

'Historical Collections and Cultural Activities of Central Banks' Central Bank Workshop, Banco de Portugal Lisbon, 15 December 2004.

The aim of the workshop was to generate a deeper understanding of the different experiences central banks have gained in the field of cultural activities. Each year the organizers of the Central Banks Workshop try to find a theme which is of particular interest for archivists within central banks. Yet, in 2004, it was decided to go beyond the traditional workshop's scope of historical archives by focusing on all historical collections.

The organising committee - consisting of Luís Filipe de Abreu Nunes (*Banco de Portugal*) and Joke Mooij (*De Nederlandsche Bank*) in cooperation with the staff of the *European Association of Banking and Financial History* – hoped that the topic 'historical collections and cultural activities of central banks' would not only be of interest for archivists but also for other staff members within central banks involved in cultural projects, such as researchers, communication, museum, marketing and PR managers.

And the committee was right. The large number of participants involved in this event demonstrated most acutely that there is considerable interest in the ways in which central banks can use their unique historical collections to bring benefit to both the bank and the greater public. The workshop, which was kindly hosted by the *Banco de Portugal*, was opened with a welcoming address by José António Godinho, a member of the Board of Directors of *Banco de Portugal*, following which the new *EABH* Chairman, Dr. Duisenberg, welcomed the participants, especially those representatives of central banks attending this series of workshops for the first time.

The program consisted of three sessions, each dealing with a specific part of historical collections and the ways in which these are or can be used for cultural activities. The first session focused on numismatic collections, the second on historical archives, and the third session provided an introduction into future developments. In total, seven papers were presented covered a wide variety of issues and experiences about the way central banks use their historical collections.

In general, central banks use their numismatic collections to communicate with the public about their business. This can be done in a number of different ways as illustrated during the first session. Over the past decades, central banks have put together numismatic collections for business reasons. Nowadays these historical sets of old means of payment have become obsolete for business reasons. But, as these objects are closely linked to both the national currency history as well as their corporate history, some central banks have set up a permanent exhibition of these old notes and coins which is now open to the public. In the case of the *National Bank of Belgium*, as outlined by Marianne Danneel, the numismatic collection is part of the bank's far larger museum collection. This museum, which is nowadays part of the External Communication division, plays an important role in the bank's contact with the public, especially children and students. With the introduction of the euro this bank (established in 1850), like many other central banks in the euro zone, restructured a large part of its activities, reflected on its future, and developed new strategies and a new communication policy. In this way, the museum has become a part of the bank's new communication policy and is used as an instrument for explaining the activities and objectives of the *Belgian central bank*. Furthermore, the historical collection still contributes in various ways to the cultural activities of the bank.

Next, Josephine Zammit discussed the history of the numismatic collection of the *Central Bank of Malta*. She illustrated her presentation with beautiful slides, which showed the rich currency history of the Maltese Islands. Even when it was first established in 1967, the *Central Bank of Malta* had the idea of setting up an exhibition of notes and coins issued at Malta. Over time this objective has been achieved in the form of a permanent exhibition displayed in the hall of the central bank and which is open to the public. Furthermore, collector's information and sales services are provided as well as up-to-date information on currency, like counterfeit awareness.

The second session focused upon the historical archives. In general, in the past central banks maintained their own historical archives which, very often, were closed to the public due to confidentiality reasons. Nowadays, central banks act according to the national and international archives legislation and most of them open their archives to the outside research community, including the inclusion of certain historical documents in the national archives. As a result, within these banks the traditional archival organisation has changed into a new documentation services unit providing information for use both within the central bank and externally. As Heikki Hämäläinen explained, the *Bank of Finland* no longer possess a traditional archive, but its Document Services Unit can provide all kinds of services for the bank's cultural activities, both internally and externally. To this extent, it has a relationship with the Bank of Finland Museum and other archiving bodies. In Austria, the central bank still has its own historical archives, but the bank is legally obliged to make it accessible to the public and hand it over to the *Austrian State Archives*. Historical awareness remains, however, important within the bank as, Walter Antonowicz explained, lectures on the history of the bank are a part of the basic training of new employees on the functions of the *Oesterreichische Nationalbank*.

Again, the archives have contributed to various exhibitions by lending material to other organisations. In contrast to the Finnish and Austrian cases, the *Central Bank of Iceland* (established in 1961) has not handed over its archival material to the national archives, but instead preserves its own archives as well that of its predecessor. As a result it preserves 120 years of banking history in Iceland. Organizationally, the bank's archives are linked with the library services. Eiríkur Guðnason, a governor of the bank, pointed at the rather unique feature of the library of his bank, which also has been assigned as a national preservation library for books on the economy, business, social issues, history and natural resources of Iceland. A decade ago the *Central Bank of Iceland* made an agreement with the National Library under which its collection is regarded as part of the national collection. In the third session, the focus changed to future developments. As Luís Filipe de Abreu Nunes of the *Banco de Portugal* stated, 'Collections in central banks are of great variety and value but they are kept not only in archives, but also in museum, coins displays, libraries, and in documentation and information units.' Many banks not only have created, preserved and studied their collections but also made them accessible to the public. So, future activities involving central bank collections could encompass a wide variety of cooperative projects in the cultural domain, including archives, museums and libraries. Matthias Weber of the *European Central Bank* closed the last session, talking about the role of the *ECB* archives in relationship to future cultural activities. In his view, archives are an important part of a company's or public office's administration, but their role in cultural activities is very limited. This is also the case for the *ECB Archives*. The *ECB Archives* could provide however material for an exhibition and/or related publications on some historical topics within the scope of the organization. Following the third session there remained time for a general discussion. In his concluding remarks, Jaime Reis (*University of Lisbon*) expressed the usefulness of this kind of interchanges of experiences and ideas, particularly highlighting how broad the scope of activities is in which historical collections can (and do) play an important role. A visit to the Museum of *Banco de Portugal* provided a most befitting end to this workshop on historical collections and cultural activities.

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