Disaster Recovery and Sustainable Choices - Cologne City Archive: 5 years after the collapse, which decisions for the future?

Marion Verborg

- 3rd March 2009 -
Collapse of the Cologne City Archive

Fragments Project:
- Millions of puzzle-fragments
- Digital reconstruction

Futures Projects

Reconstruction of the building:
- Cologne City Center
- Planned for 2019
- Conservation labs on site
- Reading room
- Storage facilities

- 30 km archival documents, from 922 until today
- Biggest city archive in Germany and North Europe
- Buried at between 12 and 28 meters below street level
- More than 2 years to salvage all the documents
- 10% definitely lost
- 2 dead people

Frozen photos project:
- Different workflow
- Photos often stuck together
- Unfrozen at ambient temperature
- Washed in water

Primary Care Operation Center
- Help from fire services, organizations, volunteers and employees from the City
- First cleaning steps of archival documents

Charters project:
- 60,000 parchment and paper charters with seals
- Oldest and most valuable documents
- Covered with concrete dust
- Dry cleaning, mounting and re-housing

Condition of the objects:
- 15% light damages
- 50% medium damages
- 35% heavy damages

Classification of the documents:
- A: Usable and digitization possible
- B: Digitization possible but not usable
- C: Not usable and no digitization possible

Workflow:
- Identification
- Photographic and written documentation
- Conservation (dry cleaning)
- Quality Control
- Photo after treatment
- Digitization
- Housing

- 10,000 m² conservation and digitization center
- Storage: 18 shelf kilometers;
  250 plan cabinets
- 21 conservators and 45 assistants
- Operating since 2011

Workshop:
- Registration, identification of documents, assignment to a collection
- Unique barcode for each document
- So far 67% documents registered

Fragments Project:
- 3 km of documents wet during collapse
- Rinsed and wrapped in plastic film
- Frozen at -26°C
- Vacuum freeze drying (ice sublimation) on site

3 km of documents:
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14 archivists + 13 assistants
- 20 "asylum" archives in Germany where documents stored
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