

by tomorrow,
today will
be history

nationaal**archief**

The Nationaal Archief today and in five years' time

By tomorrow, today will be history

The Hague, september 2008

200 days later

The introduction of e-mail and the Internet has had a revolutionary impact on our daily lives and on the way we deal with information. The consequences for the Nationaal Archief and other archival institutions are becoming more and more visible. Yet the transition from archival research on site to searching on line has not yet happened. It is a transition that will have to be made, and that will lead to many changes at the Nationaal Archief. These changes affect our core business and must be properly managed. It is therefore a good idea to set out our core business once again and identify the changes that are required.

Since I took up the position of Director 200 days ago, I have learned about the challenges of the infocracy of the 21st century, and the enthusiasm of the archives sector as well as of our own staff. Now it is time to set a course. That is the purpose of this document, which is the result of intensive discussions with stakeholders, fellow institutions, and the management and staff of the Nationaal Archief. There is a great deal to do, so we've already made a start!

Martin Berendse

Director

Towards a comprehensive www.nationaalarchief.nl

As the main archival institution in the Netherlands, the Nationaal Archief has a twofold task. In the first place, as a repository, it enables government to account for its activities. In the second place, it enables everyone to find the information they need, for whatever purpose: evidence/proof, interest, studies, hobbies, admiration, and curiosity. The statutory tasks of the General State Archivist rest with the Nationaal Archief.

The mission statement in the policy plan for 2007–2010 is as follows: the Nationaal Archief provides wide-ranging public insight into the history of the Netherlands by making its collection available and, on that basis, providing information, organizing activities and transferring knowledge.

The main strands of the policy plan are:

- e-culture: functioning in a digital environment
- public access: extending access to the collection for various target groups, and
- knowledge: the development and exchange of knowledge for professionals.

As a result of rapid developments in the field of digital information, the increasing expectations of Internet users, a growing interest in history and new cabinet policy (government agency modernization, and e-government) it is necessary to refine our mission and objectives from the current policy plan for the coming years, and:

- achieve a balance between the main tasks of the Nationaal Archief (selection, management and presentation)
- focus on 'archives of national importance'
- focus on two platforms: the new archives facility on its premises and the Internet.

In other words:

the Nationaal Archief selects, manages and presents archives of national importance on site and on line.

In this context, the focus must be on the recent past. There is no doubt that the history of the Netherlands in the more distant past is worth studying, but even yesterday belongs to the past. The Nationaal Archief is also about 'living' history.

In 5 years' time, in 2013, the Nationaal Archief will comprise of a physical archive and a digital archive: www.nationaalarchief.nl. At our own premises, the national heritage will be stored safely and expertly on traditional carriers (paper, parchment, celluloid, etc.). In the electronic Nationaal Archief, information will be safely and expertly stored in digital form, and fast access will be provided to the original archives. There will be a differentiated range of services, ranging from perceptions of the past (exhibitions, lectures, debates, workshops, theme sites, publications, etc.) to active research (image database, educational projects, supervised research, seminars, etc.).

The path to realizing this goal is set out in this vision document and refined into six main strands:

- 1. Safeguarding, disseminating and increasing knowledge about our unique collection.**
- 2. From 'Informatie op Orde' to 'Informatie Actief Openbaar'.**
- 3. Platform for digital government.**
- 4. Provision of an archives service on site and on line for a wide public.**

- 1. Strengthening of the knowledge function for the national and international archiving world.**
- 2. A new structure for an 'enterprising service'.**

When this vision has been discussed with stakeholders, the plan will be developed in the policy plan for 2010–2013 and in a transition plan for the organisation.

collection

1. Safeguarding, disseminating and increasing knowledge about our unique collection

The Nationaal Archief keeps our national memory: more than 6,000 archives of the government, the ministries and national institutions and people, millions of photographs, hundreds of thousands of maps, a fine library and some 110 kilometres of documents. Archives are a mirror of the archives creator. The heart of the Nationaal Archief is formed by the archives of the Counts of Holland, the Dutch Republic and the Kingdom of the Netherlands – plus other valuable archives relating, for example concerning the two world wars, decolonisation and European unification. A thousand years of history – stored in one square kilometre of space.

