles (EPV), the Association of European Royal Residences (ARRE), and the Research Centre of the Palace of Versailles (CRCV)

In collaboration with the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DEMHIST), held at the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles and Trianon

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## **Conference Proceedings**

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# Preventive Conservation in Schönbrunn Palace – Preventive Conservation of an Heterogeneous Collection

## Abstract

Schönbrunn with its apartments in the palace and its gardens, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and ongoing use by the imperial family of the Habsburg dynasty, belongs to the most frequented sights of Austria. The amount of visitors in the historic building as well in the gardens are increasing each year and had reached more than two millions in the palace and around 6,5 millions in the gardens with its bosquets, fountains, sculptures and garden architecture. As the whole sight was outsourced in 1992 in form of a private company, but still in the possession of the Austrian Republic, the corporate mission of the company is to use and protect the historical sight with all its parts. Therefore, this mission provokes the big challenge and beside restoration work, the preventive conservation is one of the most efficient strategies to fulfil the high responsibility, which has to be assumed by the company. Preventive conservation is even more important in historic buildings, as the implementation of modern structures, i.e. climate control systems, are not realisable: it would destroy that, which has to be protected.

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## Keywords

Cultural heritage, historical buildings, preventive conservation, climate control, curatorial cleaning, dust, damages.

Since 1996 on the UNESCO World Heritage sights listed, Schönbrunn is one of the most important monuments and cultural sights of Austria. The imperial apartments of Schönbrunn Palace are open to the public 365 days a year, without any closing day.

The amount of almost two million visitors a year and other commercial and/or cultural use provoke a considerable challenge to fulfil the corporate mission pretended by the Republic of Austria.

Since 1992 in various European initiatives regarding preventive conservation many initiatives in the field of restoration and preventive conservation of the construction itself and the dependent environment features were undertaken. From the year 2000 ongoing, a very ambitious concept as part of preventive conservation has started and a curatorial cleaning-program has been elaborated.

Due to intensive use of the historical apartments (visitors, receptions

*Fig.1*

Condition monitoring of the representative Salon on the ground floor. (© Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.H.)



etc.) and the impact of dust, humidity and different risks of damages an annual curatorial cleaning campaign was established, being accompanied by preventive interventions and by recording the annual condition.

The campaign includes:

- staff training before starting the annual campaign between autumn and spring;
- cleaning of circa 60 rooms with historical refurbishing and circa 2.500 items by the cleaning staff under the supervision of a restorer;
- cleaning of circa 20 rooms with very sensible and delicate superficies (i.e. lacquer, paper, textile) by restorers;
- condition report and documentation of each room / each item, entering directly in the database;
- immediate interventions by restorer (fixing loose parts) if needed to stabilize the condition.

All this components/informations lead to a comprehensive condition monitoring being inserted into a database.

The stabilization of an indoor climate and a long termed climate concept serving for the demanded preventive conservation and also satisfying visitor's demands is one of the biggest challenges in times of the worldwide climate change.

Already existing measurements are:

- structural interventions like closing open courtyards to avoid uncontrolled indoor climate;
- supply of preconditioned air (temperature and humidity) via historical tunnels and chimneys;
- elaboration of practical devices/guidelines like i.e. for opening/



Fig. 2  
Condition monitoring  
of the painting "Family  
Portrait of Maria Theresa"  
via insert database.  
(© Schloß Schönbrunn  
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Betriebsges.m.b.H.)

closing windows, introduction of local and individual air conditioners, providing humidity and its service and care;

- permanent climate measurement in selected historic rooms.

All the existing data of the climate measurements need further on professional analyses and interpretation of the climate data with the result, that the indoor climate can be stabilized even within this extensive use of the historical rooms.

Another tool of the preventive conservation concept is the Visitor's Flow Management. It includes:

- limited number of visitors (800 persons/hour);
- connected with the analogue and online-ticket sale and reservations in advanced;
- directly controlled at the gates;
- permanent discussion with conservators if an increasing number of visitors could be arguable regarding the preservation of the historic rooms and items and its long termed protection.

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