

Definition of the Life Cycle of Cultural Property, the Concept of Stratum

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Abstract: In this article, we propose a life cycle model of cultural property that allows us to schematically represent the different key moments and trends in the life of a cultural property. However, we point out that the multiplicity of possible life patterns for a property does not allow the definition of standard trends. The originality of our proposal is the definition of strata within the life cycle, making it possible to isolate specific analyses of certain problems in the life of the cultural property.

Keywords: Life cycle; Cultural property; Situation; Management software solution; Ontology

1 Introduction

Nowadays, almost all museums are equipped with documentation software to manage their collections. The publishers of these software products are thus faced with the complexity of describing works. It must be possible to describe a stuffed specimen conserved in a museum as a currency conserved in a numismatic collection. This has resulted in an explosion in the number of fields used to describe a cultural property within the software. For example, the French software Flora has nearly 400 fields for describing a cultural property.

A multitude of fields make the management of cultural property within a museum particularly complex. This appeared to us when we wanted to study the situations in which a cultural property could be found. Our objective was to identify and model the different types of interaction between a property, an environment and agents. The aim was to define the needs of documentary software in terms of the expression of actions carried out on a cultural property. The typical example leading our reflection is a fire situation in a museum in which a firefighter has to extract a work of art from a room. When a firefighter is involved, he must know which work to save, its location in the museum, how to recognize it and how to extract it from the museum [DGdPdIMd13]. To do this, the firefighter needs specific information about the work, corresponding to data found in the museum's information system.

But this information has often been expressed in scientific terms and does not necessarily correspond to the language and needs of the firefighter involved. It is therefore necessary for museums' documentary software to take into account the situations in which a property may

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be found. But the multitude of situations is such, as well as the complexity of the software we described, that it is often difficult to know if a specific situation falls within the scope of these packages.

That is why we are working on the definition of the life cycle of cultural property. This will make it possible to take into account the multiplicity of statutes of cultural property. The definition of a life cycle makes it possible to structure and map the different situations and interactions that take place in the life of the cultural property. The proposal for a life cycle of cultural property that we make in this article therefore aims to provide a framework for analyzing the different stages in the life of a cultural property and the different statuses from which it can benefit.

2 Phases in the life of a property

We define cultural property as property, in the economic sense of the term given by Marc Pénin in the article on economic property [Pésd]. Thus, a property must be „useful, capable of satisfying human needs“.

In the case of cultural property, its usefulness derives from its cultural character and not from its monetary or utilitarian value. This means, and this is reflected in the definition given by UNESCO in its Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict [UN54], that the question of the attribution of cultural property status is very personal. A cultural property is any object that can be given cultural value by anyone.

The life of a cultural property is therefore not limited to that of a work exhibited in a museum. It can be any object collected or lost on which a cultural, intrinsic or extrinsic value is projected. Life cycles generally propose to identify phases within the life of a work. These phases are chronological periods during which the value scale according to which the life cycle analysis is carried out adopts a trend (growth, decline, stability) from which results an analysis proposed by the author of the life cycle.

When considering the descriptive coverage of a cultural property within a documentary software, it seems possible to divide the life of a cultural property into a number of phases. We choose the example of the sarcophagus of the spouses to detail the phases to which a cultural property is subject.

1. The sarcophagus of the spouses was made around 520 BC in Caere, Italy. At this point, it is in what can be described as the creation-execution phase. This notion of creation-execution is found in most of the documentary software packages and includes a certain number of fields to describe the context in which the property appeared;
2. This urn was intended to receive the ashes of a couple and was placed in their tomb. During the period from the execution of the sarcophagus to the death of the last

- husband, the property is in a phase of use. The object does not necessarily have cultural value. It is a classic property;
3. Because of its destination - a tomb - the collective memory quickly forgets the existence of the sarcophagus of the spouses. It then enters a phase of disappearance. This phase of disappearance mostly concerns only archaeological objects;
 4. In 1850, the tomb containing the sarcophagus was discovered by the Giampietro Campana who included the object in his collection. From that moment on, the object becomes a cultural property since it satisfies an artistic or historical interest: it is collected;
 5. When the Campana collection was sold in 1861, the object was purchased by the Louvre Museum. The object then enters a conservation phase. From that moment on, the purpose of the interventions made on the object is no longer to increase its cultural value but only to preserve and preserve it in the state in which it remains;
 6. Finally, if the cultural property were to be destroyed, it would enter a phase of memory. It would continue to generate interest, for example through written productions. This is the case with the first version of the painting *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, the work of Caravaggio, which was destroyed in 1945. This work is now described on the Wikipedia encyclopedia, which is an act of memory.