The significance of our country did not and does not cease at its borders. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Netherlands were part of a Europe in which the balance of power was constantly shifting. The diplomatic game is documented in the rich archives of the States-General, the powerful province of Holland, and its most important official, the Grand Pensionary. Reports were sent to the Netherlands from near and far by the numerous legations

(embassies) – and of course the factories and governors of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Dutch West India Company (WIC). These trading companies had almost unlimited power, and substantially extended the reach of Dutch government.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Netherlands retained its colonies and remained a powerful player – albeit slightly less powerful – on the world stage. The archives of the Ministry of Colonies, the Nederlandsche Handelmaatschappij (Dutch Trading Company) and, once again, the embassies and consulates provide a fantastic window on many places in the world. The same goes for the many private documents of those who travelled around the world or who were sent out to service abroad. The many thousands of maps made by the Dutch over the centuries – maps of their own country and the rest of the world – constitute a special part of the collection. Their form and content require specific expertise. This also applies to the millions of photographs taken by professional photographers in the twentieth century. They document important historic events, as well as daily life at home and overseas. Every year, new archives are added to the collec

tion of the Nationaal Archief: they help us to build a picture of recent decades – the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – from the so called ‘Nether-Pop’ music to urban regeneration.

Ambitions and objectives

- The international significance of the Nationaal Archief collection deserves to become more widely known both within and outside the Netherlands. This requires a refined collection profile, an active presentation policy, and closer cooperation with our international partners.
- Management and presentation of the collection requires knowledge and expertise that must be continually developed. At the same time, the experts of the Nationaal Archief will work to disseminate their knowledge of parts of the collection. This requires scope for specialization, but also an allocation of duties that is transparent for the outside world. The preservation of the part of the collection will be linked to specific scientific knowledge (a ‘curators’ model’), thereby adding greater substance to the role of knowledge institute both nationally and internationally, and opening possibilities for the creation of knowledge coalitions.

- Priority will be given to extending, conserving and digitizing the audiovisual collection in the context of the 'Images for the Future' project, and will be realized in a new coalition with Spaarnestad Photo. The Nationaal Archief/Spaarnestad Photo collection will thus be created in The Hague.
- The Nationaal Archief is not only the national archives; it is also the archival service for the province of Zuid-Holland. All archives from the province can be found there. The cooperation with the Heritage Board for Zuid Holland (Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland) and other archival institutions in the province will be intensified.



public

2. From *'Informatie op Orde'* to *'Informatie Actief Openbaar'*

After twenty years, central-government papers and digital documents that have been selected for permanent keeping must be transferred to the Nationaal Archief in a 'good condition , properly arranged and accessible' (in the words of the Archives Act), but in practice this is not always the case. All departments have a backlog in terms of selecting and transferring archives. The transfer period of twenty years is not being achieved. In mid-2005, therefore, the PWAA project (a project for dealing with the archiving backlog) and the programme *'Informatie op Orde'* ("Information in order") were launched. The government departments, the Nationaal Archief and the Centrale Archief Selectiedienst (Central Archive Selection Service) participate in the project and programme. By the end of 2008, the archiving backlog of paper documents up to 1975 will have been dealt with. The purpose of the *'Informatie op Orde'* programme is to organize government information in paper and digital form, now and for the future.

The focus of the PWAA project is based on a new approach to selection and processing of archives. This is a project-

based method involving central control, faster procedures and active decision-making on the material to be selected and preserved. The time is ripe for the next step, in which greater emphasis will be placed on prioritization and prompt transfer, and the focus will shift from 'mass' archives to the essential information. Departments are working together on the necessary preparations. Moreover, the Council for Culture (main advisory body for the government in cultural issues) has pointed out that it is not always possible to gain a picture of society from government archives alone; non-governmental archives are also important. This relates to a shift that has been taking place in recent decades, namely in the roles of government (facilitator rather than implementer) and society (an increasing number of public services have been transferred to independent social organizations that are not government bodies within the meaning of the Archives Act).

