

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Karolína Menšíková*

Terezín Declaration – Ten Years Later 7th International Conference Prague, 18-19 June 2019

The Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of the Cultural Assets of WWII Victims, with financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, organized the 7th International Conference focused on the topic of the “Terezín Declaration – Ten Years Later”. The conference took place in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague on 18-19 June 2019.

There were five sessions, which were connected to the main topic of post-war restitution of property. The first session focused on the Terezín Declaration itself. Prof. Kamil Zeidler, the first speaker, dealt with the controversial aspects of the Declaration, recognized in International Public Law as a soft law. Dr. Wesley A. Fisher then shared his thoughts and experiences concerning the difficulties with this type of restitution. Moreover, Dr. Uwe Hartmann and Dr. Hannah M. Lessing offered their opinions about funding and the developments concerning recognition of and support for the surviving victims of the Nazi regime by selling objects from the National Fund and passage of the Art Restitution Law, which is considered as an important restitution tool in Austria and Germany. The closing lecture of this session, by Dr. Agnes Peresztegi, described the Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project.

* **Karolína Menšíková** is currently a Pan-European Seal trainee at the EUIPO, which deals with registration of European Union trademarks and Community designs. Her tasks are mainly based on legal and IT administrative issues that occur during registration of trademark or design by user-using IP tools. In 2019, she graduated from Faculty of Law, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, and became a doctoral student with specialization in IP Law at the same university.

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Karolína Menšíková

The second session focused on the problems connected with Research and Restitutions. The first two speakers, Dr. Ondřej Vlček and Dr. Alena Bányaiová, shared their interests in Czech post-war restitution with the audience. Dr. Vlček described thefts of art works by Nazis in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and compared this behaviour with other occupied countries. Nazi thefts of art works were justified, e.g. in Poland, as a “seizure due to non-existence of the state”, or in France as “concentration for security reasons”. Dr. Bányaiová then focused on Czech legislation, in particular on Act No. 212/2000 Coll. on the alleviation of certain property-related injustices caused by the Holocaust. Moreover, the lecturer spoke also about the problems with application of this Act. The main problem was that some of the confiscated art works were owned by institutions authorized by local administrative bodies to which this Act does not apply. It is important to point out that one of the speakers of this session, Dr. Thierry Bajou, described problems with restitution in French law using four selected legal cases. He summarized by concluding that while the Declaration and other restitution acts help to find just and fair solutions, nevertheless the way is not smooth at all.

The third session focused on Provenance Research as a University Discipline. Mrs. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz discussed the importance of provenance research which combines an analysis of individual cases with a comprehensive historical study. Moreover, this research as an academic discipline can enrich the knowledge of Jewish cultural life before the Second World War. She also pointed out that Polish museums exhibit a large number of objects of unknown origin which were seized from the original owners by the Nazis. Thus provenance research can help resolve the unknown origin of those items. In this session, speakers Ms MaryKate Cleary, Prof. Meike Hoffman, and Dr. Christian Fuhrmeister talked about teaching and learning methods for developing provenance research.

The fourth session dealt with the wartime and post-war fates of spoliated library stocks and methods of identification. Dr. Michal Bušek focused on methods of identifying the original owners of books held by the Jewish Museum in Prague. Furthermore, Dr. Ivana Yael Nepalová described the mechanism of transferring selected Jewish library items from Czechoslovakia to the UN mandate of Palestine and the State of Israel after the Second World War.

The final session focused on the topic of international collaboration in issues of provenance research. Dr. Christel F. Force talked about the German/American collaboration in this area based on transparency and accessibility. However, there was no communication platform for this collaboration. Recently however this collaboration led to the creation of the German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program, which addresses the need for access to international resources and expertise. Moreover, Dr. Force talked about the aims, structure, and workshops of this Program. The final speaker of the conference was Dr. Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, who focused on “Tracing Pan-European Nazi Cultural Loot on the Eastern Front: Transcending the ‘Continental Divide’ on Restitution”.

She expanded on the topics of losses and the migration of cultural property, based on her research in archives and libraries. She pointed out the issue of identification of Nazi-looted cultural property in Russia. She divided this issue into three wide sections, i.e. archives, libraries, and art institutions.

This conference was an important meeting of lawyers, academics, and workers from restitution institutions across Europe and the USA. The lectures and post-lecture debates were essential to thinking about future progress in resolving the still actual legal problems with post-war restitutions. Moreover, based on the technical developments a few speakers also described some actual improvements and potential progress in restitution thanks to modern technology, which is able to connect so many institutions around the world. It is more than possible that the next conference will bring more knowledge about established programmes, international collaboration, and improvements in provenance research thanks to modern technology devices and platforms.