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Survey on disaster planning in National Libraries

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The success of the Berlin Pre-conference “Preparing for the Worst, Planning for the Best: Protecting our Cultural Heritage from Disaster” led the IFLA PAC Core Activity to organise this session jointly with the IFLA National Libraries and Preservation and Conservation sections. This survey has its origin in a resolution voted at the end of the IFLA conference in Glasgow, a resolution intended to raise awareness of the importance (for institutions responsible for safeguarding the national documentary heritage) of preparing for disaster and of writing and implementing disaster plans: “Be it resolved that, considering the many risks that threaten the cultural heritage, all libraries responsible for collections of national significance should set up, test, implement and regularly update a disaster plan”.

JOINT SURVEY

In this perspective a joint survey was launched in order to determine how many libraries have a disaster plan in all its relevant aspects. For this purpose a questionnaire on disaster preparedness was sent in February 2004 by the PAC office to 177 national libraries (using the CDNL roster). Replies were requested by 25 March.

The report I am presenting now has been elaborated by Marie-France Plassard. The questionnaire covered such areas as disasters having occurred in the last five and the last ten years, their number and their nature. Institutions were also asked to report whether they were located in an area threatened by natural disaster and what kind could be expected.

Buildings were the subject of another section: was the institution located in one or several buildings? How old were the buildings? Did the respondents share them with other organisations?

A much longer part of the questionnaire was devoted to the disaster plan itself. If the institution did not have one and did not intend to write one, it was asked to state reasons. All aspects of the plan were covered, such as alarms, insurances, staff involvement and eventual co-operation with other organisations.

Replies were accepted till 30 April 2004. As of that date 73 institutions had replied (about 41%).

DISASTER PLAN: YES OR NO?

39 institutions of these 73 respondents reported that they had a disaster plan (about 53%):

Argentina, Australia, Belize, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Fiji, France, Iceland, Indonesia, Italy (Firenze), Jamaica, Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Moldavia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovenia, Switzerland, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, the United Kingdom (The British Library, the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales), Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Vietnam.

The 28 that answered that they had no disaster plan but intended to write and implement one were in various stages of doing so. These are located in the following countries: Barbados, Benin, Costa Rica, Croatia, Egypt, El Salvador, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy (BN Rome), Japan, Latvia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Maldives, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain (Catalunya), Sweden, Togo, Tunisia and Tuvalu, as well as the Vatican Library.

Only 6 countries have no plan and do not intend to write one: Armenia, Burundi, Gambia, Pakistan, Tonga and Thailand.

The reasons vary but are mostly related to lack of human and financial resources and the lack of a model. Some respondents thought that there were few risks in their region. Armenia, Gambia and Tonga reported that they were in an area threatened by disaster, and only Thailand and Tonga that they had suffered from disasters in the last ten years.

INFLUENCE OF DISASTERS

It is difficult to determine whether recent disasters pushed the 28 libraries to write disaster plans. Most of the libraries intending to write disaster plans did not have any disasters during the last ten years except for Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, Greece, Guatemala, Latvia, Lesotho, Maldives, Panama and Slovakia. « Few risks » is mentioned by some even though at the same time they report that they suffered from disasters in the last ten years. Lack of resources and lack of staff to write and implement the plan are most frequently mentioned, as well as lack of a model, such lack implying the desirability to obtain a model and guidelines.

Of the 39 libraries which have a disaster plan, 15 reported that they had suffered from a disaster in the last ten years.

31 respondents indicated that they were in a region threatened by disasters. Some which had suffered disasters obviously felt they were accidental, since they did not report that they were in a threatened area. Fire, cited 45 times is considered as most likely to happen. Floods come next (30), then earthquake (24), terrorism (13), internal conflicts (5) and wars (3). Other disasters

include hurricanes (mostly in the West Indies), man-made disasters and biological ones, (e.g. fungi and insects in the Baltic States).

BUILDING

Concerning buildings:

- 47 institutions have more than one building, ranging from 2 to 15 (only one case). Some are located in different cities, e.g., in Germany and Norway.
- 26 share with other organisations.
- 8 buildings are over 100 years old: they are in the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Norway, Spain(Catalunya), Sweden, Tunisia and the Vatican.
- 18 are between 50 and 100 years old,
- 16 between 25 and 50,
- 21 between 10 and 25
- and 18 buildings are between 5 and 10 or less than 5 years old.

The question was related to the age of the main building, but several countries gave the age of all buildings; therefore the total number is higher than the number of respondents.

It is interesting to assess the correlation of disaster plans with the age of the buildings concerned. Of the 8 countries which have buildings over 100 years old, only two have a written plan (the Czech Republic and France); the others intend to have one. Of those institutions located in buildings between 50 and 100 years old, 11 have a disaster plan, 6 intend to have one, and only one has no plan and does not intend to establish one. Among the category of buildings ranging between 25 and 50 years old, 8 of the countries concerned have a disaster plan, 6 intend to have one and 2 have none. Of those located in buildings between 10 and 25 years old, 11 have a plan, 7 intend to create one and 3 have none. Lastly, 11 of the countries having buildings between 5 and 10 years old (some less than 5) have a plan, and the rest intend to have one.

