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**Disaster management in the cultural heritage sector:
a perspective of international activity from the
United Kingdom: lessons and messages**

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Abstract

The paper is based on findings from an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project, '*Safeguarding heritage at risk: disaster management in UK archives, libraries and museums*', undertaken 2005-2006. The project has achieved a contemporary overview of disaster management practice and issues in the UK. It also included a survey of international activity in disaster management with the aim of identifying examples of good practice and theory that might offer lessons for the UK. This aspect of the project included literature and website review, attendance at events outside the UK, interviews, and a survey of international and national associations and institutions by means of targeted e-mails to named individuals. Of the 115 organisations contacted, 44 (38%) responded. Information obtained included details of key current issues, networks, guidance / advice / support offered, training, contacts and collaboration, new / recommended publications, and future plans.

The paper aims to outline the current situation and to look to future developments. Through examples of recent activity and initiatives relevant to large-scale region-wide disaster planning and recovery in the cultural heritage sector, it will highlight common themes and issues for those planning for and dealing with such events. Themes and issues include: nature and scale of disasters (natural and man-made), liaison with civil emergency planners, international non-governmental organisations and others involved in mitigation and relief, training, staff welfare and counselling, communication and access to relevant information, the disaster control plan, condition of buildings, economic impact, external support, new threats such as climate change. Recommendations for strategists, cultural heritage professionals and associations will be made. These will include factors such as networks and sharing experience, traditional measures, approaches to action, e.g. top-down, or grassroots-up, effective means of communication, research, cross-domain collaboration, working with those outside the sector, and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

I am grateful to the IFLA Regional Standing Committee on Asia and Oceania for inviting me to present at this session today. I am all too conscious that speakers following me, and many

of you present from the region and other countries, have first hand professional and personal experience of disasters and their aftermath on a scale that we in our 'small corner' do not face. I hope you will tolerate my view from afar.

Advances in media and communications technologies continue to make the world a smaller place. Television and the Internet have offered greater access to news so that the impact of terrorism, war and natural disasters around the world can be seen wherever we are, in our own homes and offices. Graphic pictures of the impact of disasters and their aftermath have become all too familiar in recent years, for example, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, earthquake in Kashmir, hurricanes in the United States, the Caribbean and the Pacific, drought in Africa heavy flooding across Europe and Asia, and man-made disasters caused by war and terrorism around the world such as that in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and 9/11. Libraries and other cultural heritage institutions are affected in their midst. Such calamities are not new, they have been happening for centuries. (For a brief introduction to disaster management that covers man-made and natural disasters with examples and a bibliography see Chapter 6 in Teygeler et al, 2001; for further examples and information about man-made disasters, see Heritage Preservation 2002; Johnson, 2005; Knuth, 2003, Knuth, 2006, Rayward and Jenkins, 2006, Rose, 2001; Sturges and Rosenberg, 1999; Tejjgeler, 2006; Valencia, 2002.)

I recently led a project 'Safeguarding heritage at risk: disaster management in United Kingdom (UK) archives, libraries and museums' which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) and undertaken at Liverpool John Moores University March 2005 – October 2006. I moved to my present post at Loughborough University in September 2006. This paper is based largely on select findings from the project and my ongoing interest in the topic. I will begin by providing a brief outline of the project, some results from the UK survey phase and an outline of the international survey aspect. I will then consider some of the lessons and messages from the project, using as my focus the key themes of the 73rd IFLA General Conference and Council: ... the future: Progress, Development and Partnerships.

But, firstly, what do I mean by disaster in this context?

“... any incident which threatens human safety and/or damages, or threatens to damage [or destroy], a library's buildings, collections, contents, facilities or services” (Matthews and Eden, 1996, p.4).

RESEARCH PROJECT

Moving on to the project, its overall aims were to:

- achieve a contemporary overview of disaster management practice and issues in the UK cultural heritage sector
- identify relevant practice in other countries and sectors
- inform strategists and managers in museums, libraries and archives
- make recommendations for the effective development of disaster management.

I should point out that digital resources and services were not within the direct remit of the project – that's not because they're not important – they are - but they are addressed in the UK by others such as the Digital Preservation Coalition (2007). We employed various methods during the project to gather data, including: literature and website searches and review, questionnaire survey and analysis, document (e.g. disaster control plans) analysis, visits to select organisations, and interviews with key individuals/groups.

