The Netherlands

Marius Snyders
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

A necessity for prosperity: industrialisation, 1945-1950
Amsterdam, Memory of the Netherlands / ReclameArsenaal
(Advertising Arsenal)

Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Still life with books*, 1628
The Hague, Memory of the Netherlands / Mauritshuis

Policy scenario

Dutch digitisation policy aims at more efficient
and effective (public) investments in digitising cultural
and scientific collections, measured in their long-term
contribution to the knowledge society. This not only
has implications for heritage institutions but also
for the conditions that need to be created at national
level. One year since the last Status Report and four
years since the Lund take-off, the future of Dutch
digitisation policy and its ensuing initiatives can be
described as better focused and financially secured.
By assuring financial support for digitisation of cultural
collections, the government acknowledges the cultural
sector as an important pillar to the knowledge
infrastructure, the very basis for an upward Dutch
economy. As a result, in a period in which most public
and private sectors will continue to tighten their belts,
funding for digitisation was never so present. From 2004
a secured yearly budget of 9 mln (2007) is appointed to
the improvement of the entire digitisation spectrum,
from capturing to enrichment and making accessible.

*a) Investing in a self-provisional quality-management
system for digitisation*
Focus of the digitisation policy in The Netherlands
is on standardisation and durable digitisation.
This will only be realised when institutions are willing
and stimulated to adhere to the norm because it has
proven its worth. Therefore, self-management of sectors
in terms of development and distribution of stipulated
standards and procedures will be supported. As a
result, when setting targets and deciding on grants,
government authorities and culture funds will be able
to invoke clear procedures and standards composed
by the sectors themselves.

b) Investing in knowledge transfer and professionalism
Knowledge transfer and professionalism play a central
role in digitisation and standardisation and will require
considerable investments. To improve the back-log in the
field of basic registration – which is often still regarded
as a precondition for knowledge transfer – the embedding
of museum information in an open knowledge
infrastructure with two-way traffic of knowledge and
information must be guaranteed. Besides a substantial
investment in tools and a physical infrastructure, this
requires an almost equally substantial investment in
human capital, a larger focus on a hypermedia approach
to heritage in education, dismantlement of strongholds
within institutions, a change of behaviour and mentality
of the middle management of the institutions, and, in
particular, growing professionalism, continuing education,
training and intellectual support.

c) Stimulating R&D-programmes
Action research on knowledge enrichment and metadata
is being considered as an important precondition
for increasing the efficacy and efficiency of digital
access and reinforcing the knowledge infrastructure.
A national research proposal for the digitisation
of heritage by the Netherlands Organisation for
Scientific Research (NWO) was prepared and granted.
It is managed by a diversely composed consortium
of heritage institutions, IT-businesses and computer
science research departments at major universities.

National policy agenda in brief

• Assuring that investments in digital heritage resources
 make a real contribution to a national and European
 continuum of digitised cultural resources.

• Offering efficient support in ways that institutions
  can streamline their digitisation projects and integrate
  them into other work processes.
• Enabling and requiring institutions to apply
  appropriate or prescribed procedures and standards.
• Addressing the question of copyright where digitisation
  leads to new uses and more frequent reuse.
• Promoting digital preservation philosophy and practice.
• Taking account of what is happening internationally
  and tie in with similar digitisation and R&D projects.
• Promoting best practice examples in the Netherlands
  and Europe.

Co-operation

National networks

During the last few years the cultural heritage sectors
in The Netherlands witness a significant increase
in the formation and creation of national networks.
This development evolves with the acceptance that
the creation of a meaningful and nationally
interconnected repository of digitised cultural heritage
information can only be achieved with a wide variety
of partners, because the necessary disciplines,
knowledge, and know-how are widely distributed.
The dimensions of these networks, their composition,
their geographical location, and their institutional
stratification differ greatly; there is no apparent
ordering or formative principle that predicts the
features and composition of these networks.
Networks are being established on a sectoral, thematic,
legal, regional, provincial, or national basis. They either
focus on content, on shared problems, the sharing of
resources, or on quality issues.