UPDATING DISASTER PLANS

Regarding the disaster plans, one might note that most of them are not part of a national plan; only 13 are. Some plans in existence are more than 10 years old (9) and are usually updated yearly except in three cases (in one case there is no update foreseen). The majority are less than 5 years old (20) and the update occurs mostly every 5 years, in a few cases every 2 years, which means that most of them have never been updated; and two institutions have no intention to update the plan. The rest of the plans are less than 1 year old and understandably no yet updated. The plans are mostly created in consultation with firemen, although local administration ranges second. The army is only mentioned once. One country reported consulting the police as well.

Regarding establishment of priorities, some countries having a disaster plan have not established priorities (only 6) whereas countries intending to create a plan have sometimes established some (8); of the 6 countries having no intention to have a plan, 3 have established priorities.

One question was related to the security of persons, buildings and collections. 20 respondents state that their plans are dealing with all three, whereas the others mention only collections or buildings. Except in the answers mentioning all three, « persons » occurs only 7 times but the reason is, in some cases, that human safety procedures are not harmonised with the disaster plan.

TESTING THE DISASTER PLAN

When it comes to testing the disaster plan, 25 of the respondents who have a plan, report that they have tested it. 5 of the countries intending to create a plan write that they have tested it, which seems to indicate that their plan is well in progress. Rather confusing is the fact that 2 of the countries which have no intention to have a plan indicate they have tested it!

About half of the institutions concerned organise exercises or drills, and these are only regular in some 28 cases. Getting help from institutions is slightly less common than contacting companies, which about half of the respondents do. Services most often mentioned are related to equipment and transport. Freezing figures more seldom. Other services include disinfection, expert support, liophilisation, logistics, restoration, site cleaning, space dehumidification, storage and training. Technical recommendations are available at about half of the institutions.

A very important component of the implementation of a disaster plan is the existence of a member of the staff responsible for the implementation of the disaster plan, as well as updated lists of staff to contact in case of emergency or disaster. 51 countries indicate that they have lists and the same countries (except 2) report that they have a member of staff responsible for the disaster plan. Among these 51 countries are 2 which had reported they did not intend to write a disaster plan.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The last section of the questionnaire dealt with prevention. The first question was whether the libraries had emergency kits easily accessible: 42 institutions answered that they had. The next group of questions concerned alarms, the kind (fire and intrusion) and whether they were regularly tested. 59 respondents have fire alarms and 31 out of those 59 have alarms against intrusion. Only one country has an alarm against intrusion but not against fire. Alarms are tested in 50 libraries.

The question of insurance came next. Only 23 institutions have insurance for their buildings; one reported that only some of their buildings were covered. The reasons vary high cost of insurance, government coverage (« unfortunately » added one institution), and cost of valuation. Even lower (16) is the number of institutions which have insured their collections. 19 have insured their equipment.

The last question was related to the kind of preventive measures considered as most useful and appropriate in the event of a disaster. Those listed were: duplication of documents and storage elsewhere, sprinklers, alarms, and keepers, regular rounds. 13 respondents listed all of them. Duplication was obviously considered the most useful, as it appeared altogether in 50 answers. Over half of the respondents listed alarms, and slightly less keepers. Sprinklers came last, cited by about a third of the libraries. Additional measures mentioned included expert support and having funds immediately available in the event of a disaster,

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to estimate the general situation since only 41 % of the institutions contacted replied. It is equally difficult to determine why the other 59% did not reply. Problems of communication might have occurred: some countries indicated that the questionnaire had taken weeks to reach them; they had received it very close to the deadline.

1/ During the reading of the replies, it became evident that the institutions which have a sound disaster plan, tested and regularly updated, are **not always** located **in** the big **industrialised countries**. To single out only a couple: Cuba has a disaster plan, has tested it, organises drills regularly, has a member of staff responsible and insures buildings, collections and equipment; Singapore is one of the few countries which update their plan every year. The library has alarms against fire and intrusion, and insures collections and equipment.

2/ The reasons invoked for not having a disaster plan vary, as indicated above, but are mostly related to **lack of resources** (human and financial) and the lack of a model.

3/ It thus appears necessary to **raise awareness** of the importance of disaster preparedness, which should be part of the priorities, even in libraries with very limited budget. The National Library and Archives of Tuvalu reported trying to raise such awareness, a good example to follow.

4/ « **Few risks** » was an additional reason given for having no disaster plan. It is worth pondering the fact that a country is never really free of risks. Some of the countries which did not feel any threat reported that they had suffered from disasters (obviously unexpected!) in the last ten years.

5/ Another aspect of risks should be studied: their correlation with the **age of the buildings**. And the importance of having adequate insurance should not be underestimated.