UK survey

We sent questionnaires to a representative sample of 1996 archives, libraries and museums in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. 635 archives, libraries and museums returned questionnaires, a response rate of 32%. The questionnaire sought to acquire information about: the respondent; organisation type; its disaster control plan; training; in-house disaster management activities; external arrangements; views on disaster management; and experience of disaster(s).

I'll offer just a few figures to give you a flavour of what we found. If having a disaster control plan is an indicator of positive action, then the 56% of managers who reported that their archive / library / museum had a disaster control plan represents an advance on the figure (c30%) from research in the UK ten years or so earlier (Matthews and Eden, 1996). Varlamoff and Plassard (2004) recently reported on a survey of national libraries for IFLA. About 53% of their respondents reported they had a disaster plan. Almost a third of the archives, libraries and museums that responded to our survey had experienced a 'disaster' in the previous five years. Water related disasters were the most commonly reported (68%). Others were much less frequent: fire - 11%, vandalism - 3%, theft / break-in / burglary - 6%, bomb incident / terrorist threat - 2%, other (e.g. building collapse, IT, power failure, etc.) - 10%. We are fortunate that generally we do not experience the scale of natural disasters that occur, for example in the countries of the speakers that follow.

Lessons learned

Across the sector in the UK, the most frequent lessons learned from experiencing a disaster, in order, were:

- Awareness of building issues, e.g. maintenance, regular checks, updating plans
- The importance of training, particularly with regard to knowledge of the disaster control plan and how to respond in a disaster
- Availability of adequate emergency equipment in appropriate locations.

These, I would suggest, are not restricted to the UK. Managers in libraries also pointed out the need to maintain clear communication channels between staff and disaster response teams. Throughout the research the significance of risk assessment and an up-to-date disaster control plan was emphasised. You can find further results of the UK questionnaire survey and other project information on the project website (Safeguarding heritage at risk, 2007)

International survey

The aim of the international aspect of the research was to gain insight into international activities in disaster management and into those in other countries, with a view to learning from appropriate experience elsewhere. Requests were sent to 115 organisations (international, regional, national, networks) or individuals, asking for information about aspects of disaster management such as: strategy, models of operation, examples of good practice, guidance / advice / support offered, surveys, new / recommended publications, training, contacts / collaboration outside the cultural heritage sector, key issues currently faced, and future plans. Of these, 44 (38%) responded. Responses, from all over the world, were very helpful, advising of developments, initiatives and meetings, suggesting further contacts, and some sending documents of various kinds. Where there was no response, information was sometimes available on institutions' websites. The international picture was further enhanced by project team members' attendance at conferences, and undertaking visits

and interviews. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking those of you here and / or your organisations for helping us by providing information or talking with us. Further information relating to the international aspect of the project can be found in a recently published article in the journal *Alexandria* (Matthews, Smith and Knowles, 2007). I should also advise that the full findings of the project will form the basis of a book to be published by Ashgate in 2008.

Following that brief introduction, I will now turn to lessons and messages. In doing so, as I said at the beginning, I will focus on the future and the conference themes of '*progress, development and partnership*' With the time available, I must be selective.

PROGRESS

Introduction

Disaster management activity in the cultural heritage sector has progressed gradually since the 1970s. If there have been times of relative complacency, major disasters have reawakened interest, at least for a time. As one of our project interviewees in the U.S. commented "... there has been a great deal of attention on disaster management and emergency planning. Certainly after September 11th there was a little flurry of activity, but after Katrina it's been huge".

The research overall has underlined that the basic principles of disaster management are established and widely available; in recent years risk assessment and management have become more incorporated and business /service continuity is also now being addressed. Where there is less activity, this may be in institutions, often smaller ones, with limited resources which they focus on service delivery. Around the world, collaborative networks, informal and formal, local and regional have been established to offer varying levels mutual support and sharing of expertise. Much information and advice has been published about disaster management. There is good practice to learn from and there is a willingness among individuals and institutions to share this.

International associations

IFLA has contributed to progress. For example, in 1996, along with the International Council on Archives, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), they established the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), the cultural heritage equivalent of the International Committee of the Red Cross. ICBS works closely with UNESCO, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). For further information on the development of ICBS, see Shimmon (2004) and the ICBS website (International Committee of the Blue Shield, 2007).

