

The Nature and Scale of the Antiquities Market in Europe

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Trafficking Culture
Researching the global traffic in looted cultural objects

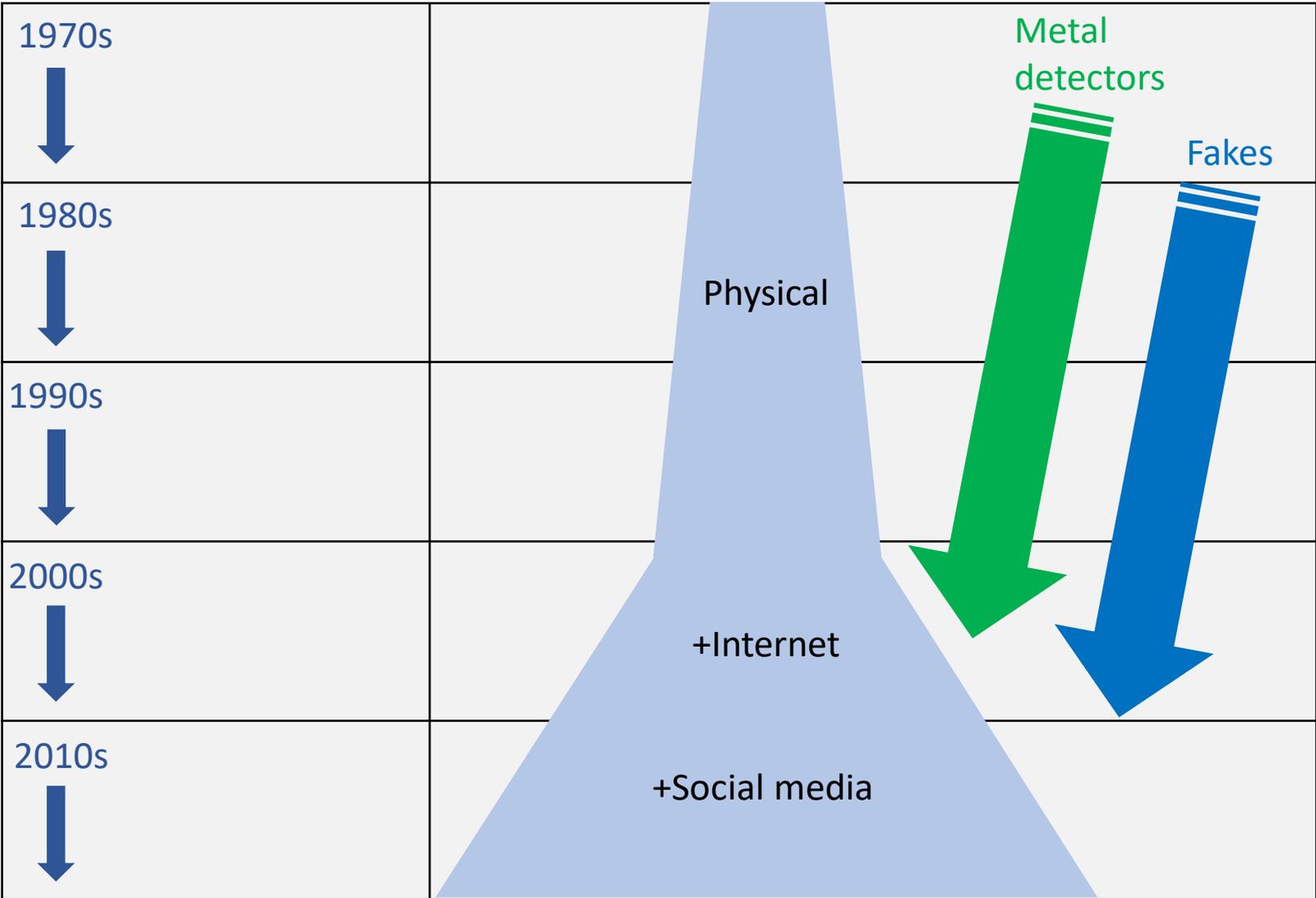
Technology timeline

1970s ↓	Metal detectors	Physical market
1980s ↓		
1990s ↓	Internet/WWW eBay	
2000s ↓	Facebook iPhone WhatsApp	Internet market
2010s ↓		Social media market

Changing nature of trade

1970s ↓	Low volume, high value	Physical market
1980s ↓		
1990s ↓		
2000s ↓		Internet market
2010s ↓	High volume, low value	Social media market