6/ Concerning the plans, the necessity of producing a **model and guidelines** (or revising and updating the existing ones) has already been noted.

7/ It is also worth reflecting on the fact that only a third of the plans in existence are part of **national plans**. Should disaster plans be integrated into national policies?

8/ The importance of **testing** the plans and **updating** them should be emphasised. A plan which is not updated or at least reviewed every year loses some of its value.

9/ **Establishing priorities** is also a necessity; yet the percentage of positive answers to the relevant question was rather low.

10/ Equally low was the number of respondents who reported having **technical recommendations**, which is, however, another essential component of disaster preparedness.

RECOMMENDATION

Co-operation between institutions should be encouraged, especially but not exclusively, when institutions with limited budgets are concerned. Only half of the respondents indicated that they co-operated with other institutions. And finally one cannot stress enough the fact that it is indispensable to have a member of the staff responsible in case of disaster, co-ordination being essential for an efficient operation.

AN IFLA PAC MANUAL ON DISASTER PLANNING?

Considering the results of the survey and the discussions which took place during the two seminars on disasters organised at the initiative of PAC, first in Mexico, October 2003, then in Trinidad & Tobago, May 2004, considering also the discussions of the archivists during their 2nd International Conference on Preservation of Archives in Tropical Climates that took place in Curaçao, November 2003, PAC has decided to contribute to the already long list of publications dealing with disaster planning.

PAC intends to elaborate a basic and practical manual on the model of *IFLA Principles on the Care and Handling of Library Material* published as n°1 of International Preservation Issues in 1998, which has become a sort of "best-seller" with translations in more than ten different languages.

The manual will present the various risks threatening our documentary heritage and the items to be taken into consideration when establishing a disaster plan. It should also bring practical solutions in order to mitigate the consequences of most disasters. Aimed at librarians as well as at archivists, the manual will be elaborated by a joint advisory committee gathering colleagues from ICA (International Council on Archives) and IFLA. John McIlwaine, former Chair of the PAC Section and Ted Steemers, Chair of the Committee of Preservation of Archives have accepted to assist me in this task. Volunteers are most welcome.

The manual is expected to be published in 2006 and will be available in a trilingual version (English-French-Spanish).

Annex 1

IFLA QUESTIONNAIRE ON DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

To be sent back to

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IFLA PAC
Bibliothèque nationale de France
Quai François-Mauriac - 75013 Paris - France

BEFORE MARCH 25, 2004

A – INSTITUTION

- A.1 Name of institution :
-
- A.2 Name of director :
- A.3 Address :
- A.4 Phone :
- A.5 Fax :
- A.6 E-mail :

B – DISASTERS

B.1 Has your institution suffered from disaster during the last

✓ 5 years yes no

✓ 10 years yes no

B.2 What kind of disaster was it ?

natural

man-made

D.2 If no, do you intend to write and implement one?

- yes no

D.3 Give the main reasons why such a disaster plan does not exist:

- few risks
 no staff available to write and implement it
 lack of model to write it
 lack of resources to implement it: *lack of staff* *lack of money*
 proximity of fire brigade
 others, please detail:

D.4 If yes, is it part of a national disaster plan?

- yes no



D.5 Does it deal with the security of:

- persons building collections

D.6 Have you established priorities to save your collections?

- yes no

D.7 When was the disaster plan established?

- less than 1 year ago less than 5 years ago more than 10 years ago

D.8 Do you update it regularly?

- yes: *every year* *every 2 years* no
 every 5 years *less*

D.9 Has your disaster plan been established in consultation with civil security teams?

- firemen army local administration

D.10 Have you tested your disaster plan?

- yes no

D.11 Are drills or exercises organised to train staff?

- yes no

D.12 Is your staff regularly trained?

- yes no

D.13 Have you contacted other nearby cultural institutions susceptible to help you in case of a disaster?

- yes no

D.14 Have you contacted companies who could respond immediately in case of a disaster?

- yes no

D.15 What kind of service can they offer?

- transport equipment freezing
 others :

D.16 Do you have updated lists of staff to contact in case of an emergency or a disaster?

- yes no



D.17 Have technical recommendations been written concerning the rescue of damaged material?

- yes no

D.18 Is a member of your staff responsible for the disaster plan and its implementation?

- yes no

D.19 Name and position of this person (not compulsory):

.....

D.20 Do you have emergency kits easily accessible?

- yes no

D.21 What kind of alarm systems do you have?

- against fire against intrusion

D.22 Are your alarm systems regularly tested?

- yes no

D.23 Is the building insured?

- yes no

D.24 Are the collections insured?

- yes no, why?

D.25 Are the equipment insured?

- yes no, why?

D.26 Which preventive measures do you consider most useful and appropriate in the event of a disaster?

- duplication of documents (collections, catalogues) and storage elsewhere
- sprinklers
- alarms
- keepers, regular rounds

E - INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERSON WHO FILLED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- E.1 Name:
- E.2 Function:
- E.3 E-mail:
- E.4 Phone number: