NETcher
Social Platform for Cultural Heritage

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Cultural heritage as a non-renewable and threatened resource

Protecting humanity heritage is a key historical challenge of the 21st Century. Trafficking of cultural goods destroys parts of collective memory and deprives humanity of testimonies of its history. Looting and trafficking of cultural heritage represent an increasing phenomenon with strong consequences on security, economics, culture and society. It has reached an international scale, favoured by new technical resources and by political situation all over the world. It often uses existing criminal networks and sells at the market price, often to good-faith buyers, thanks to a period of latency in various States and intermediaries.

Trans-Domain Cooperation for Fighting Against Illicit Traffic of Cultural Heritage

Many initiatives have been launched to protect endangered cultural heritage and help stopping illicit trade. All of them brought partial solutions and remediation actions, methods and approaches to tackle looting and trafficking. The NETCHER project intends to harmonise and bring together all these previous experience, creating a Social Platform, a structured network drawing together international bodies, national governments, policy makers, research and academic institutions, cultural institutions and archaeologists,

police services facing difficulties in European and international cooperation, journalists, civil society, representatives of the art market.

Key Messages

- Fighting against illicit traffic means a strong cooperation between domains and professions both at national and European level

- All people interested in trafficking and looting of cultural heritage should address the NETCHER project for providing their contribution to the discussion.

- Before purchasing an object of uncertified provenance, cultural institutions, art amateurs and merchants should remember that your money is supporting trafficking and financing a war.

- The problem of trafficking in archaeological artefacts and cultural heritage needs in-depth studies, to better understand the mechanisms and provide an effective response. The role of the human and social sciences must be reflected here in very strong involvement and adequate funding.

- The links between organized crime and trafficking in antiquities should be better demonstrated, so raising awareness of the problem among the general public. Demonstrating the connections between terrorist financing and antiquities trafficking is a key step in fighting against this phenomenon.

- When noticing a suspicious activity concerned with illicit trafficking of antiquities, notify national police, or INTERPOL.

- The lack of interoperability of the several data bases created in the last decades is still a major problem, that prevents presently the efforts of cooperation to be really efficient. The creation of FAIR data (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) is a requirement for the future.

Traffic trade is not a new challenge: Increasing Threatens

Trafficking of antiquities, looted by means of metal detectors and illegal excavations, is a well-known problem, particularly serious in the countries around the Mediterranean and in Asia.
New actors have been entering the organized trafficking circuits linked to criminal networks and terrorism in the last years, thanks to the political and social chaos in some countries, mainly in Syria and Iraq. Most of these objects are going to arrive on the European and American art markets, probably through European and Asian free ports.

Raise Awareness

The first step for fighting this danger consists of communication and awareness rising, in order to avoid the dissemination of stereotypes and false pictures of the issue.

Professional communities:

Judicial, customs and police institutions often underestimates the seriousness of the matter: trafficking is sometimes considered a hobby similar to a passion for history. Similarly, cultural and research professionals have different positions with regard to the purchase of antiques on the art market, putting the focus on buying to preserve a cultural heritage instead of not buying to avoid endorsing a fraudulent system.

An efficient training actions must be rapidly set-up, allowing different professional communities to communicate together, creating toolkits to improve the knowledge of this phenomenon.

Press and media:

A critical mass for facing this threaten can be achieved thanks to the use od key media, and a specific action towards the information communities and more particularly journalists, is necessary. Press release, storytelling, specific websites and flyers can provide good quality information to alert these professional communities to the realities, scale and dangers of the trafficking in antiquities, providing them with information to work with.

General public:

General public and art amateurs should be informed that, due to the many conflicts in antiquities supplier countries, the probability of buying a looted object on the art market is very high. Ad hoc campaigns must address this problem, launching advertising campaigns, similar to the existing ones against brand counterfeiting and trafficking in protected animal species (poster in airports, warning messages on the Internet, etc.).

Art market:

Cooperation and collaboration with the art market community can be very different according to country and specific local situation. For this reason, it is necessary to start from an effective identification of those partners, within this professional community, more attentive to the problem of trafficking.

Law enforcement agencies and justice authorities:

Security forces (police, border control staff) should contribute to describe the state of the art, the offender processes, their modus operandi, flows, routes and waypoints. They should deliver contents to the registers of needs, good practices, risks and ethics, as well as participate in designing the legal frameworks at national, European and international levels, and contribute to the inventory and analysis for interoperability of the existing tools.