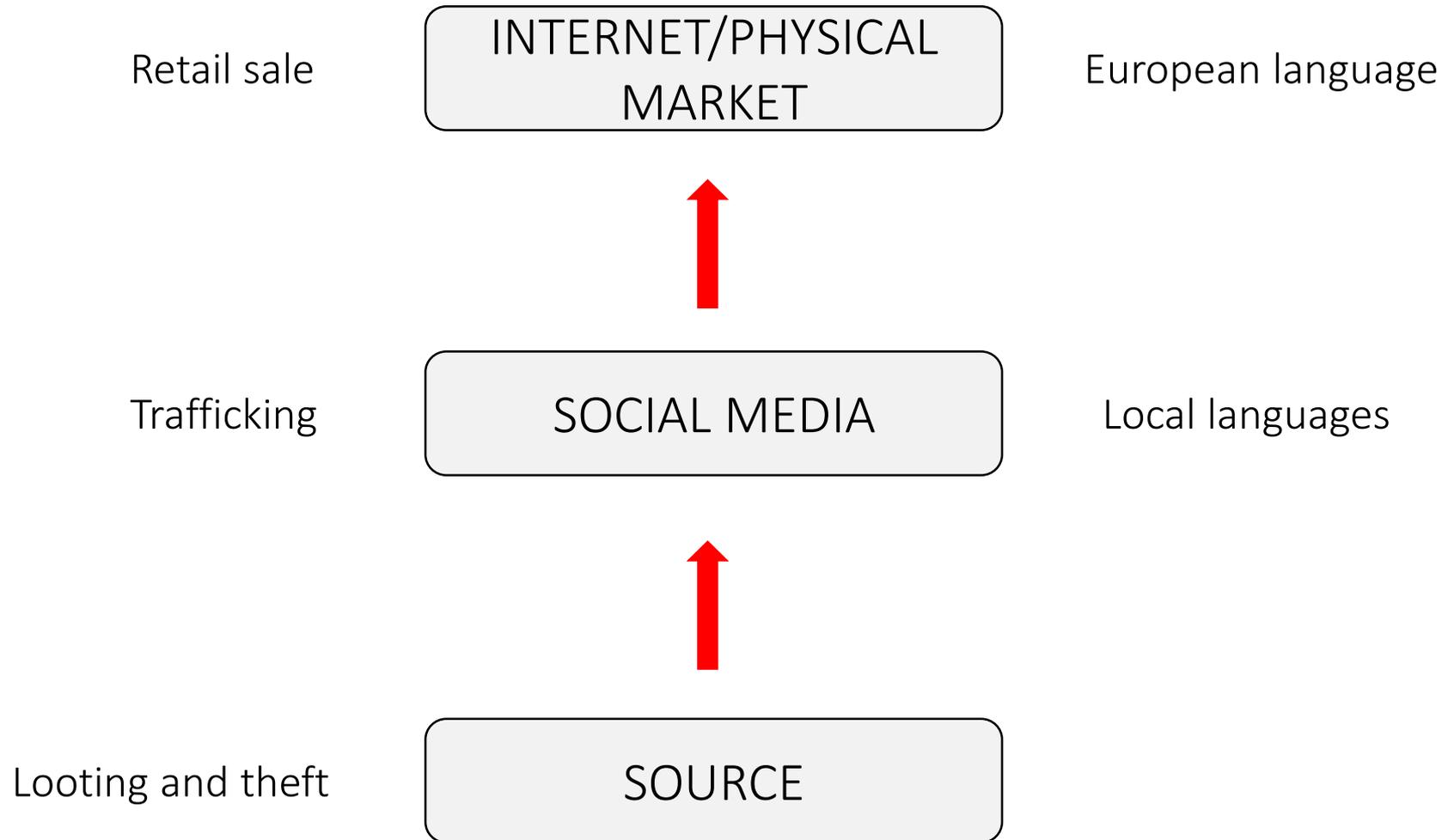
Cumulative market growth



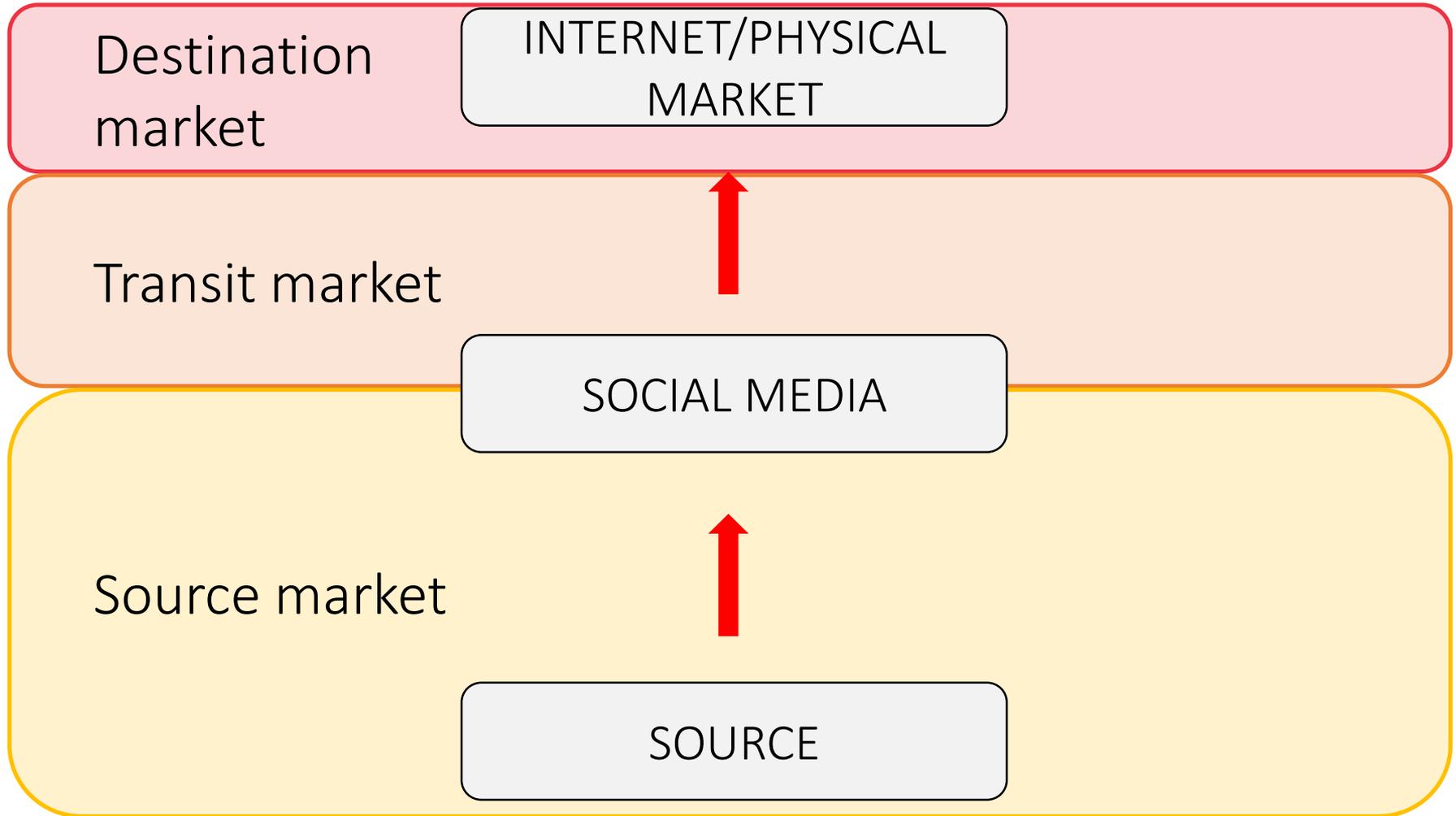
Internet and social media markets

1. Create demand for and enable trade of small and portable objects.
2. Small objects easy to transport and conceal.
3. Seemingly “low value” crimes (though high value in aggregate).
4. Difficult to police.
5. Loose transnational criminal networks.