The international associations, as many of you will be aware, use a range of methods to advise of developments about disaster management. Newsletters, bulletins, guidance notes and briefings, bibliographies and conferences, seminars, practical workshops and training events, and lists of contacts are commonly used. Websites increasingly carry publications, advice, announcements of events and links to other sources. Have a look for example, at the IFLA Core Activity on Preservation and Conservation (PAC) website (IFLA Core Activity on Preservation and Conservation (PAC) (2007)) and those of its Regional Centres. A recent example of significant regional activity was the Open Seminar on the documentary heritage damaged by the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the meeting of the Directors of the IFLA/PAC Regional Centres in Asia and others (IFLA PAC Regional Centre for Asia and National Diet Library, 2006). As well as papers on the situation and damage and recovery in the countries affected and future

developments, there was an overview of IFLA PAC's programmes which include workshops on disaster planning, networking, and relief and disaster partnership.

Information and advice

We now have an abundance of information and guidance on disaster management available to us, predominantly from the developed world. The selection of sources provided at the end of IFLA's recently published short manual on preparedness and planning (McIlwaine, 2006) attests to this. An increasing amount of information is now available on the Internet. Indeed, work on the research project underlined how difficult it is to keep track of information appearing on websites and e-discussion lists across the world, especially in the aftermath of major incidents. Added to this is the increasing amount of relevant information about business continuity made available to business and the general public by government. Whilst this is not directed specifically at cultural heritage institutions, much of it is of relevance (see for example, UK Resilience, 2007).

Disaster control plans and templates

There seems to be general acceptance of the significance of the disaster control plan for effective disaster management, even in the case of catastrophic disasters. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, Heritage Preservation reported:

“Although the events of September 11 were caused by an unprecedented act of terror, we found that standard, proven emergency management plans and responses turned out to be the most effective way of dealing with the disaster” (Heritage Preservation, 2002, 20).

Many associations or institutions now provide disaster control plan templates that provide a framework of headings / activities and prompts for institutions to use to devise their own plans. The lesson here seems to be: use them with caution and in the right context. They work best based on an institution specific risk assessment and within an institutional framework of support, training and ongoing liaison and review. Picking one off the Internet and ticking the boxes does not necessarily do the job, nor does it encourage ownership. One trend detected, especially in those institutions with a well established plan, is the provision of a cut-down concise, yet flexible, plan for immediate reaction and recovery which outlines all staff's roles and activities and which can be easily understood by all.

Information overload

Having said that there is now a lot of information, I have to add that, for some, there seems to be too much information. Some of our interviewees have commented on this: “There's volumes on the Internet but it's all the same stuff”; “... it was actually just sort of picking the half a dozen sites that would give ... the kind of basic information ... needed to get started but they were in danger of you know, just sort of typing stuff into Google and getting so many hits back that they just couldn't actually navigate what was there ... “. When time is paramount, finding the right, reliable information quickly is vital. For those without, or with limited access to the Internet, however, this may not be an issue; in fact, the opposite, insufficient access to information and advice, may be the case in countries where the information infrastructure is still developing.

DEVELOPMENT

So having looked, albeit selectively, at areas of progress, how might activity be developed?

Information

Given the quantity of information available, some streamlining in terms of accessing it and its reliability would be worth considering. A recent initiative in the UK is interesting in this respect. Last year, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (UK) established Collections Link which aims to provide: ‘fast, easy access to current best practice in 16 areas

of professional collections management [including emergency planning]. All of the content of the site has been provided by authoritative national bodies and experts with years of experience in their field' (Collections Link, 2007).

Sharing information - language

Continuing with the theme of information, as I have said, there is a lot of it about – much of it based on experience. Disasters strike anytime, anywhere. Accounts of disaster planning and recovery are accordingly written in various languages. Are we all aware of what helpful information might be available to us in languages other than our own? IFLA addresses this through translation and interpretation. Perhaps others could do more. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Heritage Preservation's well known Salvage wheel (Heritage Preservation, n.d.) has been translated into several languages including Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, French and Dutch (Heritage Preservation Update, 2006)

