



Improving emergency preparedness and response through regional networks

von Ellie Bruggeman

Zusammenfassung

Niederländische Kultureinrichtungen bündeln seit 2002 ihre Kräfte in regionalen Netzwerken. Das Ziel ist vielfältig: Unterstützung bei der Verbesserung von Notfallplänen (da diese den Schutz der Sammlungen oft nicht einschließen), Erleichterung des Wissensaustausches über Notfallpläne und Stärkung der Kontakte mit Einrichtungen des Katastrophenschutzes. Zusätzlich sollten die Netzwerke ein Sicherheitsnetz bieten: Bei einem Notfall in einer Einrichtung können die anderen Einrichtungen angefordert werden, um bei vorübergehender Unterbringung, mit Fachwissen, Material usw. zu helfen

Die Ergebnisse und bleibenden Aufgaben: Die verbesserten Notfallpläne haben die Selbstständigkeit der einzelnen Einrichtungen verbessert, und die Zusammenarbeit in Netzwerken verstärkt diesen Effekt noch. Die Netzwerkstrukturen erleichtern es auch, den verstärkten Kontakt mit Einrichtungen der Katastrophenhilfe aufrecht zu erhalten. Um jedoch diese Ergebnisse aktuell zu halten und weiterzuentwickeln und zugleich das Netzwerk weiterhin als Sicherheitsnetz instand zu halten, müssen die Netzwerke am Leben gehalten werden, was regelmäßige Treffen der Mitglieder erfordert. Dies erweist sich aber als schwierig in Zeiten ohne Unfälle und mit vielen anderen Aufgaben, die Aufmerksamkeit fordern.

During the 16th Dutch-German archives symposium it was discussed, how regional cooperation between cultural heritage institutions can improve the safeguarding of their cultural treasures. This article discusses the method used in the Netherlands, with special attention for the Dutch province Gelderland.

Dutch cultural institutions have joined forces in regional networks to improve their emergency preparedness and response since 2002. These networks were built following the method »Netwerkaanpak Veiligheidszorg voor Collectiebeheerders«¹. The goal is multifarious:

- to support the improvement of disaster plans (as these did often not include the protection of the collections in case of emergencies),
- to facilitate the exchange of knowledge regarding emergency preparedness and
- to strengthen the contacts with emergency assistance services.
- Additionally, the networks should provide a safety net: in case of an emergency at one institution, the others can be contacted to help with temporary storage, materials, etcetera.

Working method

The fundamentals of the networks were laid down during a project phase of about nine months. These projects were organised by the foundation for cultural heritage of the province involved. The foundation for cultural heritage in the province Gelderland, the »Stichting Gelders Erfgoed«, started offering these projects in 2006. As the formation of the networks is based on the region of settlement, and not on similarities like type of collections or organizational size and structure, the groups comprised very diverse types of institutions. The seven networks that were built in Gelderland comprise in total 16 archival institutions, 69 museums, three university libraries and documentation centres, three churches, several castles and historic houses and a historical garden. Each network consists of ten to twenty institutions.

Review of disaster plans

The improvement of the disaster plans was supported by a combination of workshops, assignments and individual support. The benefits of collaboration were not limited to project efficiency. Working together also eased the process since it gave the opportunity to learn from others' mistakes, which were discussed very frankly within the network. Sharing a common deadline also resulted in peer pressure.

Collaboration with emergency assistance services

At least one workshop per network was attended by a representative of the fire department, sometimes accompanied by representatives of the police force or local government. Their input resulted in a greatly improved understanding of what cultural institutions should, and should not, ex-

pect from the emergency services. Likewise, these contacts resulted in increased awareness within the emergency services about the special circumstances at cultural institutions.

The cultural institutions especially became less sceptical regarding the possibilities to rescue collection objects in case of fire. Previously, almost everyone was convinced that the fire brigade would not at all be concerned about the safety of the collections. Now, many realize that a request to rescue specific objects or to focus on the protection of specific areas in the building will not necessarily be rejected. Obviously, this will only be an option if the safety of humans remains warranted. Additionally, the institution itself must have taken its own responsibilities. For instance, you must have organized all people present to be safely evacuated and you must be quickly available (in case of a fire alarm outside working hours as well!) to provide the fire brigade with site-specific information. Next, you need to be able to provide clear information regarding the locations of the objects of highest importance. For example by marking them on building maps beforehand. Additionally, you will have to have arranged a storage location for evacuated objects, including transport arrangements. Ultimately, self-reliance is the keyword!

Prevention networks

On a national level: in nearly all provinces of the Netherlands cultural prevention networks have been established or will be shortly. There will be about 60 networks in total. Generally, the networks meet one to two times a year to discuss recent developments or a specific topic, or to perform an emergency practice drill at one of the member institutions. However, some networks do experience difficulties in keeping the network contacts alive after the initial phase of reviewing disaster plans together.

Fortunately, there have not been many occasions that required networks to act as a safety net. In December 2007 an accident with an Apache-helicopter caused a 50-hour electricity blackout in the »Bommelerwaard« (area in the south-west of Gelderland). The network coordinator consequently wanted to contact the members to find out if they needed support, but the coordinator was at home at that moment and did not have a copy of the disaster plan – with the contact list of the network – available. This instructive experience is generally applicable: a copy of the disaster plan should be at the homes of key staff members. That way, they can initiate actions from their homes, directly after being informed about an incident.

¹ The method »Netwerkaanpak Veiligheidszorg voor Collectiebeheerders« is developed by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage and is based on a proposal by cultural property protection specialist A. G. (Ton) Cremers.

Results and remaining challenges

The improved disaster plans have increased the level of self-reliance of the individual institutions and the collaboration in networks adds additional strength. The network structures facilitate the upkeep of the strengthened contacts with the emergency services as well. However, to maintain and further build on these results – and to keep the network operational as a safety net as well – the networks need to stay alive which requires the members to meet pe-

riodically. This however has turned out to be a challenge in times without incidents and with many other responsibilities to attend to. ■



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