

Networking: « Coordination and Collaboration among Diverse Institutions and Organisations in Emergency Preparedness and Response » in the Island of Tobago

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Resumen

Creación de redes, coordinación y colaboración entre distintas instituciones y organizaciones de la isla de Tobago que realizan trabajos relacionados con la gestión de situaciones de emergencia

Desde hace varios siglos, la isla de Tobago, situada en una región geográfica propensa a las catástrofes naturales, ha sido testigo de una historia accidentada y escenario continuo de conflictos armados y desastres naturales devastadores. Hoy en día, muchas instituciones y organizaciones trabajan en pro de la preservación del patrimonio cultural (edificios, monumentos, archivos, sitios, etc.). Entre ellas, cabe señalar el Tobago Trust, una organización que ha participado en numerosas actividades realizadas en el plano local para mitigar las repercusiones de los desastres climáticos y geológicos que han afectado recientemente al país (huracanes tropicales y sismos).

Résumé

Création de réseaux : coordination et collaboration entre diverses institutions et organisations de l'île de Tobago travaillant dans le domaine de la gestion des situations d'urgence.

Depuis plusieurs siècles, les luttes armées et les manifestations violentes de la nature ont toujours existé sur cette île à l'histoire mouvementée et à la localisation géographique propice aux situations d'urgence. Aujourd'hui, de nombreuses institutions et organisations travaillent à la préservation du patrimoine (bâtiments, monuments, archives, sites, etc.) dont le Tobago Trust, qui a été impliqué dans de nombreuses actions locales concernant des catastrophes climatiques qui ont touché le pays récemment (tempêtes tropicales et tremblements de terre).

Demographics

The island of Tobago is part of the independent state of Trinidad and Tobago, is the southernmost of the Caribbean islands and is geologically linked to the mainland of South America. Trinidad lies 10 km (7 miles) north-east off the Venezuelan coast and Tobago lies a further 33 km (21 miles) north-east of Trinidad.

Trinidad and Tobago has a landmass of 4,828 km² (1,86 square miles). Tobago the smaller of the two islands 298 km² (116 square miles) has a population of approximately 50,000 (Trinidad & Tobago's population is 1,400,000).

Historical Background

Before Europeans arrived and colonized Tobago in the 17th century it was settled by aboriginals (Amerindians) linked to South America as early as 2000/2500 BC, from stone age Ciboney and later ceramic Arawakan and Kalina (Caribs) cultures which prevailed for a certain time during European colonization, but eventually faded through combat, population displacement and disease. The artefactual remains are located at more than fifty known sites on the island, mainly on the coast and around the wetlands. In addition to this, the Europeans and enslaved Africans (emancipated in 1834) left a legacy of fortifications, ruins of sugar factories and buildings, artefacts and archival material from the Couronians from Latvia (17th century), the Dutch (17th century), the French (17th, 18th and 19th centuries) and the British (18th, 19th and 20th centuries). Today's homogeneous African descendants have preserved their cultural and folk traditions of speech, food, religion, stories, music and dances.

Natural and Manmade Disasters of Tobago

1677: The French Navy bombed and destroyed the Dutch town of Lamsingberg (now Scarborough), the main fort, Fort Sterreschans, and naval and commercial ships in the harbour of Rode Klip Baai (Rockly Bay). The French also lost several ships in the battles (March and December 1677).

During the dredging of Scarborough Harbour in 1990 to expand the port, the hulls from several 17th century Dutch and French ships were identified and several pieces of cultural material retrieved. An undisclosed number of artefacts, in particular coins, jewellery and cutlery were pirated by divers employed on the project. Since then no serious attempt has been made to retrieve and conserve material from the harbour, with the exception of the establishment of a Marine Archaeological Laboratory in 2000. This project is now on hold pending a decision by the administrative authorities for funding and the appointing of experts.

1790: The first recorded hurricane caused considerable damage in August 1790. Earlier, following the revolution in France, French troops mutinied and destroyed the capital of Port Louis (Scarborough) setting fire to it. Ships in the harbour were also destroyed. While Fort King George, also named Fort Castries or Fort Liberté, has not survived, there are still structures and buildings exemplifying French engineering and architecture standing today. The buildings and structures dating from the French and British occupation in the 19th century are currently being restored and will be renamed "Fort King George Heritage Park".

1847: A disastrous hurricane, preceded by an earthquake and accompanied by a thunderstorm, caused extensive damage to buildings and property. Fort King George was severely damaged and never rebuilt. British troops were withdrawn in 1854. The Fort and its precincts contain a wealth of cultural artefacts that have not been fully explored.

1921: A minor hurricane caused landslides, but there are no records of any other damage.

1949: A rainstorm caused severe damage to the northern part of the island.

1963: On September 30, 1963, hurricane «Flora» devastated many buildings, plantations and the rain forest (the oldest in the western hemisphere, established circa 1776). Seventeen lives were lost. Some of the buildings, including churches, were more than 100 years old.