Another way of sharing experience with people from different countries and backgrounds is through attendance at conferences, or if that is not possible, reading their proceedings. I can vouch for this from personal experience of two recent IFLA events. The first was an IIFLA pre-conference, 'Preparing for the worst, planning for the best: protecting our cultural heritage from disaster', held in Berlin in 2003, with proceedings published in 2005 (Wellheiser and Gwinn, 2005). The conference was attended by 90 participants from 25 countries, with speakers talking about different aspects of disaster management in countries including Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, UK, USA, Vietnam. The second, 'The 3-D's of preservation: disasters, displays, digitization', organised by the Bibliothèque nationale de France in collaboration with IFLA (Koch, 2006) took place last year and proceedings were recently published, including papers on disaster management experience by speakers from Chile, France, Sweden, the UK and USA. Such conferences provide opportunities for exposure to new ideas, to make new contacts and firm up existing relationships. It is also worth looking out for such events aimed at colleagues in other related domains - whilst we have to acknowledge differences, there are also areas of common interest. One that we found particularly useful during our research was an ICOM international symposium held in Hyderabad, India in 2003 (Menegazzi, 2004). The proceedings include papers by representatives of a wide range of international organisations and speakers from Argentina, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Burundi, Congo, Costa Rica, India, Italy, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Netherlands, Peru, Puerto Rico, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, USA, Venezuela. Select papers from another recent conference organised by the Canadian Museums Association (2006), 'Cultural Property Protection', are available on its website. These deal with current issues such as risk assessment and management, security, terrorism and business continuity. Cross domain events might be an interesting and mutually beneficial development.

Training

Training for all staff in an institution is vital for effective disaster management. One aspect that fewer institutions in the UK had undertaken were simulations and exercises. These are seen as very useful but they are resource intensive. Collaboration is seen as a possible cost-effective way forward. Following on my comment above about looking outside the domain, one development which might learn from is an initiative for museums which has been developed by ICOM, the Getty Conservation Institute and ICCROM. The Teamwork for Integrated Emergency Management Course was first implemented in 2005-2006 in South, Southeast and East Asia. Its aim is 'to focus on risk assessment and emergency preparedness and response for museums and other cultural institutions. The course reflects a capacity building approach to emergency management by combining training workshops with practical experience gained over an extended period of time. The course guides participating institutions through the processes of undertaking risk assessment and implementing emergency plans and strategies that are suitable for their own institutions, taking into account

local contexts, traditions, and methods' (International Council of Museums. Museums Emergency Programme Initiative. Module 4, 2007). There is some involvement from outside the region too. For further information, see the ICOM website (International Council of Museums, 2007)

Conservation expertise

A key issue which came through in both the UK and international aspects of the project is the need for information, advice and training with regard to post-incident handling and salvaging of damaged materials, particularly in the case of region-wide disasters where emergency services have to focus on human safety and infrastructure, and libraries may have to go it alone for some time. Following Hurricane Katrina, Heritage Preservation produced a *Field guide to emergency response* with a DVD which illustrates processes (Heritage Preservation, 2006). The need for conservators with appropriate experience and skills to help with initial decisions relating to handling and salvaging damaged materials was emphasised and questions asked as to whether there were sufficient such individuals who could work in teams. There is a need to develop rapid response teams with expertise, equipment and funds that can be dispatched to disaster scenes (see Frost, 2006). Those already on the scene will not always have the necessary expertise and may be in a state of shock. They will be unsure of what to do and will need expert advice from experienced conservators from the public or private sector. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works is undertaking a programme aimed at producing '60 collections emergency response team members trained to assess damage and initiate salvage of cultural collections after a disaster has occurred' (see American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2007) for further information).

Research into the technical aspects of conservation also has a role to play here. A recent example is a project investigating drying techniques for water-damaged books led by Preservation Librarian, Randy Silverman at the University of Utah Marriott Library, with partners in the USA and the National Library of the Czech Republic and the British Library (National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, 2007).

Models

Looking at how others elsewhere approach disaster management can be helpful but models or frameworks from other countries need to be considered in their specific political, social, cultural, economic, technological and legal contexts, for example. Some governments may take a strong national approach and include disaster management for cultural heritage alongside civil emergency planning. Others might have a more cultural heritage and / or regional focus. Historically, these may have developed more bottom-up, than top-down or vice-versa. Others might take a middle approach with strong regional emphasis and some national coordination. Select examples illustrate progress and development made.