The digital revolution is reinforcing the need for an efficient and effective approach to selection. Appraisal and selection of digital archives cannot be postponed until it becomes evident whether or not they are of cultural and

historical significance; for that the volume of information is simply too large for this. Digital archiving makes it possible to appraise material as the records are created, and selection can take place during or just after the creation of records.

Ambitions and objectives

- The main objective is to ensure that the focus shifts from dealing with a backlog of 'metres of documents' to the prompt transfer of relevant information to the public archives. In other words: a method involving selection by relevance and currency. This means that together, as the central government, we not only organize the information but are also committed to ensuring its prompt release.
- Building a picture of society sometimes requires more than consulting government archives. Non-governmental archives are also important. Clearly, alliances should be formed with strategic partners in order to acquire these archives and provide access to them. This means that objectives for appraisal need to be amended and a method is required that is geared to 'archives of national importance'.

- The rapid – mainly technological - developments in government administration require new regulations that achieve the correct balance between the interests of open administration, data protection and long-term preservation. It therefore seems to be more sensible to modernize gradually rather than according to a 'grand design'. Complete harmonization would be a complex and time-consuming exercise that, moreover, would not enable us to respond to new insights. The most urgent issues can be dealt with rapidly and satisfactorily by updating the Archives Act in the short term.

digital

3. Platform for digital government

In itself, the digitization of information does not affect its importance and the intermediary role that the Nationaal Archief fulfils between archives creators and users.

However, the digital revolution is leading to new opportunities and challenges, which are being addressed in the *'Informatie op Orde'* programme, among other things.

Digitization can enable government to release possibly relevant information for citizens faster and proactively. Because a digital environment is leading to an exponential growth in the volume of information, appraisal and selection will remain essential. It is necessary not only to control the cost of storage and management, but also to prevent a situation in which releasing all information creates a 'smoke screen' that obscures the essential picture.

Single storage of high-quality digital archive material also enables multiple use to satisfy differentiated demand, e.g. from citizens requiring documentary proof who wish to consult authentic digital sources, someone with a particular hobby who requires a paper reproduction of a digital photograph or map, or a policymaker who needs to receive information quickly on a PDA or mobile telephone.

The main challenge lies in the vulnerability of digital archives. This is due to the fact that hardware and software rapidly become outdated. Control measures are necessary in order to be able to open and read the digital files that form the digital archives (websites, databases), and place them in their context. Once digital information is lost, it is almost impossible to retrieve it. This means that, in terms of long-term on line access, the emphasis is on prevention. A great deal of attention is also paid to providing information, advice and support for records creators and parties responsible (referred to in the Archives Act as *archieformers* and *zorgdragers*). The purpose is to integrate *records management* in the digital business processes of records creators from the outset, so that it is possible to transfer digital archives in an organized and accessible form.

In addition, the Nationaal Archief is preparing for the task of *legal deposit*, for the management, preservation and long-term access of exclusively digital records: the e-depot.

Ambitions and objectives

- The core objective for the period to 2013 is to create a recognizable national and international platform for digital storage (and earlier transfer), knowledge (standards) and digital longevity. The Nationaal Archief aims to become a recognized e-depot/service centre and one of the government's centres of expertise in the field of e-government.
- The Nationaal Archief can accept digital archives eligible for permanent storage before the twenty-year deadline, i.e. as soon as the files are closed.
- The Nationaal Archief aims to offer ministries and government bodies a repository so that digital records that must be kept for long periods (but will eventually be destroyed) can be managed and made available to parties with statutory responsibility.
- If a records creator transfers digital records that need to remain accessible for operational purposes, the Nationaal Archief can facilitate remote management. It can also link the information at the location in question to other information sources so that it can be used by all interested parties (subject to regulation if necessary).

users

4. On site and on line research for a wide public

The virtualization of society is having an enormous impact on the archiving sector. Today, thousands of Dutch people still visit reading rooms to consult the original sources. But many of those visits could be rendered unnecessary if the tools to get access to the archives, as finding aids like inventories and indexes (in more general terms: the catalogues) and research guides were available in digital form. For several years now, the number of people visiting the reading room has fallen. This could be compensated by an even larger number of visits for other purposes, but this will not happen automatically.

