

**International Council on Archives:
Invest in cooperation in the fight against theft, trafficking and tampering of
archives to prevent and protect our heritage**

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Abstract:

Rare books, manuscripts, archival documents are of great cultural value and part of the world's heritage. They are worthy not only to preserve but also to prevent them from being stolen or becoming object of illegal trade.

Recently the International Council on Archives (ICA) has created an expert group on the fight against loss, theft and trafficking of archival items. The group is developing an action plan, including the following main streams:

- 1. Create cooperation with sister organisations like IFLA, CERL, ICOM ; with UNESCO and with law enforcement agencies like WCO and INTERPOL and with the books - and antiquities trade*
- 2. To develop general instruments and methods for defining, reporting on stolen and trafficked material and create "Red Lists",*
- 3. To develop prevention measures to be used within the organisations, including training and education*
- 4. Sensibilisation of the public, the institutions, the professionals, law enforcement agencies.*

As libraries and archival institutes are confronted with similar questions constructing a network would be a good option.

Keywords:

ICA, cooperation, Red Lists, prevention, archives

1. Introduction

Rare books, manuscripts, archival documents are of great cultural historical value and part of the world's heritage. Just like paintings, statues and, archaeological objects they are

worth not only to preserve but also to prevent them from being stolen or becoming object of illegal trade.

During the 70-80s and 90s there were spectacular thefts and burglaries in museums all over the world. Attention was drawn to safety and security issues and preventive measures. National governments invested in improving the safety and security within the museums on several levels and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) installed a group of specialists that developed a set of practical and policy-strategical measures.

Not only the museums had a wake-up call; also libraries and archives became victim of criminal handlings. There is a difference: thefts from archives or libraries often are not immediately noticed, due to a.o. their way of registration or filing; maps, books and documents can be put away easily. So it can happen that after many years the missing is discovered. The vulnerability of archives and books is also notably at stake in countries at war, for instance in Mali and Iraq: a large part was safeguarded but also parts are still lost.

In 2017 the International Council on Archives took the initiative, together with the Association of Latin American Archives (ALA), to program the subject of theft and illegal trade in archives during its annual conference in Mexico. ALA was already active in the fight against theft and illegal trade in documents.

The “Mexican principles” were the outcome of the conference: principles to stimulate cooperation between archives to register losses and thefts, to prepare organisations against theft and missing objects and set up cooperation between archives and law enforcement agencies in this fight.

The ICA decided to create an expert group and last May 2019 the EGATTT was established: the Expert Group against Theft, Trafficking and Tampering. The EGATTT provides a forum for high-level discussion and expert advice. The members of the expert group have backgrounds in archives, libraries, UNESCO, supervision and have different countries and continents of origin (Latin America, USA, Africa, Europe). IFLA and CERL are two of the members. The action plan EGATTT is developing will be ready by the end of 2019.

2 What are the issues EGATTT is covering

The EGATTT undertakes several projects and actions to support archives. In this paragraph the outlines are presented.

A. Create cooperation

Research findings and practical experience show that safety and security issues are common practice in heritage and cultural institutions. Therefore, cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and best practices is important. The cooperation takes place on several levels and across various kinds of organisations:

- With archival institutions in the ICA on continental level and through other ICA-expert groups: Archives all over the world are located and work under different circumstances. There is not one universal model but a checklist on the different items can be helpful in the decision making of better security measures.

- With sister organizations like UNESCO, CERL, IFLA, ICOM, ICOMOS, Blue Shield:
we are aware of the international developments on the issue of prevention of illicit trade and thefts. UNESCO is of course an important organisation, a platform where member states can meet and exchange ideas and views: the 1970 UNESCO Convention, but also the Memory of the World program is of great importance and can help each of us in contributing to better protection of our collections. UNESCO also cooperates with ICOM for instance on Red Lists for objects that are vulnerable or criminal handlings, or with ICCROM on conservation matters. Umbrella organisations can also cooperate on these issues in order to share knowledge and expertise: the initiative of ICA and CERL is a good example of developing a network of security specialists.
- With law enforcement agencies like Inspectorates, INTERPOL, World Customs Organisation cooperation can be on technical issues but also on exchanging knowledge of legal instruments. Questions like what is conditional for law enforcement agencies to come into action in cases of incidents; how can Customs officers recognize important pieces or countries of origin. The INTERPOL database could also be filled with information on stolen archival documents. What are the indicators to identify?
- With trade organizations like ILAB, E-BAY, Catawiki, Sotheby's, Christies cooperation can be discussed on sharing of information and codes of governance, vetting rules and so on.

B. Develop instruments on registration and maintenance on thefts and losses

Registration as complete as possible is a basic instrument for an organisation concerning collection management. However: registration also is an instrument for identification; the unique description of an object, an object-ID, makes it traceable for police, customs, trade etc.

Museums already have such an ID. Most of the collections are registered and described in a proper way as well as photographed: important elements for identification.

