Expert Group on Archive Buildings & Environments

Yaoundé, Cameroon 2018 Workshop: Archival buildings; standards and developments

This year in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, the ICA’s Expert Group on Archive Buildings & Environments (EGABE) held a morning workshop on Tuesday, November 27th, to address some of the issues inherent in the management and maintenance of archives storage, and the impacts of buildings, with particular emphasis on African building provision. This workshop built on the successful model continued at the Mexico City conference in 2017. This year, the workshop presentations focussed on the findings of a short survey of African archives carried out by the EGABE in partnership with the ICA Africa Strategy committee at the end of 2017.

The workshop was split into three distinct sections each dealing with a particular area of buildings and collection care. Each section presented the attendees with some issues to address in their groups, and for this to be a point of discussion for the workshop. Jonathan Rhys- Lewis, chair of EGABE, presented the workshop. The subjects that were covered:

- **Sustainability & renewables** - to be a review of "green" solutions and their applicability for archives;
- **Specifying archival buildings** - with the emphasis on the Africa buildings survey and the recently published European standard on specifying heritage buildings;
- **Archival packaging** – the role of packaging and the first line of defence and how it supports overall collection care.

9 participants attended the workshop session and represented a range of African countries and elsewhere including, Haiti, Macao, and the United States. After each formal presentation (each lasted about 30 minutes), the participants broke into groups to discuss the set scenarios, and further comments encouraged. The general feel of the workshop was very positive and some interesting and challenging discussions took place.
In the afternoon, there was the opportunity to visit the National Archives of Cameroon (NAC) and 9 participants joined the tour. The NAC building is a former printworks in the heart of Yaoundé that was re-purposed for the storage of the archival collections. It was acknowledged that the building does not currently meet archival requirements, with very real risks resulting from poor building maintenance. The National Archivist, Esther Olembe, led the tour and was open and frank about the shortcomings. The NAC has support from the Cameroon government to start the process of identifying land in the city for a new national archives building – in the meantime, resources have been made available for the repair and maintenance of the existing building. This is all very positive news!

The tour included all of the storage areas on both the ground floor and basement levels and participants were given dust masks to protect themselves. The majority of the collections are stored on wooden shelving, most above floor level and all the gangways and corridors were clear and tidy – very significant work has been carried out by the National Archivist and her team over the last 2 years. The building has no system for regulating and controlling atmospheric conditions, and only a small proportion of the collections are in boxes. Much of the material needs assessment, and cleaning, and programmes are being developed to address these pressing issues.
The EGABE would like to thank the National Archivist and her staff who took part in the tour and answered the participant’s questions.

Jonathan Rhys-Lewis
Chair of Expert Group on Archive Buildings & Environments