

Discussion: **Ukrainian Heritage in Danger - Questions and Answers with Experts**

When: **Thursday 17th March, 11am (CET)**

Where: **Zoom**

Introduction:

Ihor Poshyvailo

There has been a lot of support for the people and heritage of Ukraine.

The biggest issue that needs addressing is the details of equipment to be used to protect the heritage, e.g. what kind of fire extinguisher should be used.

The meeting will start with questions, and then answers from the experts.

Nimalka Passanha (Prince Claus Fund)

The Prince Claus Fund has activated the 'Emergency Response' and they are able to release funds as needed.

There are 'cultural heritage first aiders' on standby to step-in and help when needed.

Question 1

What should you do if the administration of the institution you work for is pro-Russian and is sabotaging the conservation of the cultural objects and is preventing you from applying and having access to outside funding, e.g. from ALIPH?

Expert Answers

Yacy Ara Froner

Spread information and register all attacks on museums via social media platforms, and make this information very clear (*N.B. see answer below from Sam Hardy who contradicts this response*).

Gerrit de Bruin

It is imperative to have backup of archives (and data on collections) elsewhere, either in another institution or in another country.

Digitalise collections and always ensure accessibility. Prioritise with the most important information first.

This is hard to do now, especially if the administration is pro-Russian, but it is important for future risk management.

Sam Hardy

If the administration of your institution is pro-Russian, it is probably not safe to share information via social media, e.g. twitter.

Share privately. Private institutions can help prepare actions for the future.

Olesia Ostrovska

Need to be absolutely sure that the accusation is accurate. If you believe this to be true, talk to the Ukrainian Intelligence Service as well as the governing body of the institution.

Rene Teigjeler

Regarding experience with the Russians during WW2, if they are in possession of something, it will be very hard to get it back.

It is important to film the actions of the Russians, to acquire evidence.

Gerrit de Bruin

Again, regarding WW2 and cultural objects taken by the Russians from Germany, it took 50 years and it cost €500 000 to obtain the return of some pieces. It is possible, but it is expensive and it takes time.

Question 2

Do you see a possibility in isolating Russian culture from the world stage? Surely this is crucial in undermining the strength of the aggressor?

Answers

Sam Hardy

In the past, professional archaeologists from other countries were blacklisted from digs in occupied territories.

However, in terms of intergovernmental organisations, they will not boycott Russian culture.

These organisations are dependant on donations from governments. The governments are against these boycotts. If they have a strong reaction they will likely lose money from the governments.

Question 3

The National Museum and the Director of the National Museum is the no. 1 target by the Russians. The Director is present on Instagram and twitter. Should they limit this access to information to prevent looting and plundering?

There is also an English version [of the collection online], should they promote it or limit it?

Yulia Pischanska

The National Historical Museum is on the frontline, located on a strategic position. It holds a huge collection of antique sculptures. These are located outside in the open air. We have protected the sculptures with wooden beams and boxes and sand bags.

Is there anything else we can do?

Answers

Rene Teigjeler

In Palmyra, before the attack of ISIS, what we did was:

- Firstly, if the bombs are coming, you need to flee and leave the big statues.
- If there is time, make the statues into a pillar

Bury ceramics and stone ware in the ground. Use an app on your mobile phone to note the GPS. Share this information with 2-3 people maximum, ensuring one of these people is abroad.

With mosaics, you can cover these with sand to make them inconspicuous.

Try to make most things inconspicuous. Cover it with wheat, corn, manure etc.

You need to have priorities, in case of an emergency leave the heavy, impossible to move items.

York Rieffel

In Berlin during WW2, brick masonry walls were built to protect sculptures, as well as the use of sand bags. This was very effective with almost no damage.

Cristina Morena de Acevedo

It is important to implement data management.

'Kobotoolbox' (kobotoolbox.org): this is an open source platform for data collection. This toolbox was created by the UN and Harvard University as an open source platform to collect information privately. It was created for humanitarian workers in order to collect data and then save this information. You can access this information with a password.

Info saves heritage: with your telephone, take a photo and note down as much information as you can, note the GPS. Share this information.

Francisco Romeo

Before you put the sand bags around the sculpture, build a wooden structure with two levels, and then place the sand bags around this structure. Use something to fix the two together. The wood structure helps it become more solid.

Place items in plastic boxes and plastic crates and then hide them.

Yacy Ara Froner

Involve the Ukrainian population in protecting sculptures with the sand bags.

Gerrit de Bruin

Use metal containers for sculptures.

It is possible to take certain material home, e.g. archival material, to save from bombing, or flooding. It is tricky, but it happened successfully in Baghdad during the war.

Clas Ternstrom

When burying material, it is necessary to bury accompanying documents allowing archaeologists in the future to understand the circumstances of the burial.

Comment from *Olesia Ostrovska*

There are two areas in Ukraine right now:

- 1) Currently under attack.
- 2) Not under attack

How to protect the cultural objects depends on which area they are in. We need two sets of recommendations, one for those who are able to get supplies and one for those already under attack.

It is hard to get supplies, the ports are blocked, it is not easy to get sand or wood (*N.B. you can use wooden doors and earth as a substitute for sand*).

Question 4

Yacy Ara Froner

Is it important to use the Blue Shield flag on heritage sites in Ukraine to stop the Russians from shelling it?

Answers

Sam Hardy

Russians are deliberately targeting homes and civilians, the blue shield flag will result in the heritage site becoming a target.

Gerrit de Bruin

But then if you are able to film the destruction of a site with a blue shield flag, you will have proof in a criminal court.

Rene Teigjeler

The National library in Sarajevo was bombed because it had a blue shield flag.