Some libraries also introduced a registration system mostly for the most rare, precious ones. The more spread or multi paged the objects are, like archival documents, the more difficult registration becomes. An adequate model for registration should become available, consisting a set of criteria.

An interesting example are the so called Red Lists. The ICOM has developed these lists to show examples of cultural objects which are vulnerable for looting, illegal excavation, theft and unlawful removal from a country of origin. The lists give an indication of the vulnerable categories.

Red Lists are an important tool for instance law enforcement agencies like Customs, to be able to recognize objects in their controlling task.

Up to now archives are not systematically represented in the Red Lists. Rare books and maps should also be presented. One of the priorities of the EGATTT is to develop a method of shared identification in order to add to consisting Red Lists or develop a separate list.

C Formulate recommendations on preventive and security matters

EGATTT finds it important to invest in prevention and security from the point of view of the people that work in the institutions, the importance of the responsibility for the collection and the infrastructure, the building but also the digital infrastructure.

The formulation and implementation of a policy on safety and security in archival institutions can be supportive and delivers focus on risks and priorities. Prevention and security require the engagement of all members of staff and especially requires active support from management.

It must be stressed that security policy should be tailor-made: drawing up security plans and preparing for calamities is a complex task as many factors need to be taken into consideration. It depends on the location, the different buildings and differences inside the buildings, the number of staff, the degree of digitisation, infrastructure, financial means available, ea.

Instruments already available: an example

EGATTT has started cooperation with the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) because it has developed a quick audit tool. CERL already has a longstanding experience on the subject of the fight against theft in libraries. It started in Copenhagen in 2002 with the adaptation of the Copenhagen principles to lead to enlarge security measures with the setting up of (international) networks, to raise awareness for the vulnerable position of libraries in relation to their openness and accessibility and to encourage national and international cooperation.

The main themes in the quick audit tool are:

- the institution's commitment through governance structures and policies
- collection management including monitoring and protection
- the security of the building(s) and incident preparedness
- risk analyses on exhibitions, transport
- the unexpected and unusual, such as extensive building works, calamities.

The quick audit tool is freely available via:

<https://www.cerl.org/collaboration/security - cerl quick audit tool>.

D. Organise training and education

Education is essential in the struggle against theft and trade of documents and books. Education and training of staff in the archives or libraries that are responsible for the enhancement of the security and safety of the important heritage collections.

It is also important to be well informed on legislative aspects, for instance the 1970 UNESCO Convention, 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, Sanction Orders for Iraq and Syria and the respective connections to national legislation. What to do if a document or rare book is offered for sale, what is allowed and what information do you need to check and where can you check.

The ICA/EGATTT intends to offer education and training on these domains. This might be organised within the ICA during an annual congress or more extended during ICA's world congress. Ofcourse EGATTT can also organise special workshops.

Another possibility is to work in partnership with other specialised institutions. The Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) is such an institution. CERL annually organises a Collection Security Summer School to offer security officers from libraries and archives, special collections and curators the opportunity to discuss security issues with their peers in an informal setting. The Quick audit tool as presented above is a good standard in developing methods and standards.

EGATTT and CERL Security Working Group intend to develop an e-learning tool. Such a tool could become available for all sister organisations and by means of shared finance.

Special attention should be paid to cooperation on training and education with police and customs on national level and on an international level via Interpol and the World Customs Organisation. The education is relevant for both workers in the institutions and for police and customs officers: on national level training of police and customs officers in recognizing the objects, how to handle them and who can be asked as an expert for instance to detect fakes? For the institutions it is important to know how to handle in case of thefts or possibly illegal offers show up on the market.

E. Sensitize the public, institutions and professionals and the art trade.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, thefts and displacements of archival documents are not really known for reasons like under reporting, fear for negative image within organisations. Another cause is related to situations of war and conflict that also threaten the safety of archives and rare books.

All situations can lead to showing up of these materials on the (black) market. Therefore, awareness raising can be an important instrument. Some examples: Archives can try to inform the general public through their websites or internet campaigns. Red lists and alerts or apps can inform colleagues and the general public. On the local level apps can be introduced that activate people to help.

Important is also the cooperation between the trade and archives. A good example of the possibilities of registration of stolen books is the site of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers, the ILAB- site. EGATTT is working on an awareness raising strategy that can contain several of these elements.

F. To conclude

This paper describes a number of activities EGATTT intends to start in the coming years. We strongly invite IFLA to become partner. First steps have been taken: IFLA already is member of EGATTT. Not only to pursue the weight of advocacy for documentary heritage and expert advice to UNESCO and law-enforcement agencies, but also to work together on

issues like registration and Red Lists and security recommendations. Combining the force of libraries and archives in developing a program we can create a worldwide focus on the importance of heritage.

As we believe in the strength of cooperation and dissemination of already successful practices together, we (IFLA, CERL, ICA) could contribute on all the levels in the struggle against theft and illegal trade.

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