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The Case of the Dutch Hamster: Promoting Awareness and Preservation Management Training in Europe

by YOLA DE LUSENET

When we talk about conservation we think of books. Some people, however, have other priorities. Their first thought at hearing the word „conservation" is the Dutch hamster. This is an animal living in the southernmost part of The Netherlands, and there are, as you will already have guessed, only very few of them left. A large organization for nature conservation[1] therefore started a campaign a while ago to save the last of the Dutch hamsters. As the picture shows, it is a sweet little animal that deserves to be rescued. Many of us have kept tame hamsters as children, and this variety looks just as cuddly. That the animal really belongs to the natural world is clear from its folk name „korenwolf", „corn wolf", a name with an almost mythical ring to it, suggestive of mysterious creatures roaming the wild[2]. The campaign appeals simultaneously to our desire to protect pure, unspoiled nature and to our soft spot for little woolly innocent beings. Probably very few people ever heard of the corn wolf before the campaign started, but its existence has been revealed to us just in time for it to be rescued.

But what is this campaign *really* about? The corn wolf as a species is at no risk at all of becoming extinct. Its habitat stretches over a large part of Europe where great numbers of corn wolves are still frolicking about. Only in a little corner of the Netherlands which happens to be the most western tip of its habitat, the hamster, the Dutch hamster, is on its way out. What is really at stake is not the hamster, but its home, the environment in this area, which is mostly agricultural land. The organization that launched this campaign wants to promote a return to more „natural", extensive ways of farming that will benefit a whole range of species. Many of these species are, in the eyes of most people, not worth bothering about - undefinable plants, tiny insects, little creepy crawly things, who would miss them? The cuddly little corn wolf, appealing to children and lovers of nature alike, is an ideal focus for the broader goal of restoring the environment in which it lives. In the picture

the hamster is the center of the idyllic landscape of our childhood, which we, and a whole lot of other creatures we are hardly aware of, will be able to enjoy again if we „make sure the corn wolf can stay", as the campaign urges us to do.

I think this campaign, by the largest organization for nature conservation in the Netherlands, with 800,000 members on a population of 15 million, reveals true mastery in its choice of subject. The campaign will do much more than save a few rodents that, for all I know, may still be regarded as a pest by farmers in some other European countries (the name „corn wolf" does, after all, raise suspicions and has connotations of a voracious creature). The hamster is used as a tool for a wider agenda that is not so easy to grasp and would be hard to sell to the general public.

You may well be wondering what hamsters have to do with the preservation of archive and library materials. I have introduced it as an instructive example from which we can learn something. Consider the parallels between the conservation of our natural environment and preservation of library materials. First, in both cases one can think of the ultimate goal as being sustained management of certain assets, which we want to safeguard for coming generations. In both cases the general problem is complex and full of conflicts of interest that are not easily resolved or explained to the public. From the point of view of the ethics of conservation, there is the choice made here to restore agricultural land to a situation of about fifty years ago - what is it that is being conserved here? Or think of questions of access and use - more harmful than anything to books and landscapes alike. Yet conservation is concerned with the protection of what is at risk so that all of us, and our children and grandchildren, can continue to enjoy or use it. Conservation by refusing access would not bring the public support that is needed so badly.

Parallels between different types of conservation and campaigns to promote awareness have been drawn before. At the conference which the European Commission on Preservation and Access (ECPA) organized with die Deutsche Bibliothek in Leipzig a couple of years ago, Fernanda Campos of the National Library of Portugal talked about the hype about dinosaur remains in her country, as compared to the modest interest in preservation of the documentary heritage. There is no denying that dinosaurs appeal to the imagination in a way that books cannot. But the example of the Dutch hamster shows that the success of organizations of nature conservation does not simply lie in the fact that the true objects of their efforts are so directly appealing, but also in their skill at choosing an attractive focus for their

campaigns. The impact of the seal babies of Greenpeace and the giant panda of the World Wildlife Fund teaches something about the use of what in nature conservation is called an „umbrella species", an appealing example that stands for a complex issue involving a great number of other species.

Librarians interested in promoting conservation may have a hard time finding cuddly and endearing objects to catch the fancy of the public. On the other hand, there *is* a real interest in cultural objects of special value, and it is possible to pick out particularly attractive items that appeal to the imagination. In fact, this is already done when libraries decide to highlight for instance illuminated manuscripts in digitization projects to bring out the importance of their collections, or when the treasures of a library are displayed in exhibitions.

In my view it is important to face the fact that the use of such „umbrella pieces" is a necessity in promoting awareness of preservation issues and that preservation cannot be sold to the public as a general problem. One cannot expect people to take a warm interest in rows of 19th century books affected by acidification: instead, one needs to use a few examples that they can relate to, even if that means focusing on only a very small, perhaps even less relevant, part of the problem. I would like to advocate here a creative use of the facts and a certain boldness in presenting them in the service of a higher goal. In a world that in so many ways revolves around the power of images and the choice of the right words, one cannot expect to work wonders by just describing the situation correctly.

And then, even just describing the situation correctly seems risky to some. I have heard that librarians sometimes dislike displaying seriously damaged materials because they think this may reflect badly on the reputation of the library, as it may suggest it does not take proper care of its collections. Yet this defensive attitude makes sense only if such criticism is justified. If one feels confident that every effort is made to do a good job, surely it should be possible to present dramatic instances of damage to collections without giving people the wrong ideas. Crumbling newspapers and mouldy books do not have to be interpreted as a sign of failure if they are presented in a context of professionalism and possible solutions that says: „look, the problem is really serious, but with your help we can do something about it". How can people become involved otherwise, if there is apparently nothing to worry about?

The issue of promoting public awareness is probably the hardest of all the preservation field is facing. It is a task that can only be tackled if those engaged in preservation have a clear idea of priorities, of what needs to be conveyed, and enough confidence to present their case convincingly, not only to the world outside, but first of all within their own institutions and professional organizations. The foundation I represent, the European Commission on Preservation and Access, the ECPA, was established as a European forum for the promotion of preservation to a wider circle of librarians, archivists, scholars, and decision makers and also to the general public[3]. The latter is in my view almost impossible if one works on a European level, as preservation is so closely linked to the concept of national heritage: the hamster must, after all, be saved because it is our own *Dutch* hamster. A European campaign would require the European equivalent of a giant panda, and I doubt if that really exists.

The ECPA, as a small organization, can therefore only contribute to this larger goal indirectly, by promoting preservation first of all among librarians and archivists. The publication programme of the ECPA, run in cooperation with its American counterpart, the Commission on Preservation and Access in Washington, is part of that. The ECPA publishes several reports on general preservation-related topics a year, which are distributed to hundreds of institutions all over Europe in the conviction that this will help to make non-specialists understand how central preservation is to the overall management of collections. The ECPA also has an extensive website, which includes information on publications and preservation activities in Europe, with many links to other organizations and institutions. A special ECPA project, co-funded by the Raphael Programme of the European Commission in Brussels, is the „Preservation Map of Europe". This is a fully searchable on-line database bringing together information on preservation policies and practices on a national level in European countries. The database is freely accessible and is aimed at professionals who wish to find out more about activities in other countries[4]. The website also includes a „Virtual Exhibition on the Ravages of Dust, Water, Moulds, Fungi, Bookworms and other Pests", which is a visual presentation of the damages to library materials. So far the exhibition only covers paper and bindings, but it is hoped to add sections on other materials in the future.

In line with the general aim of the ECPA to promote preservation in the library and archive community, the ECPA has been developing a training programme in cooperation with the LIBER Division on Preservation and a number of other partners[5]. The first step was a workshop to explore training

needs, which brought fifteen people to Amsterdam for three days in November 1996. During this workshop the basis was laid for further activities. The participants of the workshop came from ten different countries and the circumstances in which they have to work are very different. But even so, from the discussions it appeared that the kind of problems the participants experienced as most frustrating and discouraging were strikingly similar. These have to do with the internal organization of institutions, and the position and status of preservation, not only within the institution, but also, for instance, with the Ministry of Culture or the library association or training institutes. All felt the difficulty of getting things off the ground when funds are scarce and colleagues are not easily convinced of the need for change.

