

The IFLA Risk Register: Its History, Aims, and Methods

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Abstract:

Throughout the centuries, libraries have been essential for the preservation, conservation and safeguarding of the world's heritage. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) upholds this age-old mission of libraries and has made it one of its core aims.

Culture is a basic need. A community thrives through its cultural heritage, it dies without it.

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IFLA, preservation, conservation and safeguarding of heritage

At IFLA, we work together with our members and our extensive preservation and conservation network on many different aspects of safeguarding documentary cultural heritage for the next generation. We engage in issues around digital preservation with the UNESCO PERSIST Project¹, we manage a network of fourteen IFLA Preservation and Conservation Centres² world-wide and we work closely with UNESCO and the Blue Shield on safeguarding heritage affected by natural and man-made disasters.

Preservation and conservation of documentary heritage in all its formats has always been a priority for IFLA. However throughout the last decade, it is becoming more and more apparent that IFLA needs to be more actively involved in the role libraries play in disasters. IFLA is one of the founding members of the Blue Shield³ and has been involved with UNESCO's work on safeguarding heritage throughout the last decades. More concrete measures were needed for IFLA to better respond to disasters on the one hand and to raise awareness for disaster preparedness on the other hand. The International Council of Museums

¹ Dutch UNESCO National Commission PERSIST home: <http://unesco.nl/digital-sustainability>

² IFLA Preservation and Conservation Core Activity: www.ifla.org/pac

³The Blue Shield (<http://www.ancbs.org/cms/en/>) was founded in 1996 and is recognised under the second protocol of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

(ICOM)⁴ as well as of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)⁵, both also founding members of the Blue Shield, already had expansive processes in place to respond to disasters. Based on the ICOM Red Lists and the ICOMOS Heritage@Risk, together with the IFLA Preservation and Conservation Section⁶, we started working on the Risk Register for Documentary Heritage.

The IFLA Risk Register for Documentary Heritage

The IFLA Risk Register for Documentary Heritage is an essential tool to serve libraries, library staff and library collections world-wide. It has several aims in order to assist the safeguarding of heritage.

The Risk Register is a closed, confidential database where institutions and holders of documentary heritage collections are encouraged to register their collections⁷. By registering collections, holders of documentary heritage ensure that IFLA does have reliable and trustworthy contact details in regions if a disaster strikes. It also enables IFLA to pinpoint where collections are held if coordinates are required by UNESCO or the Blue Shield. For this we strongly encourage everyone to submit their collections to the Risk Register as it cannot be predicted when and where a natural or a man-made disaster will strike next.

The Risk Register does not replace the necessity for institutions to have risk preparedness and disaster plans as well as adequate staff training⁸. We want to ensure that libraries are aware of preventative methods to secure their collections in order to minimise the damage if disaster occurs.

The Risk Register raises awareness for libraries to be considered in the international cultural heritage rescue effort if a disaster strikes. Being included in the Risk Register can assist libraries to raise the profile within their country for libraries in safeguarding cultural heritage and caring for at risk collections, and the need for suitable resources.

How are libraries affected by disasters?

In 2013 armed groups occupied Northern Mali and Timbuktu, a city famous for its cultural heritage and its vast amount of public and private libraries with invaluable documentary heritage. To safeguard the manuscripts during the occupation, volunteers smuggled them into safety to Bamako with the help of international support. The manuscripts have since been kept in the capital and are undergoing restoration and digitisation work. Libraries have been at the forefront of evacuating and preserving the unique heritage of Mali.⁹

Cases like Mali are devastating and hard to comprehend and are happening world-wide over and over again, for example currently in Syria and Iraq. But heritage also gets damaged or destroyed by natural disasters, as the destruction of the invaluable temples, libraries and museums in Nepal showed after the earthquake earlier this year.

⁴ ICOM: <http://icom.museum/>

⁵ ICOMOS: <http://www.icomos.org/en/>

⁶ IFLA Preservation and Conservation Section: <http://www.ifla.org/preservation-and-conservation>

⁷ Risk Register database – public registration portal: <http://www.ifla.org/node/9656>

⁸ Resources around risk mitigation: <http://www.ifla.org/node/9657>

⁹ UNESCO action on Mali: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/armed-conflict-and-heritage/emergency-actions/mali/>

The Risk Register is designed to enable IFLA to help libraries in desperate situations, to facilitate conversations between affected libraries and possible funders, to keep UNESCO and the Blue Shield partners informed on the library situation and ultimately to help safeguard and restore our irreplaceable cultural heritage.

What can you do?

What IFLA needs now is your involvement! It is essential that we collect as much relevant data in the Risk Register as possible. We aim to cover all of the world's regions and countries in order to be able to react adequately if disasters happen.

- We are asking you now to submit your own documentary heritage collections to the Risk Register.
- We are asking you to talk to other institutions as well as private holders of documentary heritage and encourage them to register their collections
- We are encouraging everyone to implement disaster preparedness and risk mitigation plans and ensure that their staff is trained in disaster preparedness and recovery

Together we will be able to make a difference and save more of our cultural heritage for tomorrow and the future!

For further information visit www.ifla.org/risk-register or contact cultural.heritage@ifla.org