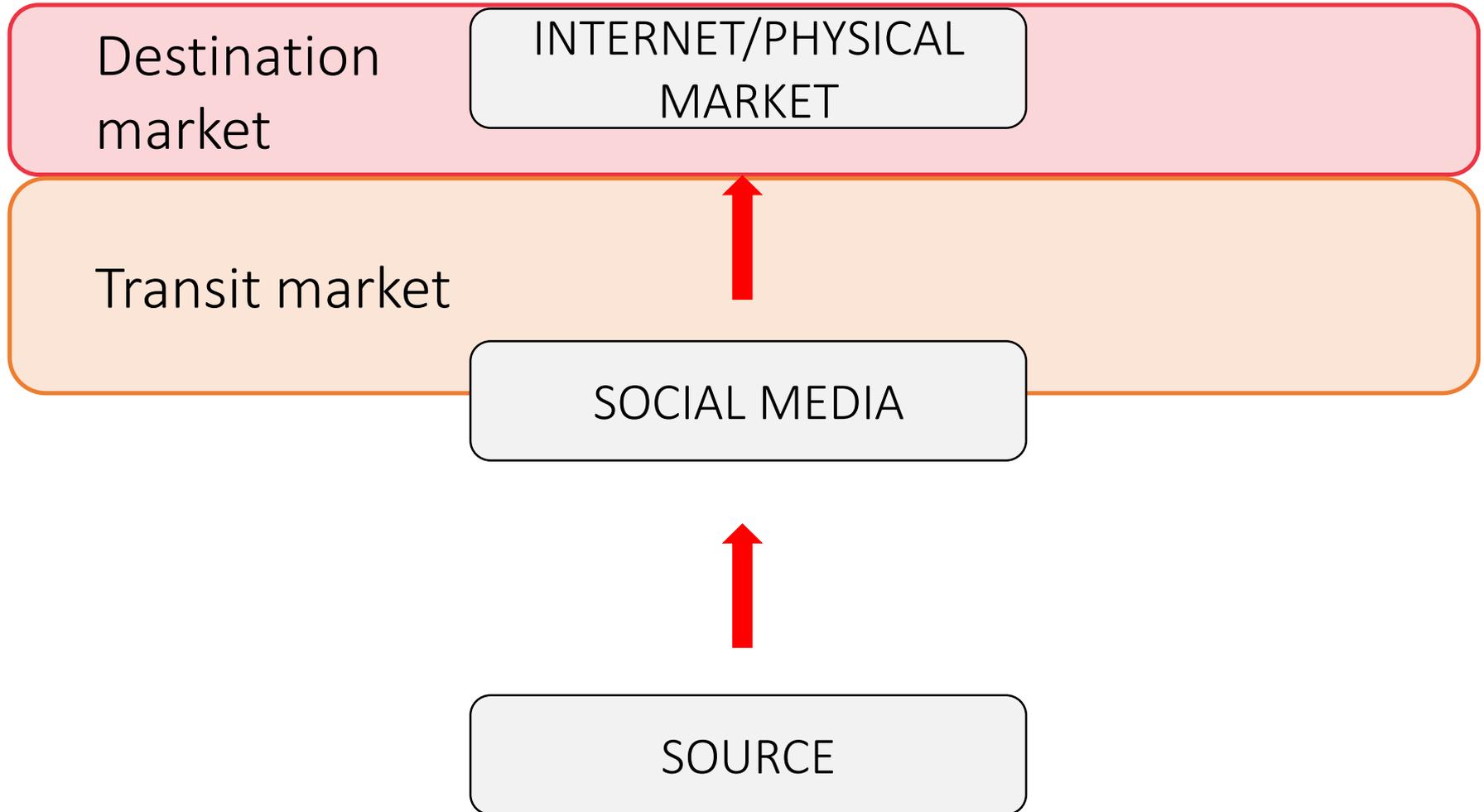
Abstract macroview



Abstract macroview



Abstract macroview



Private sales: gilded coffin of Nedjemankh

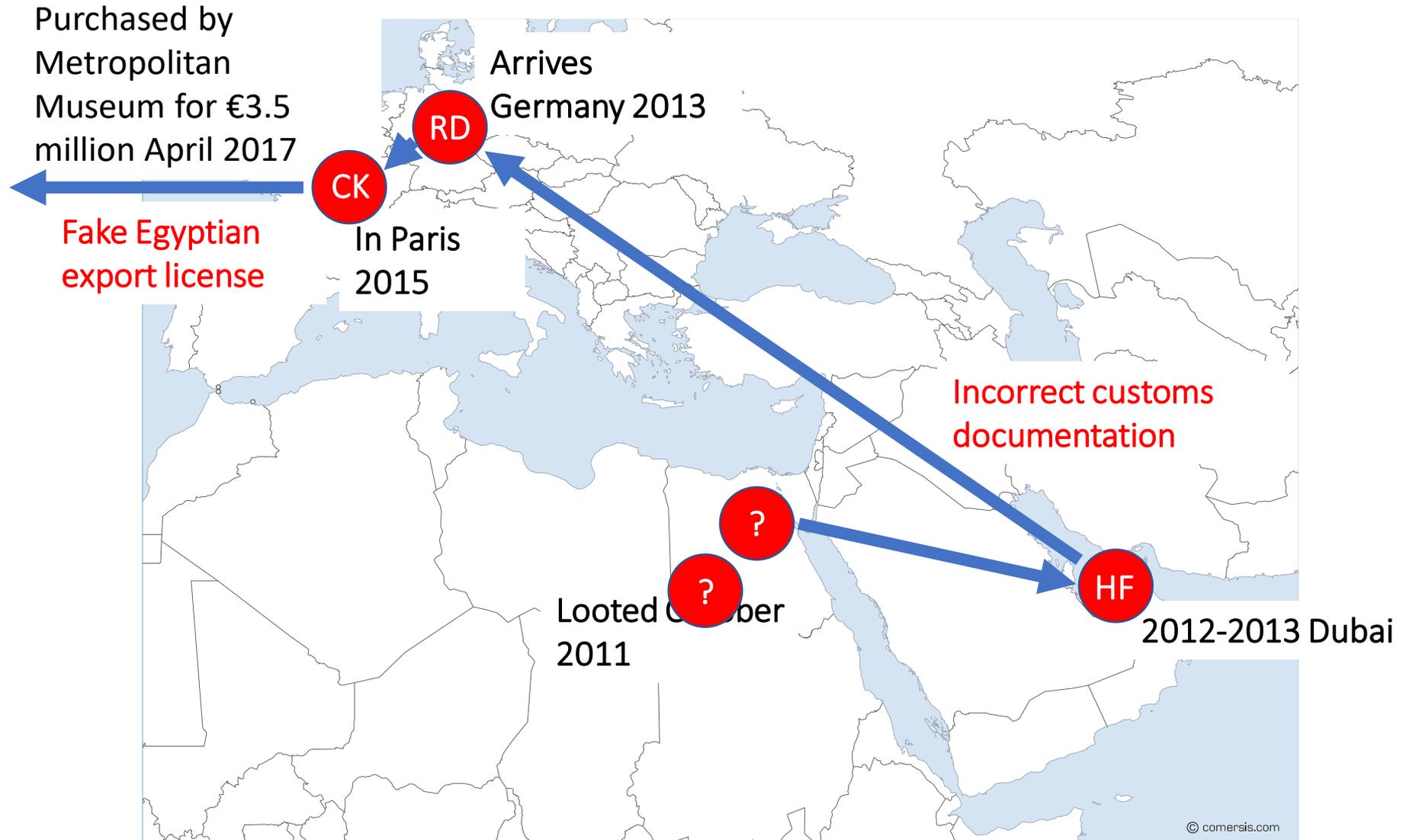
27 November 2017: Metropolitan Museum in New York acquires first-century BC Egyptian gilded coffin from Parisian antiquities dealer for €3.5 million. Coffin said to have been legally exported from Egypt in 1971.