Even though there are overwhelming differences in available resources between countries and between institutions, in all institutions those responsible for preservation have to try to make ends meet with money and staff that are limited for the goals they have in mind. Making sure that a reasonable share of the total library budget is allocated to preservation usually seems to fall to a small group of dedicated professionals, who have to find ways to make themselves heard at the highest level. In our world that means writing project proposals, presenting your case, seeking allies, lobbying - the kind of activities many of those who have been assigned preservation tasks have not been trained for, or are not used to.

On purpose I have avoided calling such professionals „preservation managers" as this might suggest this is a well-established position in the library world. My impression is that there are actually very few institutions that have specifically created such posts and that in most institutions *some* people are fulfilling *some* of the functions of a preservation manager. Sometimes such tasks are assumed by heads of conservation departments who may have a background in conservation or in conservation science. In Eastern Europe, many of the key people in preservation are chemists by training and have been involved in scientific research. Conservation departments are often seen as quite separate from the library itself and are sometimes even physically separated from the main library building. In many institutions, in short, preservation management is a domain that still has to be defined and conquered.

There is a growing appreciation of the concept of preservation in the broader sense, as a wide-ranging activity aimed at extending the useful life of all materials in an institution, an activity that is relevant to all other tasks of a library or archive. At the same time, however, there is still a widespread feeling that preservation more or less equals conservation and that it is a

matter for specialists only. As one person remarked during the workshop: „Every letter or document that is sent to someone in my country and that has 'preservation' written on it finally ends up on my desk." The impression that preservation is regarded as a task for specialists only is confirmed in the study by Feather et al.[6] on the situation in Britain. They write:

> „There are strong indications here that preservation is still widely regarded as an issue which is principally relevant to special collections" (p. 30).

Elsewhere, they comment on the difference between theory and practice:

> „The operational link between preservation and collection management and the logical link between the need to preserve information and the ability to provide it, although both loom large in the specialist literature, appear not to have entered fully into the professional thinking of many librarians" (p. 136).

That the situation is not much different on the other side of the Atlantic, which we sometimes regard as advanced in this respect, appears from a collection of case-studies on promoting preservation awareness published last year, in which the experience with training programmes for library staff is summarized as follows:

> „The concept that virtually every library decision has a preservation component is invariably a revelation to participants" (p. 18).

The challenge then is to lift preservation, as it were, to the level of the whole organization, and to make staff in other departments see the relationship between their own activities and preservation in the wider sense, including preventive measures, storage, user education, etc. This is the common ground on which the training programme focuses. The term „preservation management" is used to indicate that the training deals with topics like setting priorities, planning and budgeting. The training tries to increase insight into how the various preservation activities relate to each other and how they relate to the other tasks of the organization. Central to the training is the question of how one can impress the importance of preservation on others, how to „sell" preservation, in order to give it its rightful place in the institution.

The issue of how to promote awareness with library staff and how to train them in observing certain preservation-related principles in their own work

figures prominently in the training programme also because it is believed that by following the approach of „training the trainers", the participants may strengthen the position of preservation by involving others in the work and so widen the circle. To change attitudes is perhaps the hardest thing to do, but on the other hand it is something that can be done step by step, that does not cost any money and depends primarily on an ability to persuade others to think about the way they work.

In 1997 the Archivschule Marburg undertook to organize the first Summer School on Preservation Management, which was taught in German and lasted five days. There were twenty participants from eleven countries; thirteen participants came from Central and Eastern Europe and could be invited with the help of external funding. The course was very successful in establishing new contacts and in giving the participants a fresh perspective on their work. Some of the participants may for instance have been somewhat surprised to be told in the very first session that this course was actually going to be, not about preservation, but about *access*. This is one of the first lessons in „selling preservation": if you want people to listen, make clear to them that preservation is concerned with furthering access.