1970: Fire by arson destroyed the police headquarters (circa 1860) and the court house during civil unrest. Irreplaceable records and historic items were destroyed.

1980-2000: Three recorded tropical storms occurred.

1997: An earthquake registering 5.6 on the Richter scale struck at sea causing extensive damage to buildings in the south-west of the island, and extensive damage to the main library and archives containing records from 1768 on. The building has been abandoned and the library temporarily relocated, but the archives are still kept in the abandoned building and no serious attempt has been made to conserve and relocate them. The Tobago Museum was also seriously damaged but did not suffer any loss to the collections thanks to skilful conservation work by staff.

Bushfires, Inland and Coastal Erosion

This very small island (45km/27 miles long by 12.5 km/7.5 miles at its widest point) has not escaped the universal scourge of bush and forest fires, and inland and coastal erosion, simultaneously destroying the landscape and environment, prehistoric and historic sites; and this is now aided and abetted by unscrupulous development of housing and hotels.

Diverse Institutions and Organisations

This review of Tobago's demographics and history and the chronology of disasters provides a background for analysis and recommendations from this forum for Cultural Heritage Disaster Preparedness and Response on the subject of networking: coordination and collaboration among diverse institutions and organisations involved in emergency preparedness and response.

Below is a catalogue of institutions responsible for a wide range of collections of cultural heritage properties and material:

- the Tobago Trust is mandated with the responsibility of preserving the island's cultural and historical heritage; it is appointed by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) which governs the internal affairs of Tobago;
- the Tobago Museum, an institution of the Tobago Trust, conserves and displays the Trust collection, conducts educational programmes and research, and provides a base for archaeologists, palaeontologists, historians and cultural anthropologists;

- the Division of Community Development and Culture of the THA is responsible for the development of the arts and of cultural heritage;
- the THA Division of Tourism is responsible for state lands, natural and historical sites, and monuments and buildings within its properties;
- the THA Regional Library is responsible for the islands archives;
- the THA Town and Country Planning Division is responsible for granting permission for land development and buildings. The institution keeps records of buildings, properties, historical sites and monuments;
- the "established" churches, i.e. Anglican, Roman Catholic, Moravian and Methodist, hold records of births, deaths, marriages and special events dating from the early 1800s; there are also the tombstones in the cemeteries.

The National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA)

NEMA provides public information and emergency relief for fires, floods, explosions, earthquakes, hurricanes and storms. With the exception of the guidelines in the "Emergency Management and Recovery Plan" handbook, it does not have anything specific for cultural heritage disaster preparedness and response.

NEMA is represented by various officials from state institutions: the administration, national security, the regiment, coast guard, police and fire services, the electricity commission, the water and sewerage authority, telecommunications, the Red Cross, the hospital and health authority, the port authority, civil aviation and the division of public works.

Examples of Disasters Experienced by the Tobago Trust – Tobago Museum

1994: A tropical storm destroyed part of the roof of the museum. Emergency response and action by the museum staff and museum professionals of the Trust covered repairs, cleaning and the conservation of the collection. Contrary to what was reported, there was no response from NEMA.

1997: An earthquake caused the door and window frames at the museum to collapse and made cracks in the walls. NEMA called for a technical assessment to be conducted before the public was allowed to re-enter the buildings, but did not respond until two weeks after the event, by which time the trustees and museum staff had already set up plans for repairs and rehabilitation.

2000: Another tropical storm destroyed another section of the museum roof. The Trust took its own action for repairs and rehabilitation.

Interaction of the Trust over the last five years with other Institutions Responsible for Cultural Heritage in Tobago

During this period the Trust has gained the respect of related institutions seeking to collaborate and receive technical advice on a one-off basis. Here the Trust is prepared to network with our colleagues on emergency preparedness and response, and while the Trust has its own plan on a

limited scale, we wish to learn from the forum, from their experience, methods, and the ways and means of establishing the network with the following institutions: the Division of Community Development and Culture, the Division of Tourism, Regional Library and Archives, Town and Country Planning, private art galleries, private museums and private collectors.

Some of the main objectives will be to:

- organise and coordinate training programmes to be conducted by specialists;
- produce a catalogue of collections, properties and sites and their locations;
- establish a communications network among key personnel;
- establish a list of consultants in the fields of archaeology, museology, conservation and historical architecture. The Archaeology Committee of Trinidad and Tobago at the University of the West Indies (to which we are affiliated) can be a useful resource in helping achieve this;
- gain representation on the committee of NEMA;
- have technical advice from ICOM and its affiliates;
- advise and receive assistance from the THA.

Summary

The board members of the Tobago Trust include a historical architect, an agricultural scientist, a retired librarian and archivist, a museologist, a land surveyor and property valuator, an attorney at law and a cultural activist, four of whom are practising visual artists. The Trustees are not paid for their services and do not have adequate technical and financial resources to cope with the demands.

In conclusion we hope that through ICOM we can request and receive technical and professional advice to prepare ourselves with proper cultural heritage disaster preparedness and response.