The main problem with the description of phases described above is that each cultural property follows its own path among these phases. These phases are not found in the life of all cultural property. For example, a painting never has a priori a phase of use since its vocation is purely cultural. Concerning the disappearance phase, only archaeological objects know it a priori. Finally, many objects only enter a collection or conservation phase, without moving from one to the other. It is therefore impossible to represent a life cycle of cultural property in a linear way as one could imagine in the following figure:



Fig. 1: Succession of phases

This graph lacks an essential element: a scale of value of cultural property. Most life cycles offer a value scale against which to analyze the life of the object. It can be the price of the product, the number of sales, the energy cost or customer satisfaction.

In the case of a cultural property, it necessary to ask what value do we want to analyze? We could look at the monetary value of the property. We could focus on the legal status of the property, meaning whether it is more or less protected by a specific status. Or, in our firefighter's situation, we could be interested in the risk to the cultural property. But to relate an historical description of the property to the situations in which it finds itself, we cannot be satisfied with just one scale of value in the context of a documentary software.

3 Dividing the life cycle into strata

The life cycle of cultural property can therefore only pass through a juxtaposition of reading grids to show the different problems involved in the life of the object. This is why we propose to represent the life cycle of cultural properties through different strata. Each stratum constitutes the level of reading for a problem associated with cultural property. It is the reading of the life of the object under a certain prism. We therefore use the definition of the life cycle to apply it to the strata: a schematic representation of the life of the property seen under the prism of a specific problem expressed by a quantifiable value arranged on the ordinate of the scheme. The life cycle then becomes a schematic representation of the chronological life of the property divided into strata corresponding to specific issues.

Corresponding to our need for analysis of cultural property, we propose three strata of reading: a material stratum, a cultural stratum and an institutional stratum. These three strata aim to group and materialize the various canonical functions of the museum whose documentary software package provides the technical infrastructure: exhibition, conservation and scientific functions [GD14]. Thus, in a museum documentary software package, we find the need to express the materiality of the object (to preserve it), its cultural character (to enhance it, to exhibit it) and the institutional acts that characterize it (to document and study it).

The first stratum we define is the material stratum. This stratum corresponds to the life cycle of the physical object. This cycle therefore begins when the object is created, materialized and it ends when the object is destroyed. This life cycle is based on a value scale which is the integrity of the object. It is within this cycle that all situations of intervention on the object such as conservation or restoration will be integrated. Within this stratum, we are not talking about a artwork or cultural property, but we are talking about a product. This term emphasizes the idea that the material cycle involves processes like production, restoration or alteration processes.

The second stratum is the cultural stratum, which can also be called a social stratum. This cultural stratum corresponds to the social acceptance of the object as a cultural property. In other words, this stratum includes the phenomena of cultural appropriation, collection of the object and memories that will touch the object and transform it into a cultural property. Here, the value-scale could be the fame of the cultural property, as a representation of the social acceptance of the property. Indeed, inside the notion of fame, we find the idea that the property is known, recognized by people, and the idea that the property is also liked by people.

Finally, we define an institutional stratum. This corresponds to the acquisition of the status of a work of art. We use the definition of Mikel Dufrenne [Dusd], which explains that a work of art is a document. This document is a proof of the artist status of the person who created it. So the institutional stratum corresponds to administrative actions such as: registration in an inventory or obtaining legal status. These actions attest that the property is a work in the

eyes of an agent which may be public or private. In this stratum, the value-scale could be the administrative activity or the number of documents produced around the work of art.

4 Conclusion

We believe that this approach to the life cycle of cultural property has several advantages. First of all, it allows to model the life of a property and contexts of application of situations involving the property. We could consider this model as a life-line-oriented model of documentary in museums, relating the production of documentation about work of art to conceptual model of museum CIDOC-CRM [OI14].

Also, this approach makes it possible to identify the repercussions of a situation at different scales. Thus, it can be assumed that a rescue by a fireman of a cultural property will lead to a restoration situation in the material stratum but also to an inventory situation in the institutional stratum. It can even generate a popular momentum like what happened last year at the Rio Museum, and it will have an impact on the cultural stratum of the property. It provides a model to manage and visualize documentary evolution of a work of art, in a complementary approach of the SPECTRUM standard [MDL09].

Finally, this system provides flexibility to our life cycle model. As it is difficult to imagine all the situations for a cultural property as well as all the facets of description, we believe that the notion of stratum makes it possible to extend the scope of the cycle analysis if necessary while remaining compatible with the aspects already described.

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