New York Post

25 September 2019: Coffin returned to Egypt.

Private sales: gilded coffin of Nedjemankh



Internet market: Operation Sardica

23 October 2018: Bulgarian police and Spanish Guardia Civil arrested 16 Bulgarian nationals in Bulgaria and Spain and seized more than 30,000 genuine and fake objects. Most were extended family or friends since childhood.

Since January 2016, looted or faked objects had been transported from Bulgaria to Spain by a shipping company owned by one of gang members.

Material sold on eBay in Spain using false seller profiles, thus disguising Bulgarian origin. Gang members bid against one another to drive up prices.

Proceeds returned to Bulgaria or invested in Spanish property.

Internet market: Operation Sardica



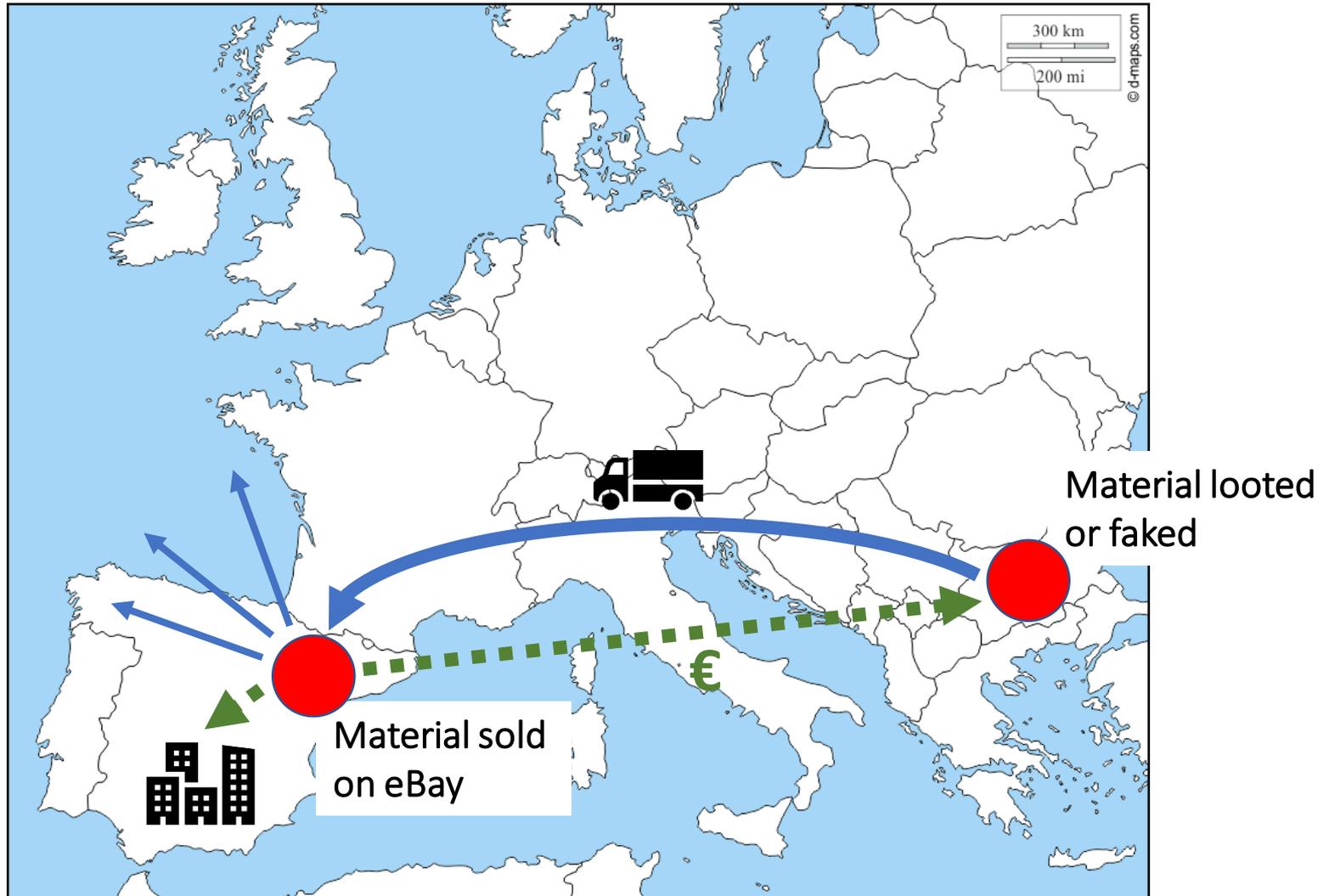
Guardia Civil



Guardia Civil



Internet market: Operation Sardica



Physical/Internet market: Operation Demetra

23 July 2018. 23 people arrested across Europe and 25,000 antiquities and ancient coins seized.

Material had been looted from ancient Greek and Roman cemeteries in Sicily and transported to Munich for sale with fake provenances through two auction houses.

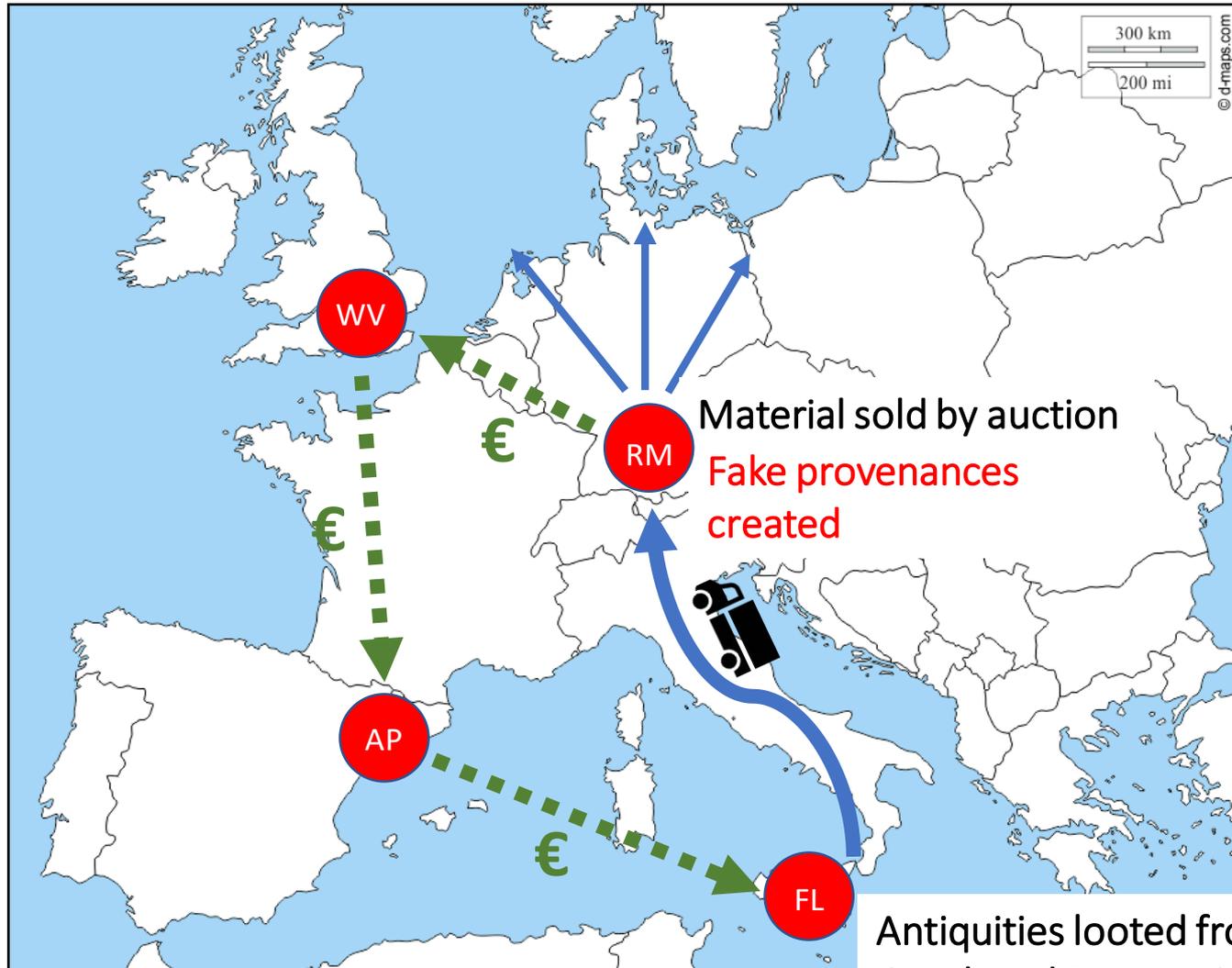
Profits from sales passed to a London-based dealer, who was considered to be the “mastermind”, then through a Barcelona-based dealer back to Sicily.