The network-character either derives from the
implementation of a common infrastructure,
the adaptation of common rules or procedures,
the creation of a common resource, or the setting
of a common R&D agenda.
Networks that group around content can be found
on a national level, but also in a more geographically
concentrated (provincial, regional) level. The Stichting
Volkenkundige Collectie Nederland (the 8 largest
ethnographical collections) makes up for a thematic
network that co-operates on a national level. The eight
institutions started to use an identical (TMS) collection
database four years ago. Users can cross-query these
databases, and the shared website contains thematic
articles about a variety of issues.
In provinces like Groningen and Brabant, networks
emerged that focus on provincial, or regional cultural
heritage, often in combination with information about
temporal events. These networks are thematically
variegated. In Groningen, for example, the prototype
project «GRONingen DIGitaal» combines information
from museums as well as archives, and organisations
that cover just one type of material heritage, like the
Stichting Oude Groninger Kerken (Foundation for
Old Village Churches). This initiative aims at collecting
and presenting as much knowledge as possible, using
an advanced knowledge networking infrastructure,
embedded in a content management system that allows
staff from all organisations to add, and edit material.
This material is then automatically indexed and tagged,
so that meaning and interconnections are partly the
product of autonomous processes embedded within
the infrastructure. The most interesting feature of this
project is its focus on knowledge in all its
manifestations, and not a preoccupation with collection
management data.

Provinces like Gelderland, Utrecht and Flevoland also developed regionally oriented networks. Gelderland combines information from several museums in the IGEM (Internet Gelderse Musea) project. This project is largely founded upon the common use of the AdLib collection management system.

Through a thematic project, co-ordinated by the Mondriaan Foundation and the National Library's «Memory of The Netherlands» project, all posters in Dutch collections will be digitised and presented. Two significant research and development networks have entered the arena in 2004. The first, CATCH (Continuous Access To Cultural Heritage), has a strong academic flavour. It is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and aims to organise scientific research around three themes that are important to the heritage sectors: interoperability through metadata, knowledge enrichment, and finally navigation & presentation. Research is distributed over several research groups in Dutch universities, but situated in cultural heritage institutions.

The second project is the "Reference Networks Project" which is a more heterogenic collaboration between universities, heritage institutions and small specialised businesses. Its aim is to develop tools and strategies to improve the integration of a multitude of reference structures (thesauri, ontologies, vocabularies) in knowledge networking infrastructures. This project is sponsored by the Ministry of Economic Affairs for a period of three years, and supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Networking to improve the conditions and quality of digitisation has just started to take form in the archival sector. In creating a Taskforce for the development of a quality framework the National Archive and the sectoral organisation DIVA have created a network of experts from the archival and neighbouring sectors like the library and museum sectors. Within the archival sector this network stretches over all provincial archives, now organised in Regional Historic Centres.

International co-operation

International co-operation did not change significantly in the course of 2004. Most newly defined projects in The Netherlands, both R&D and digitisation projects, had a national character.

International cooperation within the framework of EU-funded projects (i.e. PRESTOSPACE, ERPANET) continued according to their internal life-cycle. This international, mostly EU-funded, arena is understandably dominated by the larger national institutions like the National Library, the National Archive and the National Institute for Image and Sound. The State Service for Archaeology co-operates internationally on the development of a (digital) reference collection for archaeological artefacts. On an individual (thematic) level, institutions like the Natural History Museum Naturalis co-operate with international networks like G-BIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facilities) and on a smaller scale this institution co-produced a shared digital natural history facility with national museums of natural history in Belgium an Hungary (100 Pearls).