UNESCO are dispersing the signs, it is up to you if you want to use them.

You do not want to warn: 'this is a museum'

The Russians signed 1954 convention, however, with the way they are acting now in Ukraine, they would not take the blue shield flag into consideration.

Question 5

How and when can we decide it is time to evacuate?

Answers

Evangelos Kyriakidis

It is about risk assessment, as soon as you think there are bombs coming, it is now a top risk, you have to evacuate.

In Greece during the WW2, a month before the invasion from Italy, the National Gallery was evacuated.

Isber Sabreen

It would be useful to have an interactive map with information such as:

- When is the highest risk?
- What are the priorities?
- Where is the highest risk?
- Where we need more supplies and support.

Rene Teigjeler

Evacuation is different from hiding.

You can throw statues in the canal. In Holland during the world wars, statues were hid in the sewage system.

Question 6

Are there any precise guidelines, one specific document, aimed at museums and how to act during war situations?

Answers

Gerrit de Bruin

<https://www.iccrom.org/publication/endangered-heritage-emergency-evacuation-heritage-collections>

This is a toolkit, handbook published by ICCROM

(There are efforts to translate this into Ukrainian at the moment)

Ihor Poshyvailo

There are toolkits from 2014 and 2016 that are published on our website (maidanmuseum.org)

A toolkit from UNESCO published in Ukrainian will be available soon.

Yacy Ara Froner

We are developing in Brazil with our students a very simple flyer with information of how to protect heritage in case of a natural disaster, mining disaster, flooding etc.

It has images and a few simple guidelines.

This can be spread to people in the Ukraine via WhatsApp.

It is very important to produce materials that everyone can have in their hand.

Rene Teigjeler

Damage from natural disasters is not much different from war damage. Due to bombardments, there can be flooding, gas leaks and explosions.

Question 7

Shall we undergo 3D scanning of objects in order to replicate them if they are destroyed?

Answers

York Rieffel

If possible to do so, it is a good idea. But of course you are going to need technical equipment. But now realistically in Ukraine, there is not much of a chance left.

Taking pictures from all sides of an object is very important. A good, detailed picture of an object will hold great value in the future.

Rene Teigjeler

At the present moment it is waste of money. In a war zone use your energy for something else.

Scanning documents is useful at the moment in Ukraine.

Question 8

Ihor Poshyvailo

It is nearly impossible to evacuate now, what is your advice to secure and preserve objects? For example, what fire resistance fabrics are the best to cover material?

What can we use for the protection of archives and media?

Answers

Rene Teigjeler

Use anything now that can be reversed. For example potato starch or corn starch as covering will work well (not in a fire).

Fire fighting material is being collected now by the Blue Shield for use in Ukraine.

Pack items tightly, ensuring no air between objects.

Cotton catches fire quickly, wool does not.

Plastic burns horribly.

Poland is transporting fire extinguishers to Ukraine. However, fire extinguishers can damage certain materials. Do not use powder or foam fire extinguishers. Carbon dioxide is the best.

Gerrit de Bruin

Use as much material as you can find to protect material from flooding and bombardment, e.g. boxes, sheets, blankets.

In terms of archives and media, cardboard boxes helps a lot. The paper might be wet (from flooding), but it will still be readable. Even in a fire, cardboard boxes will help repel the fire and reduce the impact.

Metal boxes also work well.

Pack boxes very tightly together making sure they are compact and dense. The fire will go around the outside and not be able to pierce the interior.

Cut off the electricity, gas and water supply. This will prevent more damage.

Imke Neels

Make different compartments in the library. This will cause less damage than if they were in one big open room.

Sicko Pijker

Spreading the archives in different rooms spreads the risks.

Francisco Romeo

Take off signs in museums or libraries indicating there are valuable objects. This will prevent looters from knowing where the valuable collections are located.

Question 9

Zhuk Olha

What to do if museums are approached by private collectors or artists (to hold part of the collection)?

Answers

Rene Teigjeler

Stay away from it.

In Iraq, a Danish company tried to organise an exhibition of ivories based in Iraq to tour the US. It was all about money.

If you do decide to proceed to do this, make sure you have a legal contract.

If you move your collection to another museum, make sure you have a contract.

The contract should state:

- For how long (e.g. three months)
- Who the legal owner is.
- Who the temporary owner is.

Closing remarks

Ihor Poshyvailo

It is dangerous to share information on Facebook and social media. This will attract looting and shelling.

Do not draw attention to valuable objects. Ensure valuable objects keep a low profile.

Rene Teigjeler

Document everything but do not publish information. In Mariupol looting is already happening, and it is not gangs, but normal people who need to get money for food.

Except for criminal gangs plunderers do not have an agenda, they will take anything and they will destroy your museum. This is what happened in the Middle East.

Sam Hardy

The evidence from the Iraq war is that people loot to get money.

So far this is not happening in Ukraine, they have enough supplies at the moment. However, this could happen in the future.

Ihor Poshyvailo

We are in the process of creating small emergency response teams throughout the country. They will be able to share technology and assist in satellite monitoring of their dedicated areas.

Unknown Ukrainian heritage professional

It is important to build relationships, for example between fire fighters and museums. We need to learn from the conflict to be better equipped for what might happen in the future.

We cannot turn collections into targets. "Fire will draw fire"

We need cooperation between the Department for Military and the Department for Culture.

Rene Teigjeler

International humanitarian laws do not allow museums to be targeted unless they are used for military purposes. If there are soldiers in museums, they can be fired upon.

Next Steps

Ihor Poshyvailo

Smaller meetings to be set up between the experts and Ukrainian heritage professionals.