



Expert Group on Archive Buildings & Environments

Mexico City 2017 Workshop: Archival buildings; standards and developments

This year in Mexico City the ICA's Expert Group on Archive Buildings & Environments (EGABE) held a full day workshop on Sunday, November 26th, to address some of the issues inherent in the management and maintenance of archives storage, and the impacts of buildings. This workshop built on the successful model premiered at the Annual conference in Seoul, South Korea, in 2016, and explored themes suggested by the original workshop thus demonstrating responsiveness to the needs of the international community.

As before, the workshop was split into two distinct halves; the morning session consisted of three short talks, separated by group activities to explore the subjects covered, all managed by members of the EGABE who were on hand throughout to provide guidance and support. The subjects that were covered:

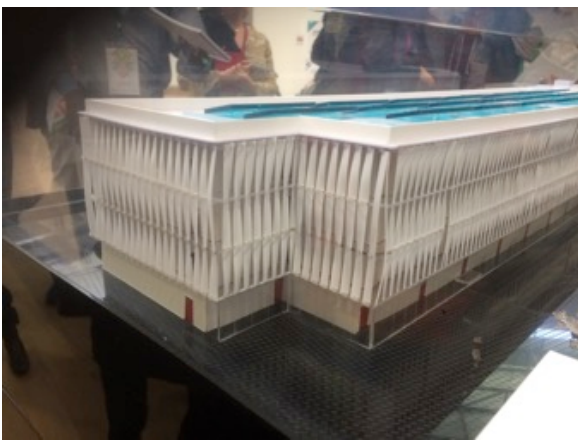
- The use of standards for specifying archive buildings
- Managing the digital space; the needs and requirements for the storage of digital data systems in archive buildings
- The purpose of monitoring and the evaluation of data
- Sustainable fire safety systems

In addition, in the afternoon, the session included a visit to the National Archives of Mexico. This was a pre-planned tour of the facilities, focusing only on the activities that promote collections care and the long-term preservation of the collections, and was a result of close co-operation with the EGABE and the National Archives. This visit provided a unique opportunity for other collection specialists to view and discuss common and shared challenges of managing archival spaces.



20 participants attended the morning session from Mexico, Swaziland, The Gambia, Israel, Bahrain, Iran, Argentina and Sweden. After each formal presentation (each lasted about 20 minutes), the presenter set a scenario for the participants to break into groups and to discuss. The results of the group work were presented to the workshop and further comments encouraged. The general feel of the workshop was very positive and some interesting and challenging discussions took place.

The afternoon visit to the Archivo General de la Nacion (AGN) was organised by the AGN in collaboration with EGABE who assisted with the timetable and content. The AGN building is a converted prison in the heart of Mexico City and was constructed to a Spokes from a wheel/ Panopticon model (which allowed better supervision of prisoners), with a central core from which long annex buildings are accessed. It was fortunate that the tour could still take place, as the September earthquake in Mexico City had damaged part of the old building.



The tour opened with a presentation on the construction of the new annex, and the remodelling of the existing building, by the architect, Jesus Velazquez. Although this was no ordinary building, as it is designed to contain the majority of the AGN's functions, including all of the storage repositories and the technical services including fumigation, conservation and digitisation.

The tour then proceeded into the security section of the building to view the complex and sophisticated CCTV monitoring system that also includes the ability to bar staff access to certain areas of the building via facial recognition! Additionally, all doors are equipped with fingerprint scanners. The group was then taken via the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) systems operations room with a very impressive building management system (BMS) in place to monitor the effectiveness of the supply equipment, with real time measurements of Temperature, Relative Humidity and Light; the AGN also has three emergency back-up units in case of failure, but most importantly, in case of seismic damage.

The group was then taken onto the roof to look at the very impressive array of solar panels that cover the majority of the roof space and provides 40% of the building's energy requirements. Participants were also able to ask questions of the building's engineer, Roberto Velazquez, and to hear about the logistics of this project, as well as get some wonderful views across the city.

The tour group then visited one of the collection repositories to view the systems in place for fire detection (VESDA), fire extinguishing (a misting system) and the monitoring and control of the internal environments (dataloggers and the BMS system). This presented a unique opportunity for

the participants to ask a wider range of questions about storage activities and packaging. The collections had only recently been moved in to the new repositories from the original building – the prison cells had previously been re-purposed as individual storage pods.

The final section of the tour concentrated on the support services for preservation and was lead by the department head, Annabell Garcia Zamora. The participants were first shown the very impressive area focussing on the cleaning and preparation of material that suffers from mould or insect attack. This facility included two large treatment chambers – one for Anoxic treatment using Nitrogen to neutralise insects and the second utilising the gas Ozone, for treating moulds.

The conservation activities at AGN are split into two very large rooms; the first focuses on wet treatments with a range of large sinks, a leafcaster and an impressive vacuum table requiring a winch to lift the clear cover that provides a seal for humidification. The second section dealt with bookbinding and packaging – the AGN had recently invested in a large boxmaking machine. Each section also included ample workspaces for individual staff members with modular tables, some functioning as large light boxes.

In advance of the digitisation section, the tour reviewed the current storage for digital data – a large room containing significant server capacity with ample room for expansion. The digitisation suite contained four specialist digitisation stations – one of which was capable of capturing large flat material.

The overall impression is off a well-designed and significantly resourced building that is fully up to the task of collection care and so managing to safeguard the future of Mexico's archives.

The EGABE would like to thank all AGN staff who took part in the tour and especially Jesus Velazquez, Annabell Garcia Zamora and the Director, Yolia Tortolero Cervantes.



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