Physical/Internet market: Operation Demetra



Carabinieri TPC

Physical/Internet market: Operation Demetra



Antiquities looted from ancient Greek and Roman sites in Italy

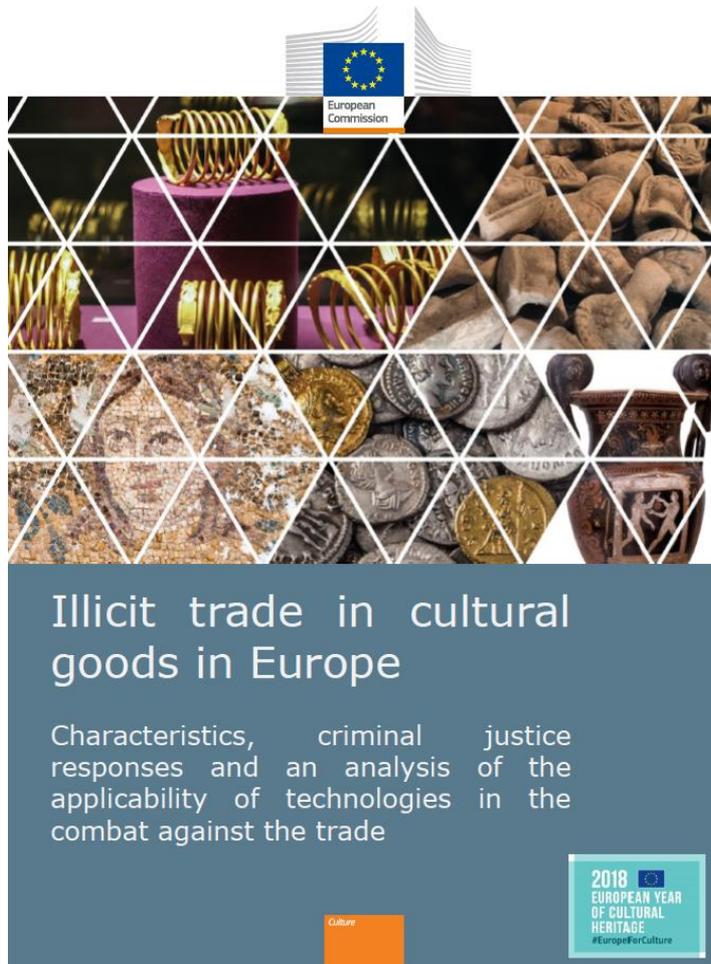
Market size and value

There are no accurate statistics describing the size and value of the market.

Wrongly inflated statistics. What Interpol says:

“We do not possess any figures which would enable us to claim that trafficking in cultural property is the third or fourth most common form of trafficking, although this is frequently mentioned at international conferences and in the media”.

Illicit Trade in Cultural Goods in Europe



<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d79a105a-a6aa-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

Market size and value

- It is impossible to obtain statistics for an ‘illicit market’.
- Most objects on the market are considered gray – their exact legal status is unknown.
- Statistics can only describe the overall market, which will be to a greater or lesser extent illicit.

Snapshot analyses

1. Sales of major auction houses (Sotheby's etc)
2. Internet sales
 - Aggregator sites
 - Sixbid
 - Catawiki
 - Invaluable
 - Vcoins
 - Trocadero
 - eBay

?Problem of private (invisible) sales. Usually high value.