NRG and MINERVA results, interpretation and impact

The efforts of the NRG and MINERVA are interpreted by a national steering committee presided by the ministry of Culture, and used to define the intermediate and more distant perspectives of digitisation in The Netherlands

Albert Hahn, Parliamentary elections, 1918
Amsterdam, Memory of the Netherlands / International Institute
for Social History

Pope [bulbs], 1930-1940
Amsterdam, Memory of the Netherlands / ReclameArsenaal
(Advertising Arsenal)

and Europe. Notions of co-operation and the sharing of resources, knowledge, and infrastructures are developing a clear presence in the consciousness of decision makers in the heritage sectors. The 2004 conference "Strategies for a European Area of Digital Cultural Resources" (`www.digitalseringerfgoed.info`), organised under the Netherlands EU Presidency, had a noticeable impact on the heritage communities, and in subsequent conferences and symposiums this impact broadened, whereas the vision that drives the concept of a European Area was explained in greater detail. Indirectly, NRG and MINERVA results reach the activities of the heritage communities through the refinement of policy, criteria, and new national funding opportunities. Research and quality issues take a more prominent position in the landscape.

Minerva products and spin-off like the *Handbook on Quality* and the *Quality Principles*, however, had little or no impact because their scope is not within the main focus areas of the quality debate in The Netherlands. Dissemination of these products was for that reason not actively pursued. Benchmarking was continued on a national level in some sector. Archives, for example, actively pursues a set of benchmarking-criteria that both fits this particular domain and is in line with the benchmarking-structure as developed during the Lund Action Plan.

Main digitisation initiatives

National portals for culture/networked digital repositories

The "Memory of the Netherlands" programme grew into a national resource of great substance, and offers not only pictures of art collections, but also more ephemeral material and audiovisual heritage. The programme will be continued in 2005-2008 while more focus will be given to delivery services (i.e. publishers) and IPR-models. From 2005, the "Cultuurwijzer" (museum collections), developed by the Netherlands Digital Heritage Association, will be further managed by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, and will change its back office, content and presentation likewise. More focus will be given to the promotion of digital access to the National Collection. This change of management and focus is due to the gradual development of a government policy that allocates different pieces of a national infrastructure for digitisation and digital cultural heritage to government-related public services. Best practices, continuous access, preservation and interoperability of distributed initiatives will be stimulated best by this structural support of national infrastructures. Other national infrastructural services contain the "Woonomgeving" (archives), the "Knowledge Infrastructure for Heritage and Historical Landscape" (monuments and archaeology) and, possibly, the Image & Sound infrastructure (audio-visual heritage).

Services for the users

One of the most notable developments clearly is the development of a chain of bibliographical service by the association of public libraries. Apart from a very powerful query-tool that connects all the catalogues of the public libraries, visitors can use the interface to call upon experts to answer questions about books, and authors. It is also possible to purchase books through the same system.

A conglomerate of museums in the town of Leiden offers advanced information services in an initiative called "museumkennis.nl". Questions by visitors of the website are dealt with by experts from the participating institutions, thus potentially generating answers from more than one perspective. New, similar questions are answered automatically through language technology. All answers to these questions are also fed into a document base. This greatly increases usability and automatically enriches the content through its use. The National Museum of Natural History has expanded this service to a network of organisations that cover nature-related disciplines and domains.

Emerging initiatives

Next to pure digitisation initiatives, more and more projects emerge that aim at the development of networked and interconnected reference structure. Maintenance, enlargement and management of large thesauri, like the Dutch translation of the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* is too heavy a burden for a single institution or will need continuous government funding. As a solution, a new national initiative will create an open environment for the maintenance of this and other thesauri, using a controlled «Wikipedia» principle, thus creating a shared sense of ownership, while lowering the cost of maintenance, and increasing use and visibility.
The enviroment will also be experimented with in similar thesauri initiatives in Belgium and Germany.

Herman de Ruiter, *Factory of missiles*, 1914-1918
Delft, Memory of the Netherlands / Army Museum