OSINT AND CULTURAL PROPERTY CRIMES

Francisco José Rufián Fernández

Agustín Constante Orrios
Pandora operations statistics reporting:

2017:

41,00 cultural objects seized, 53 people arrested, 200 investigations spanning 81 countries.

monitored online market places and sales sites.
Pandora operations statistics reporting:

**2018:**

18,000 objects seized and 59 people arrested in operations spanning 29 countries

**2020:**

19,000 cultural objects seized, together with €5.5 million in cash, 101 people arrested, and 300 investigations opened in operations spanning 103 countries

Monitored online market places and sales sites during “cyber patrol week”.

Afghan Customs seized 971 cultural objects at Kabul airport.
2021: Within the framework of Operation Pandora V, the Dutch National Police (Politie) organized a five-day cyber patrol week focusing on online markets.

Law enforcement from 15 countries, with the support of Europol, INTERPOL and WCO, identified suspicious sales online, as a result of which 15 new investigations were opened.

Artefacts seized in Romania during Pandora V.
The illicit trade of cultural objects persists, even thrives, with continuing negative impact.

- We only have approximations of the size of the trade.
- Dark figure of crime
- Poor understanding how the trade is organized and operates.
Conclusions and recommendations that simply repeat those that have been produced before by other outsourced researchers.

There is, for example, the vexatious claim that the illicit trade in cultural objects is valued at billions of dollars annually and ranks with drugs and arms as one of the three most serious illicit trades. The claim has been refuted many times, but never seems to go. (Brodie, et al. 2022)

Da‘esh was said to be making tens or hundreds of millions of dollars from the trade to bankroll its activities, and the policy makers were listening. But again, it has been impossible to verify these figures. (Brodie, et al. 2022)
What action might be taken to diminish it?

• New actions based on a holistic approach to new technologies.
• Develop of projects focusing on new technologies.
• Innovation (not always a priority) there must be knowledge transfer between academia and law enforcement agencies.
Beyond “Googling”- What can OSINT techniques can provide us?

• OSINT focused in organised property crimes has been identified as a prioritised training need in the “European Union Strategic Training Needs Assessment 2022-2025”

• We need evidences and figures to achieve a real understand of the problem (as we had seen previously).

• Take advactage of the knowledge of data provided by the internet thar was unthinkable before.
Examples
FACEBOOK'S BLACK MARKET IN ANTIQUITIES

Facebook's "Groups" feature, which allows users to create and control a contained network of individuals with "shared interests," has become a facilitator for the expansion of antiquities trafficking networks. The Groups provide a seamless environment for digital interactions and cross-border networking between users interested in buying and selling antiquities, allowing them to communicate efficiently and discretely. The ATHAR Project's report covers nearly two-years of investigative research and incorporates a case study on Groups based in Syria.

ATHAR PROJECT 2019 REPORT BY THE NUMBERS

- 95 Facebook groups tracked
- 3,539 posts recorded
- 1,947,195 group members monitored
- +3,600 images gathered
A screenshot from a video from a Facebook group devoted to looting and selling antiquities. A narrator speaking Syrian-accented Arabic describes an elaborate, Roman-era mosaic depicting mythological figures and animals believed to be in northwestern Syria – a conflict zone where there has been extensive looting of illegally excavated antiquities.

ATHAR Project/Screenshot by NPR
Screenshot of video on Facebook showing an Egyptian sarcophagus with mummy inside for sale. According to the ATHAR Project, the video is from an area known for extensive antiquities looting. Facebook bans trade in antiquities and human remains, but relies on user reports to flag suspect items. This post, reported by ATHAR using the Facebook system, was not deemed to violate Facebook's standards.
As a method of adding alternatives when investigating the trafficking of cultural objects.

Aimed at local agencies or specialised research groups.

Specific cases.

Research methodology from the ground up to larger structures.
Case study:

Location: Ukraine

Subject: Looting of historical heritage using metal detectors
Approach

Justification of actions:

- Socially accepted
- Exaltation of the historical heritage
- Lax prosecution of crime
Russian invasion favours:

- Economic needs that can be solved by the sale of looted historical heritage.

- Impunity in the looting of historical pieces and their transfer to Russia before accessing the black market.
Knowledge of the environment
Продаж металошукачів, Котушок та аксесуарів

бу металлоискатель, металошукач

Grupo de Інтернет магазин

Хобі пошук золота

Grupo pública · 126,5k members
Information gathering
Sources gathering
Targeting individuals
Targeting individuals

Selling digging finds (axes, hammers, horseshoes and other metal objects and parts of them)

Antique tablet (bronze, enamelled)
Pivoting
Targeting groups
Process information and develop hypotheses
Thank you for your attention!

Francisco José Rufián Fernández

Agustín Constante