Limits of study

- Cultural goods: very large category of material.
- Time-limited project (one month).
- Ancient and Medieval antiquities and ancient coins from Europe, North Africa and West Asia (not including Islamic antiquities).

Market size and value

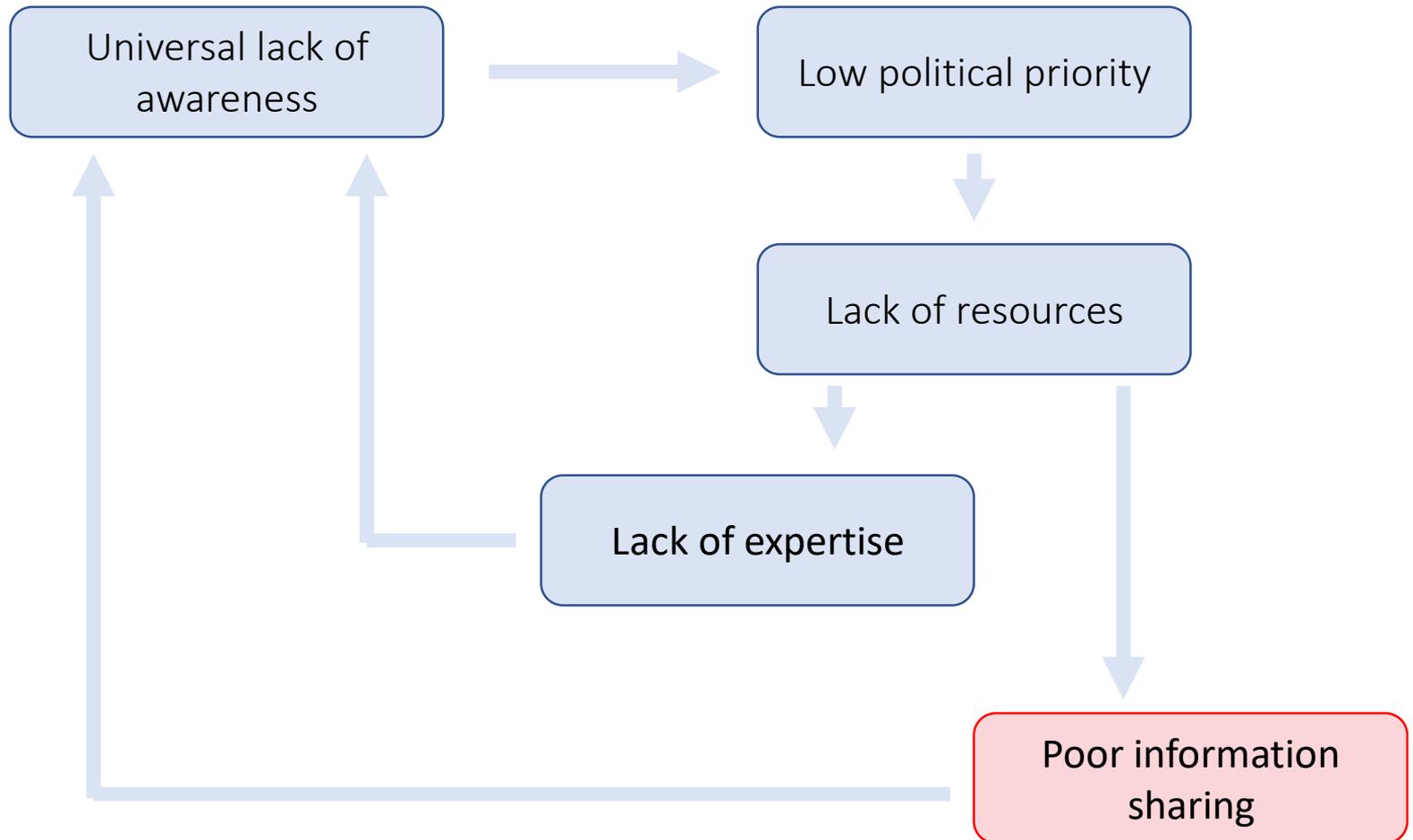
Annual sales estimates:

140,000 to 700,000 antiquities from Europe, Northern Africa and West Asia, with a total monetary value in the region of €64 million to €318 million.

A minimum of 298,379 ancient and medieval coins from the same areas, valued at more than €56 million.

These annual statistics will be increased by the considerable number of antiquities and other cultural goods sold in categories such as Islamic Art, Asian Art or Primitive Art, or other material categories such as books and manuscripts.

From **vicious circle** to virtuous circle



From vicious circle to **virtuous circle**

