

Risk Management Program for Preventive Conservation and to Avoid Illegal Trafficking of Cultural Property

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ABSTRACT

The theft of cultural property is an international problem that affects countries with cultural heritage such as Mexico's. The Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), responsible for the regulation and protection of paleontological, archaeological and historical cultural property, generates tools that prevent illegal trafficking. Its Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC-INAH) has generated a Risk Management Program for Preventive Conservation and to Avoid Illegal Trafficking of Cultural Property. The program consists of three campaigns: regulations, training and updating, and communication campaign, titled *What do We Stand to Lose When Our Heritage is Stolen?* that will be responsible for generating public discussion about the seriousness of this issue.

KEY WORDS

illicit trafficking; theft prevention program; theft of cultural property; risk management

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Theft of cultural property is an international issue that seriously impacts countries rich in cultural heritage, like Mexico. These crimes not only cost the institutions affected an enormous amount of resources but signify irreparable losses to groups of people and communities who are consequently dispossessed of objects that are involved in important processes of identity-building and sense of belonging.

In the past five decades, international agreements have been formalized to establish programs and implement actions against these crimes as well as the international networks that despoil cultural property all over the globe. In 1970 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) signed the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (UNESCO, 1970). The *Treaty of Cooperation between the United States of America and the United Mexican States Providing for the Recovery and Return of Stolen Archeological, Historical and Cultural Properties* (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1970) was formalized that same year.

To commemorate this Treaty of Cooperation, the Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC), an agency under the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), presented its Risk Management Program to Preserve Cultural Property and Avoid Illegal Trafficking with funding from the Embassy of the United States of America in Mexico. The effort seeks to improve the competitiveness of the CNCPC and consolidate the program to prevent illegal trafficking of cultural property and support the retrieval of stolen goods.

Since INAH is the institution empowered to establish the rules that will ensure protection over the country's paleontological, archeological and historical cultural property, it creates tools to tighten measures intended to prevent illegal trafficking. Among other responsibilities, the CNCPC supports the Coordinación Nacional de Asuntos Jurídicos in addition to other federal and state agencies. It also produces technical opinions on movable cultural property and properties associated with immovable heritage, so as to expedite their retrieval when they are stolen and aid in the fight against illegal trafficking of cultural heritage.

The aforementioned program has been developed and divided into three campaigns to be held in the course of three years (2020-2022). The first of these has been called a regulation campaign. Its purpose is to generate best practices by means of regulatory documents, procedures, guidelines and institutional policies dealing with the retrieval of stolen property. The second campaign

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—training and updating— will offer chats, workshops, and educational activities to provide attendees information, tools and knowledge to prevent theft from different angles. It also seeks to build the expertise of specialists at the Institute as well as of those who participate in retrieval and prevention activities in order to identify cultural properties in transit.

Finally, a communication campaign was proposed to release and disseminate information via graphic and audio-visual materials that would allow society to recognize just how serious the theft of cultural property is and understand the importance of identifying cultural heritage.¹

WHAT DO WE STAND TO LOSE WHEN OUR HERITAGE IS STOLEN?

The project began in 2020 with the design of a communication campaign called *What do we stand to lose when our heritage is stolen?* under a group of INAH specialists who defined the goals of the campaign, its target groups, as well as the content and topics to be addressed. This work made it possible to define various stages to frame the communication materials the group planned to generate. Special attention was given to designing an image that would appear in all of the materials to be developed.

The overall point of the campaign consists in promoting actions to prevent and report illegal trafficking of cultural property among groups involved in protecting and using cultural heritage. While the campaign is for the public at large, it also intends to produce materials for social groups associated with religious temples.

The campaign has been structured around four stages that deal with the different aspects and issues of theft:

1) Introduction to the campaign: this stage began in December 2020 and concluded in late March 2021. It was followed by the official announcement of the campaign and a presentation of an introductory poster and video (Figure 1).

2) Preventing the theft of cultural property: This stage was implemented in early April and will conclude in July 2021. The

¹ International conventions and other documents agree that education and communication are important and substantial elements in any campaign and action implemented by governments and institutions alike to prevent the theft of cultural property. Accordingly, the program emphasizes training and communication campaigns.

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FIGURE 1. Poster announcing the program, *What do we stand to lose when our cultural heritage is stolen?* (Designed by: Mónica Badillo; courtesy: CNCPC-INAH, December 2020).



3) Encourage reporting: This stage will take place from August through October 2021. Its purpose is to encourage reporting as a vital part of retrieval. We will strive to be clear on the steps to take following reports of theft.

4) Feedback: This stage will occur during the last two months of 2021 and will close the campaign. It will seek to engage with, and understand, people's perceptions with the question *What do you feel is lost?* as the starting point to reflect on effects of the theft and illegal trafficking of cultural property in Mexico.

² *Manual to Avoid Theft in Religious Venues*. Editorial translation.

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FIGURE 2. Cover for the *Manual to Avoid Theft in Religious Venues* (Design: Mónica Badillo; courtesy: CNCPC-INAH, January 2021).