A provisional translation of the German programme of the Summer School is presented in Appendix A. It shows the structure of the course and makes clear how the more familiar topics, like microfilming, mould and conservation, are placed in a larger framework that emphasizes general management issues like planning, aims and methods, organization and management of change. The course aimed to convey how setting realistic targets and careful planning and budgeting can contribute to the transition from theory to practice, from ideas to action. The various preservation methods were not discussed from a technical point of view but rather as options to be considered, and a lot of attention was devoted to preventive preservation as a cost-effective approach. There was no attempt to offer ready-made solutions; instead, the aim was to present the participants with tools that should enable them to work towards a comprehensive preservation policy in their institutions. They were expected to participate actively in role play, discussion and group work.

In 1998 the torch was taken over by the Open Society Archives in Budapest, which organized a two-week Summer University on „Management Issues in Archival Preservation". This course was funded by the Open Society Institute, and the ECPA acted as co-sponsor. Thirty-one participants were admitted, primarily from Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of the former USSR, which is the region in which the Open Society Institute

operates. Participants came both from the archives and from the library world.

Two full days were devoted to planning a preservation programme and another full day to disaster planning. One afternoon was taken up by a discussion on aspects of an archives move. The second week revolved around the specific questions relating to the various materials: paper, audiovisual materials, and electronic records. When participants were asked at the very beginning of the course whether they were involved in preservation, a substantial percentage believed they were not, but after two days of intensive discussion of all aspects of a preservation programme, the whole class was convinced that preservation was indeed their concern.

In 1999, a European Summer School on Preservation Management will take place in Britain. This will be a week long course in English organized by the LIBER Preservation Division and the ECPA, in cooperation with the Public Record Office, and will cover policy, strategy and planning, combined with detailed workshops on some central issues.

The ECPA is looking for partners for further summer schools in other European countries and other languages. Discussions have already been opened with possible partners in France for a course in French. All courses will be open to participants from all European countries. However, in order to be most effective and to reach the whole potential audience, the training should ideally be offered in many different European languages. After all, for many librarians and archivists participating actively in a foreign language is a real obstacle, and it is therefore hoped that by setting an example and by offering information on the possible contents of a preservation management course, other organizations in other countries will follow suit and develop their own initiatives in time[8].

Another part of the training programme, apart from the courses, are publications. The first one that is being developed now, together with the LIBER Preservation Division, is a set of Guidelines for Preservation Management. It will be a brief and basic text that can be distributed widely and should help people understand what preservation management entails. It will cover all aspects, from storage to user education, in short sections with bibliographical references to more extensive literature. A draft is now being reviewed and it is hoped that the text will be published in the course of 1998.

Translation of basic texts is an essential part of the training programme which we try to promote as much as we can. The participants of the first workshop with which it all started have done their share in this. Translations of introductory texts have been made in Rumania, Lithuania, and Russia. In Estonia a project is underway for writing short introductory texts on various preservation topics. In this context translation and training efforts in Hungary deserve special mention.

Beatrix Kastaly of the National Library and Gabriella Albrecht-Kunszeri of the National Archives decided that they would like to have material to train non-professional staff in their institutions, for instance those working in store-rooms. A manual had been developed for this kind of training by staff of the Dutch National Archives, and the Hungarians undertook to translate parts of it. In the end, this amounted to 275 pages, which have now all been translated from Dutch into Hungarian. At the moment the text is being edited and it will be printed later this year.

Apart from this training material, different kinds of courses are being developed in Hungary. Basic general training of staff of the National Library and National Archives and some special courses for specific departments are scheduled for next year. In addition, the National Archives have set up an entirely new course at the university, which is compulsory for students of archival science. This is particularly important as these students are the archivists of the future and will now enter their profession with a basic understanding of preservation issues. Thirty-nine students took the 12-hour course, which included topics like environmental factors, security, cleaning, dusting, handling, selection for conservation, and surrogating techniques. It is hoped that practical training can also be included in the future. Apart from this university course, preservation has been included as a subject in courses for archivists and archival assistants being trained in the National Archives, in which parts of the translated Manual are used.

