

Networking and Communication. Our Best Hope for an Adequate Response to Emergency Events

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Resumen

Creación de redes y comunicación: los mejores medios posibles para reaccionar adecuadamente ante las situaciones de emergencia

Ningún país o comunidad están al amparo de los caprichos de la naturaleza o de los desastres causados por el hombre. Es necesario fomentar la adopción de legislaciones a este respecto y facilitar el acceso de todos a la documentación escrita mediante su traducción a distintos idiomas, a fin de contribuir al fortalecimiento de los esfuerzos realizados en el plano internacional.

Conscientes de este problema mundial, diferentes entidades, instituciones y organizaciones se están reuniendo en los Estados Unidos para examinar cómo es posible ayudar a las instituciones culturales a proteger mejor sus colecciones y reaccionar rápidamente ante las situaciones de emergencia, formando en especial a personal capacitado para enseñarle las técnicas adecuadas con las que se puede hacer frente a ese tipo de situaciones.

En este contexto, los gobiernos y los ministerios competentes deben desempeñar un papel importante en materia de sensibilización y concienciación. Para ello, es preciso que faciliten los datos necesarios que permitan localizar a los responsables y personas de los servicios del Estado con los que hay que ponerse en contacto. La creación de un fondo internacional serviría para impulsar las actividades en este ámbito.

El establecimiento de un diálogo y la aportación de ayuda a las poblaciones en el plano local, nacional e internacional exigen la creación de redes que permitan establecer una cooperación entre los profesionales de la cultura, por un lado, y las organizaciones humanitarias y religiosas, así como las autoridades militares y diplomáticas, por otro lado.

Résumé

Création de réseaux et communication : notre meilleur espoir pour une réponse adaptée aux situations d'urgence

Aucun pays ni aucune communauté n'est à l'abri des caprices de la nature et de ceux causés par l'homme. Il est nécessaire de favoriser la législation et de rendre accessibles au plus grand nombre les supports écrits par des traductions en différentes langues afin de renforcer l'effort international.

Conscients de ce problème mondial, des agences, des instituts et des organisations se réunissent aux États-Unis afin de discuter pour savoir comment aider les institutions culturelles à mieux protéger leurs collections et à réagir rapidement, notamment en formant des personnes capables

d'enseigner les techniques de réponse aux situations d'urgence.

Dans ce contexte, les gouvernements et les ministères doivent jouer un rôle important (sensibilisation, responsabilisation, etc.) à condition qu'ils permettent d'identifier les responsables et les personnes à contacter au niveau étatique. La création d'un fonds international encouragerait d'autant plus cet élan.

Le maintien du dialogue et l'aide envers les populations au niveau local, national et international passent par le travail en réseau des professionnels de la culture en partenariat avec des organisations humanitaires, religieuses, militaires ou diplomatiques.

"D" for "DO" - The time has come to gather together to find a simple, international approach to helping each other raise awareness about cultural property, and to plan and to ensure that we transmit the message that it is now a matter of political will, and relatively limited requirements for resources, that will protect and preserve moveable and immovable cultural property from most emergency events that threaten to overwhelm and destroy it.

"D" the big dilemma question of those we have been asked to address. Networking: coordination and collaboration among diverse institutions and organisations in emergency preparedness and response.

I am drawn inexorably to this topic from a cogent group of suggested themes for this symposium.

The strategies we decide to employ should be swift in their implementation, short on rhetoric, agreed in principle in advance, and provide guidelines and parameters for responders on site who own, care for, or are guardians of their cultural heritage but who may or may not have any training in the professional care or handling of works of art or built heritage. Those persons should be able to call in resources from outside their regions or their countries. All of us, at one time or another, will have to rely on each other for this help. No country or community is immune to the vagaries of natural hazards or man-made disasters.

As a conservator for the last thirty odd years dealing with large and small collections, works in private hands, advising on collections care, emergency planning, response and recovery at the institutional, local, state, national, and with occasional sorties onto the international stage, I am convinced that between us all we now have the written information that we need to begin an international effort. We need more legislation and translations are necessary, into and out of numerous different languages but we have what it takes to begin. We have people who know what to do in emergency situations in various countries. Cultural property organisations are in a position to help and for a while we have the attention of politicians due to events of the past ten years.

We have the will.

We need the way. We need an international equivalent of an Incident Command System.