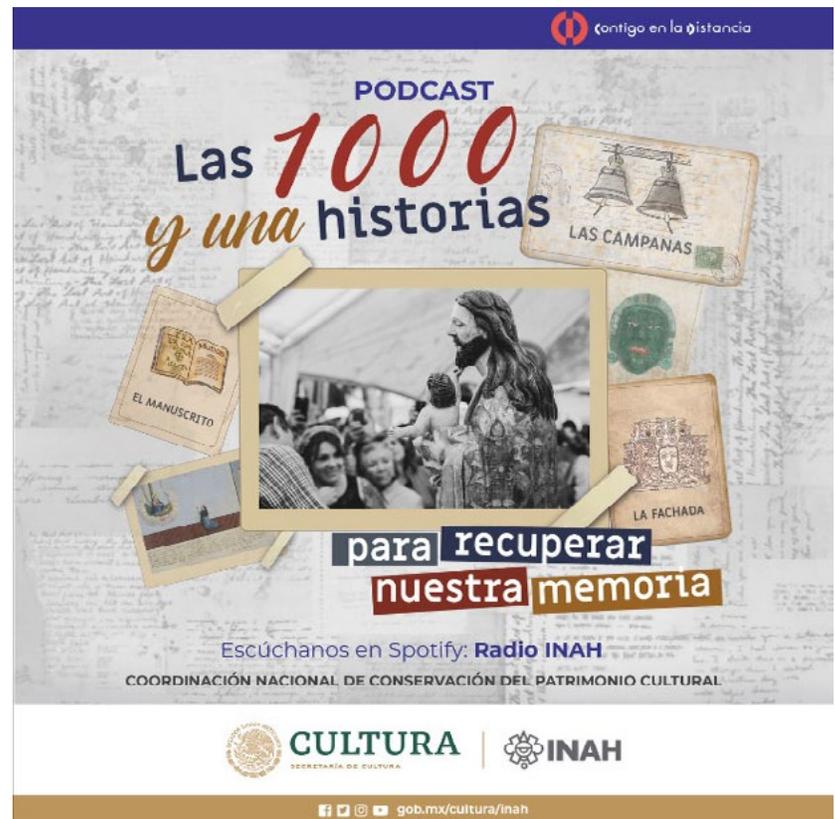
Throughout the campaign various communication materials should be produced, including posters, videos, and infographics, as well as a podcast series under the title *Las mil y una historias para recuperar nuestra memoria*³ (Figure 3). The series will discuss interesting cases of stolen and retrieved Mexican heritage as a springboard to address the subject matter of the campaign.

³ *A Thousand and One Stories to Retrieve our Memories*. Editorial translation.

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FIGURE 3. Image for the podcast *One Thousand and One Stories to Retrieve our Memories* (Design: Mónica Badillo; courtesy: CNCPC-INAH, March 2021).



The project also includes a Facebook page,⁴ *What do We Stand to Lose When Our Cultural Heritage is Stolen?* The page will be used to share and disseminate materials. Therefore, promoting and spreading the word about this page will be crucial to adding followers who, in turn, will make it possible to replicate and share our materials and in this manner reach a broader audience.

While the communication campaign proposes actions throughout 2021, we believe it is important to underscore that working towards preventing this crime is a long term effort. Thus, the actions and impacts of all three campaigns (regulation, training-updating and communication) will be articulated and complementary as a means to generate mechanisms and strategies to consolidate this program at the CNCPC together with other national coordination offices, and even at the interinstitutional level with other agencies such as the Fiscalía General de la República, religious associations, communities, the Mexican army, public prosecution services, customs.

⁴ Refer to : <https://www.facebook.com/PerdemosMilesDeHistorias>

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He studied administrative computer science at the Universidad Tecnológica de México (UNITEC, Mexico), and attended the seminar on a “System to manage and modernize management capacity in Latin American countries in 2018” at Peking University (PKU, China). He is currently working towards another Bachelor’s Degree in Public Administration and Management at the Universidad Abierta y a Distancia de México (UnADM). He has been with INAH for 16 years and has accumulated experience in different areas of the Institution such as: Museo Nacional de Historia-Castillo de Chapultepec and the Coordinación Nacional de Recursos Humanos. Since 2016,

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he has been working at CNCPC where he currently heads the management and regulations office.

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Designer and visual communicator who specializes in the design of 3D support materials by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). She holds a certificate in *Visual Merchandising and Emotional Branding* from the Universidad Jannette Klein.

Between 2009 and 2014 she collaborated in designing, producing and setting up exhibition design projects at: Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL from the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura [INBAL]), Gallery of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Museo Arte de Guatemala, Centro Cultural Mexiquense Bicentenario and Museo Nacional del Virreinato (INAH).

From 2014 to date she works as a graphic designer in projects dealing with preserving and restoring cultural property at CNCPC.

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Restorer who graduated from the Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía (ENCRYM-INAH). She holds a Master's Degree in Applied History from the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA). In 2013 she received the Paul Coremans-INAH award to the best Master's thesis on conservation for her research "Construction and value of the Mexican legislative and regulatory documentary legacy (1914-2012)." She has headed the Dirección de Educación Social para la Conservación of CNCPC since March 2016. In recent years she has devoted herself to working on the registration, dissemination and social links of cultural property, and on spreading the word about its conservation.