By focusing on training of staff, emphasizing good storage practice and careful handling, all of them measures that cost very little, it is hoped that a culture of preservation can be built up that will benefit the collections in many small but important ways. An essential factor is the support that has been secured for these activities in the institutions involved. It is indicative for the serious interest in the subject that the Director of the National Library himself was one of the students of the Marburg Summer School last year.

The Hungarian experience shows that progress in preservation does not simply depend on money. There will never be enough money to do all that could ideally be done. The little money there is will have to go a long way, and it can do so, provided there is support and cooperation. Training can contribute more to the success of preservation than anything else, by getting people to understand what is at stake and what they can do about it.

The training programme the ECPA and LIBER have been developing should in time help the preservation managers of Europe to gather each a small band of faithful followers. Together they will set out through the waving corn fields on a long journey full of obstacles in search of their own Dutch hamster. The corn wolf is an elusive animal that moves at night and you will not find it easily. But when you do, you will be lavishly rewarded. The hamster will shed its many disguises and finally reveal its true identity. It will lead you to wealth and riches, for it is: a gold hamster. And this happy ending also brings my story to a close.

REFERENCES

1 The organization is called „Vereniging tot Behoud van Natuurmonumenten in Nederland" , and the campaign was started in May 1998.

2 That it indeed concerns an almost mythical creature also appears from the fact that the word *korenwolf* is not included in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* (Dictionary of the Dutch Language), with its forty volumes reputedly the largest dictionary in the world. However, the editors have been alerted to this oversight and steps are being taken to correct it in the Supplement (see Renate Dorrestein in *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 June 1998).

3 More information on the ECPA can be found at <http://www.knaw.nl/ecpa>, or by writing to the ECPA Secretariat, P.O. Box 19121, 1000 GC Amsterdam, The Netherlands. A full catalogue of publications is also available at this address.

4 The Preservation Map of Europe is accessible at <http://www.knaw.nl/ecpa/ecpatex/map>; the project is still in progress, and suggestions for additions and corrections are welcomed.

5 Apart from the ECPA and the LIBER Division on Preservation, the Archivschule in Marburg and the European Programme of the International Council on Archives were the partners who initiated the training programme. Funding

for various parts of the programme has been received from many different sources: the Council of Europe, the Open Society Institute, the Ariane Programme of the European Commission, the European Cultural Foundation, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Royal Dutch Society of Archivists, and the National Archives of the Netherlands.

6 *Preservation Management: Policies and Practices in British Libraries*, by John Feather, Graham Matthews and Paul Eden. London, Gower, 1996.

7 *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries: A Sourcebook for Academic, Public, School and Special Collections*, edited by Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page. Westport Conn & London, Greenwood Press, 1997.

8 Training for preservation management will also receive considerable attention at the conference „Preservation Management: Between Theory and Practice" that will take place in The Hague in April 1999 and that is organized jointly by the Royal Library in The Hague, the IFLA Core Programme on Preservation And Conservation, and the ECPA.

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Laat de Korenwolf blijven!

APPENDIX A

Programme (summary) Summer School in Preservation Management
Archivschule Marburg, 18-22 August 1997

Day 1
Preservation in the context of the core tasks of the institution - the conflict between protection and use - maximal service versus optimal preservation

Planning of preservation projects

- planning methodology
- damage assessment
- defining goals
- choosing means that fit the end
- planning steps over time

Day 2
Instruments for preservation

- endogenous factors
- storage
- moulds and fungi
- disaster preparedness
- massconservation
- microfilming
- digitization as a method of preservation?

Day 3
Excursion to Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg and Institut für Erhaltung von Archiv- und Bibliotheksgut

Day 4
Management issues

- resouring work, procedures and organizational aspects
- apprource management (human and financial)
- economic factors, budgeting
- selection criteria for preservation measures
- microfilming or conservation?
- intrinsic value as a selection method
- efficacy and efficiency in preservation
- structpriate tools

Day 5
Management issues

- outsourcing and contracting
- priorities and criteria in the decision process
- preservation as management task
- motivation, tools for personnel management
- information and communication
- countering opposition, working change

Course leaders: Dr. Angelika Menne-Haritz, Dr. Hartmut Weber, Dr. Anna Haberditzl, Cornelia Bandow

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