**“The ideal of the ideal environment”. The influence of climate control on the emergence of preventive conservation theories.**

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The lecture will discuss the link between the technological evolution of climate control installations in museums and the emergence of the concept of preventive conservation, meant as the idea of preventing decay by controlling the environment around the object. The key to understand this connection is to analyse the history of environmental standards in museums and, precisely, temperature and relative humidity specifications. The timeframe chosen for the lecture ranges from the early 1940s to 1978. These dates exemplify the thread connecting the moving of the most important British collections into air-conditioned warrepositories with the publication of the first edition of Thompson’s “The Museum Environment”, one of the most influential books in the history of museum practice. It will be shown how the experiences of British museums during the WWII were used to prove the validity of the climate specifications empirically developed in the pre-war years and how these hygrothermal values spread from the war-repositories to the whole world as universal museum standards. Connected to this process is the development of preventive conservation. The opportunity of preventing the most visible forms of damage, such as mechanical decay and biological attack, by controlling the hygrothermal conditions surrounding heritage objects, made the strongest case for promoting an indirect and continuous action on the conservation environment rather than an invasive and direct intervention on the objects themselves. By presenting both the contradictions and the positive outcomes of this controversial history, this lecture will show how the disciplinary formation of conservation science in the post-war period was shaped by the continuous interrelation among technological development, practical knowledge, scientific research and eventful circumstances