In the United States of America we have established partnerships and resources. To quote from a paper by Jane S. Long of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force: "In late 1994, more than 80 representatives of regional and national United States (of America) organisations came together to discuss how to help cultural institutions better protect collections and recover from disasters. Sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), and Heritage Preservation, the National Summit on Emergency Response was a call to arms".

She continued, observing that the gathering was notable for two reasons. First, it presented a good opportunity for the library and archives, museum, and historic preservation communities to join forces around a single issue. Second, it marked a major public commitment to preserving cultural heritage by FEMA. The director of FEMA, James L. Witt challenged the audience to commit "to a national effort to reduce the future impact of natural disasters on our cultural and historic institutions across this nation".

The Heritage Task Force is now a partnership of 34 federal agencies and national service organisations, sponsored by FEMA and the national non-profit Heritage Preservation.

Many of the initial initiatives and publications have been accomplished and / or published with the aid of its partner organizations. With the "Wheel", training trainers to teach emergency response techniques, we have developed a national curriculum for training in emergency response and have organised teams of two trained conservators in each of the ten FEMA regions within the United States.

At the Kobe/Tokyo gathering a year after the Kobe earthquake, a broad-based group of cultural property administrators, curators, conservators and members of UNESCO and ICOM produced a Declaration that was circulated (and has been made available by the organisers of this conference); this too called for action.

As an international community we know what to do. Those nations that have the information are more than willing to share it. Every situation is different, but this is not rocket science; it boils down to coping with too much water, fire, structural damage and collapse, and helping people cope with shock, loss, horrible weather conditions, and the immense task of recovery. War and terror add layer upon layer of difficulties but these too pass, and life, for the lucky ones, goes on.

As a person who works in the trenches, my requests of you gathered here are fairly straightforward:

- heads of State should be made aware that they and their governments bear personal responsibility for the long term preservation of cultural heritage and that we are a professional field that can help them on an ongoing basis to do a better job;
- ambassadors of as many nations as possible need to be approached to make them aware that if problems or major events occur in their countries they may be able to call upon the resources of the country where they may be posted;

- ambassadors to the United Nations should be enlisted to act as conduits for information if national events occur. One of the tragedies of, say, a tsunami or an earthquake, is that those of us who can help do not have an established line of communication to set up an immediate response mechanism;
- ministers of Culture or appointed individuals within national governments who can act as the national Incident Command Coordinator (oh, easy for those with Ministers of Culture!). From nation to nation we need to know who is in charge and how to contact them or their appointees;
- we need an international funding source that can be tapped in order to move trained personnel where they may be needed, with their equipment if necessary;
- we should emulate the work of the rescue dog teams or members of the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute – both organisations can provide small teams on a twenty-four hour basis 365 days a year to do the work they are trained to do or to assess the impact of an emergency event, report accurately on the extent of damage and what outside assistance may be required, in what time frame;
- networking. This is all about knowing each other and working together. Working with the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, religious leaders, the military, the diplomatic corps. We also need to continue to talk to each other as members of cultural property organisations but most of all we now need to leave our comfortable cocoon where we calm our consciences by saying “nobody allowed us to help” or “no one contacted me” or “there is no money” or “why didn’t the military guard the museum?”.

The fact is that we have done a poor job of letting those who make policy aware that we can and do protect cultural property against many emergency events. We have answers, the will, the expertise – all we really need is their understanding and their consent and their leadership, and then we can be full partners in helping people at the local, national and international level help themselves, their art, their monuments, their written documents and their heritage.

With a concerted communications and networking effort aimed at Heads of State, Presidents and Prime Ministers of countries, policy makers and the public we can do our work of saving cultural property, both moveable and immovable from unnecessary destruction and permanent damage. We should pinpoint a small, well placed group of leaders who could then, by example, provide peer pressure to move the basic protection of cultural property to the forefront of their thinking. It is good politics, it is good for cultural property.

I do not underestimate the need for laws, that more nations must ratify the Hague Convention, the United States of America included, (this is now much closer to reality than ever before), that there is not an immense amount to do. All of the questions that have been put to this audience need clear and swift answers and we are not finished with the talking yet, but let us establish a timeframe for action, divide up what must be accomplished, and move forward. I am a great believer in the adage that one can eat an elephant, bite by bite.