

Developing national and international standards for better cultural security

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Résumé

Il importe de développer de nouvelles normes en matière de protection des biens culturels, qui soient applicables quel que soit leur statut: monuments historiques, archives, bibliothèques, jardins botaniques, objets liturgiques ou tout objet archéologique ou historique conservé in situ. Si nous estimons un tant soit peu notre patrimoine, nous devons définir des mesures minimales de protection et de conservation pouvant être réellement adoptées par tous les pays. On observe en effet de nombreuses disparités entre les systèmes de protection des différents pays, ce qui freine les échanges artistiques et culturels à une échelle internationale. Une harmonisation des normes minimales de protection et de conservation apparaît donc essentielle, afin de favoriser les échanges d'expositions et le développement du tourisme culturel. La définition de normes minimales a été amorcée en Grande-Bretagne, aux Etats-Unis et au Canada au début des années 1990. Aujourd'hui, le Brésil définit avec l'ICMS des mesures de protection et de conservation valables tant pour les musées que pour les bibliothèques et les archives. A cette fin, les mesures existantes sont répertoriées, synthétisées puis structurées dans un questionnaire distribué à plus de quatre-cents institutions brésiliennes. Ce questionnaire permet de se faire une idée juste de la fiabilité des systèmes de protection existants et de les améliorer. Les normes élaborées au Brésil sont susceptibles d'être adoptées par d'autres pays et par toute institution patrimoniale, y compris celles qui ne disposent pas de budget de sécurité et qui ne sont pas encore conscientes de la nécessité d'améliorer la protection des biens qu'elles conservent. L'ICMS souhaite que l'exemple brésilien ait un effet d'entraînement, afin que d'autres institutions choisissent des mesures de protection appropriées à leur réalité.

At the ICOM 1986 meeting in Buenos Aires, Hugues de Varine gave an inspiring presentation on the history of an oil painting, from the oil painting's point of view. The painting was born in an

artist's studio, stored in a musty basement, then sent from owner to owner until it came into a museum's steady care - in an attic. It poignantly illustrated the extremes of conservation care for the same painting as it changed hands time and again.

The same can be said for security care: museum objects at home, on loan and in transport deserve equal consideration for care, "at least a minimum level of care and security". We should regard all cultural objects similarly, whether historic structures, library and archive collections, ecclesiastical materials, and objects in situ on archaeological and heritage sites. No cultural property should go less cared for simply because it is administered by a different organization or one unfamiliar with its needs.

This would call for a minimum level of care and security, if we truly valued what we collect. We would certainly provide more care and security for objects with greater needs, and for ones that are under more threat. In security, the baseline minimum level of security is accountability for our collections, and a minimum of physical protection barriers and procedures to keep our collections safe. While up to now security levels have been extremely variable and relative depending on the place, globalization, with more international travel and marketing of goods and services is motivating greater agreement on a minimum level of security for all cultural collections. For valuable collections, for instance, the rule of thumb almost anywhere is to seek the same security levels as those used by the local banks and jewelry stores.

Voluntary museum security baseline minimums emerged in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada in the early 1990s. Some are now being used for institution accreditation and qualification for loans. Last year in the United States a similar library and archives standard was developed for use, and this year Brazil will develop a similar baseline for museums, libraries and archives alike. While some use the term "standard", others may use the term "guideline" to avoid inferring that there is a legal guarantee of protection afforded.

The motivation behind developing minimum security standards and guidelines is the preservation of collections throughout the systems of any nation: in botanical and zoological gardens, in parks and heritage sites, in various governmental and municipal bodies, in private collections, and certainly in museums, libraries and archives. The movement is strongly endorsed by insurance underwriters, loss prevention companies, and law enforcement agencies. With effective security across the board, the new demands of exhibition exchange, accreditation, cultural tourism, and accountability to an organizational governance are more easily met in advance. It makes sound economic and business sense to measure the risks to be taken beforehand, and to apply a baseline expectation.

To that end the ICMS Working Group on Security and Protection Standards looked for accountability, barrier, and procedural standards in security, fire and emergency planning. When existing standards are compared, they show the validation of the independent development of similar baseline needs, such as a need to lock up collections that are left unattended, and the use of an accurate inventory list that is periodically rechecked and validated by others.

In the Brazilian development of cultural security standards, existing standards were synthesized and then framed into a questionnaire that was distributed to over four hundred Brazilian museums, libraries and archives in June 1997. From a synthesis of different national security standards there evolve universal cultural security needs. From the questionnaire results there evolves a current statistical base of working realities. The international comparison and the questionnaire comparison each validate a perfect "fit" for their current, realistic requirements.

The questionnaire is worded in practical, common terms, beginning with what some would call "common sense" and moving on to the sophistications and variations of institutional environments. It asks the director of the institution to indicate whether he or she:

- takes direct responsibility for protection
- periodically reviews and adjusts protection programs
- closes, locks, (ideally sets an alarm) and checks all doors, windows and other openings that are parts of defensive perimeters
- limits the number of openings that are used
- defends high risk openings more strongly
- keeps a record of keys
- requires all collection objects to be under escort when not inside a defensible perimeter
- requires existing non-security staff to protect institution people, properties, buildings and activities where security staff are not assigned
- requires the staff, in case of fire, to call professional fire fighting services.

There are security standard categories for basic responsibilities, standards of care, perimeter defence, doors and windows, locks and keys, policies and access, exhibitions and loans, collections in storage, security staff, alarms and television, fire security, and emergency preparations.

Fulfilling these standards does not require spending a lot of money or hiring a lot of staff. Most common sense steps for security and accountability are free. They simply take time and great care. Among them are inventorying, marking, tracking the location of objects, and physically checking. Some steps of physical protection have minimal, but necessary costs, such as purchasing improved locks for the doors or using a different system to secure windows.

The existing questionnaire is constructed in such a way that if one can answer all the questions honestly and affirmatively, then the standard is met. Questions with negative answers require explanations and often improvements.

The Brazilian standards are being developed with a view to further application in other nations, for places where there may be shared properties or buildings; imperfect municipal electrical, water, rubbish or police service; organizational complexities and a lack of codes or code enforcement; and for organizations with "no budget" for security, little motivation for im-

proved protection, and often with no dedicated security staff and perhaps only one member of staff on duty at the property at any given time.

The ICMS plans to prototype this minimum security standard in a number of other nations, especially in developing countries, to bring the countries' security efforts into line with the international security community. ICMS expects to see a number of other nations developing a national security standard on their own terms, before those from other places appear to be imposed on them.

ICMS welcomes inquiries from your nation's technical museum security colleagues which would benefit every nation, enabling each one to provide a minimum protection level for all its collections, while preparing to serve with greater flexibility and skill.