In Switzerland civil emergency planning is well established, and the cultural heritage is embedded in this (Switzerland. Federal Department of Defence, 2007). There may be national coordination, with a strong regional and local element... In the U.S., the Heritage Emergency National Task Force has a new initiative, the Alliance for Response, which is '... building partnerships between the stewards of cultural heritage and first responders'. (Heritage Emergency National Task Force. Alliance for Response, 2007). In Chile, the National Library has been working closely with the ICBS locally to develop disaster prevention (see Cruzat, 2004 for details). The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage has recently developed a regional network approach to dealing with disasters (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2007). The Institute supports groups collectively on a regional basis to compile their own disaster plan and create a disaster network locally. In Australia, DISACT is a disaster recovery resource for public collections in the ACT [Australian Capital Territory] region, 'established by cultural and scientific collection institutions in Canberra to improve disaster preparedness and provide local mutual assistance in the event of emergencies affecting public

collections' (DISACT, 2007) In London, UK, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, is currently facilitating the development of an emergency planning group for cultural heritage institutions in the city.

Other initiatives involve developed and developing countries working together, such as with the ICOM Museum Emergency Programme Education Initiative (International Council of Museums. Museums Education Programme (2007). Some networks have been formed as a direct result of hazards in their region, to improve risk reduction and reaction and involve a range of organisations. CARDIN, the Caribbean Disaster Information Network, for example, '... seeks to provide a new and dynamic approach to and minimizes the effects of disaster in the Caribbean Region' It has recently developed with partners a virtual library offering full text documents, presentations, maps, audio and video clips (Caribbean Disaster Information Network, 2007). (For further information on CARDIN, also see Lashley, 2003.) In collaboration with the Latin American Centre for Disaster Medicine, CARDIN recently organised a 3 day workshop on disaster information management in Cuba in November 2006 ('Workshop on disaster information management', 2006) 'The main objective of this workshop is to strengthen the institutional capacities of the disaster information units in the Caribbean countries ...'

PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

Libraries are traditionally good at partnerships with each other, whether it be for inter-library loans, cooperative cataloguing, purchasing consortia, training networks, and so on. In disaster management collaborative networks have developed, particularly in regions where there are natural threats (see, for example Davis and Kern, 2003). In the UK, where this is less the case, there seems to be more activity in this area recently, some of it driven by increased risk of terrorist incidents, the increase in region-wide flooding or the appeal of efficiencies of sharing expertise and offering mutual support. The advantages, drawing on examples from around the world are discussed elsewhere (Matthews, 2005). There is now a need to develop partnerships, existing and new, across the domains within the sector and beyond it

Collaboration outside the cultural heritage sector

Those working to restore libraries in the aftermath of a major region-wide disaster, man-made or natural, will have to work with international and national emergency organisations and services, relief agencies, representatives of government, the armed forces, civil emergency planners and the emergency services dealing with the emergency and its aftermath. In a report on rebuilding libraries in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, Amarasiri (2005) identified the kind of challenges faced in such situations. For example, trauma of librarians, conservation of damaged library material, working with government bureaucracy, working with non-governmental organisations, interaction with politicians, keeping libraries on the agenda, scarcity of land, and internal conflict. These underline this point, i.e. working with others can be a challenge. Library managers and professional associations maybe need to be more proactive as Taboroff (2003, pp.239-240) has argued: 'Cultural heritage needs to be factored into overall disaster mitigation and management approaches. Cultural heritage professionals should make themselves known to disaster mitigation professionals and disaster mitigation professionals should invite the participation of heritage professionals in designing response systems. Effective preparedness and mitigation strategies will depend upon government agencies, heritage professionals, and emergency professionals working together ...'

It was thus encouraging to read that objectives of a working conference of the International Blue Shield held in September 2006 included: '... to strengthen the network between the national Blue Shield Committees on the one hand and between Blue Shield and other cultural emergency assistance organizations on the other', 'to improve Blue Shield's international visibility with institutions and authorities that are responsible for cultural heritage' and 'to

stimulate joint operations and the efficient coordination of national initiatives.’ (International Committee of the Blue Shield, Announcement, 2007).

THE FUTURE

Disaster management is not a topic that allows you to stand still, so on top of this progress and development, what is required for the future?

People

People, their interaction and communication are vital to effective disaster management. In major disasters, managers must not lose sight of the fact that their colleagues may be experiencing considerable personal difficulties affecting them and their families. They have suffered personal loss or injury, had their homes destroyed, their children’s schooling disrupted. Consideration should be given as to how will this impact on their role in the recovery of library services, and if they do participate, how their safety and wellbeing will be addressed (with for example, appropriate health and safety measures in place, counselling available). This is an aspect that Craig et al, (p.198) attest to following experience of Hurricane Ivan in the Cayman Islands ‘When examining the archive’s disaster preparedness plan, it is evident that a rational approach was taken in its responses to post-disaster recovery ... It can be said that the archive’s plan met most of its objectives ... The major flaw however was that the action plan did not sufficiently take into account the personal issues affecting staff’. They may not be available with other pressing personal tasks taking up their time and in the worst scenario they may be among the dead or injured.

Those of you who have experienced disaster have set inspirational examples in the courageous, determined and dynamic way you have striven to restore and renew services in the face of personal loss and challenges. You are a lesson to all of us!

Strategy

Recent events seem to have brought about recognition of a need for a move to more strategic, coordinated activity, rather than just relying on individual grass roots efforts. Frost and Silverman (2005, p.46), ‘first responders’, one of the Heritage Emergency Assistance Recovery Teams to work in Mississippi post Hurricane Katrina to assess damage to cultural heritage institutions’ collections, express the view that ‘Katrina’s aftermath underscores for us the national need for a robust emergency response plan to deal with the salvage of cultural materials’. Silverman (2006) expands his thoughts on a national disaster response protocol in a recent conference paper). The Preservation Directorate, Library of Congress (2006) held a meeting of key stakeholders to determine “*Future Directions in Safeguarding Document Collections.*..

Strategy and response need to be developed along with others working in disaster management in the broader sense. In addition to the reasons given above, the economic impact of disaster must also be addressed. Beyond the individual library, in major disasters, there can, be enormous economic impact. In areas where cultural heritage and tourism are important elements of the local economy, major disasters will cut this income flow. Additionally, in the aftermath and recovery, authorities may divert funding from libraries and other cultural heritage institutions to help rebuild the wider infrastructure. How are libraries prepared to deal with these eventualities, how good is their advocacy? How well do they put their case in terms of their potential role in the aftermath of disaster, for example, with regard to acting as centres for disaster-related information, getting children’s education back underway, showing citizens that their documentary heritage matters. Strategy and procedures should also be in place for dealing with offers of support and financial donations. Those who wish to help may not be aware that what they wish to send is not necessarily what the recipients want.

Strategy must also embrace sustainability. People we spoke to during the project, especially those with well established disaster management procedures frequently said that maintaining sustainability was demanding.

CONCLUSION

New threats – climate change

I'd like to finish by looking at a new threat, climate change, which is receiving growing attention in the cultural heritage sector in the UK (see, for example, Cassar, 2005, Colette, 2007, English Heritage, 2006, National Trust, 2005, Staniforth, 2006, Stern, 2006) where signs of it have been evident in recent years with an apparent increase in incidents of region-wide flooding. Lessons from severe natural disasters may well be worth considering by countries which have to date been less affected by them, in terms of both mitigation and recovery. When looking to learn from experience from disasters elsewhere in the world, local circumstances must be taken into account. For example, the UK climate is considerably different to that, say in Indonesia or the Caribbean, and different measures will accordingly be taken before and after incidents. It is still possible to learn, for example, about salvage and conservation techniques of water-damaged material, about the psychological impact on staff, about communication with external agencies. There may be ongoing heightened awareness in some regions, due to climate and other conditions, where earthquake, tornado, hurricanes, bush-fires etc., are more prevalent and therefore disaster management has greater pressing importance.

In the UK, ICON's (The Institute of Conservation) Care of Collection Group held a one-day event in April 2007, 'Responding to climate change'. Papers covered topics such as planning for sustainability in heritage organisations, standards, buildings, environment and energy use, lighting and energy use and pest management. I presented a paper on emergency planning. In this, I re-iterated the commonly held view that it must be addressed by a multi-agency, interdisciplinary approach and identified the following key players at national level: Arts and Humanities Research Council research clusters, Noah's Ark project (European Union) funded project, Centre for Sustainable Heritage, University College London, English Heritage, The National Trust, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), Regional agencies (MLAs) / networks, civil emergency services, commercial services and professional bodies. At local and institutional level, the following activities will be needed: policy, awareness raising, commitment, training, information / publications, resources, build on existing activities, seek out external 'drivers' or 'levers' to tap into funding, advocacy (make case, e.g. economic impact).

Does all of this seem familiar? It's similar to what we've been doing with disaster management but with a need for greater collaboration and partnerships with an even wider range of contacts. And for clear strategy and commitment and resources to achieve it. The message I would give those who have faced and dealt with the aftermath of major disasters, is that the way you have coped and moved forward is a massive lesson and encouragement to all of us as we plan for the future.

GM 17.05.07

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