Reading rooms as we know them today will no longer exist. They will be replaced by a much more differentiated range of services for users: a restoration workshop, a research room for special items, exhibitions, supervised research, study meetings, educational projects, etc. etc. These developments enable archive services not only to focus on 'the visitor in general', but in particular to respond more effectively to the wishes of specific target groups (e.g. journalists, historians, cartographers, conservation experts, schoolchildren, genealogists). The range of activities and

services offered by the Nationaal Archief will make full use of the unique *selling point* of the archives: archives do not exist to be looked at, but to be worked with. Archives enable us literally to 'touch' ancient and modern history.

Ambitions and objectives

- The Nationaal Archief will promote its name and the unique nature of the archive more strongly in order to enhance its appeal to current and potential users.
- The collection (and the related tasks) will be more visible in a renovated building, and a range of public groups and professionals will be encouraged to use it. Major and minor events in the history of the Netherlands can be presented using the primary sources.
- Increased cooperation with neighbouring organizations (e.g. the National Library of the Netherlands and the Central Bureau for Genealogy) in the unique complex of buildings behind the Central Station in The Hague, thereby creating more shared services for researchers/visitors. This could result, for example, in an integrated reading room for genealogical research.
- More and more primary sources will be available in electronic form. A fast 'Scanning on Demand' service is available for sources that have not yet been digitized.

- Digital technology has made it easier to search in several different collections. Cooperation with other archival institutions at national and international level will lead to improved service and a better provision of information. The aim is to increase this cooperation and form new coalitions.

Knowledge

5. Strengthening the knowledge function for the national and international archiving world

As a knowledge centre, the Nationaal Archief is geared to professionals and has three target groups: the national state archive consortium, the Dutch archives sector and the international archives world. The family of archives overseas has an important place within the third target group.

National archiving consortium It is to be expected that national responsibility for the Regional History Centres (RHCs) will be transferred to the provinces, thus acknowledging the role of the Regional History Centres (RHCs) as public-oriented heritage institutions in a regional network. Nevertheless, cooperation with all involved partners and provincial/municipal authorities is still important. Moreover, all the centres keep the archives created (and to be created) by provincial government, and this 'national collection' is therefore a binding element.

There is still a role for the general state archivist in terms of selection and transfer of state archives. Digital storage and access are best dealt with together. The approach must be geared to combining the cultural and historical value in the cities and provinces with the benefits of a

national network of institutions managing the state archives.

System responsibility Until recently, the *Rijksarchiefdienst* (State Archives Agency) as a whole (including the former State Archives in the provinces) served as a knowledge centre for archival matters, conservation and institutional history, and the general state archivist was the point of contact for regulation (the system). As a result of deconcentration into Regional History Centres and the development of the Nationaal Archief, 'the archives field' expects the Nationaal Archief to serve as a knowledge centre for professionals and be responsible for the development, transfer and exchange of knowledge. The general state archivist will fulfil the role of 'pioneer'. The main strands of the heritage function are knowledge of the collection, paper conservation and electronic access to the sources. Permanent access to government administration requires the further development of effective standards, regulations and management concepts. As the range of possibilities grows, the right of citizens to information must continually be weighed against the interests of record creators.

International position The historical role of the Netherlands continues in the modern world, albeit in a new setting. The Nationaal Archief will strengthen its relations with related institutions in countries with which it has historical links, and will initiate and implement joint projects and develop new policies. Together with these countries (including Suriname, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Ghana, South Africa, India and Brazil), we have custody of a shared cultural heritage. Part of the history of the Netherlands lies overseas and, conversely, the Nationaal Archief has a great deal of information about the countries in question. The Nationaal Archief is also actively involved in European and worldwide partnerships in the field of archival science.

Ambitions and objectives

- To strengthen the partnership of public-records institutions
- The Nationaal Archief functions as a centre of knowledge for professionals and is responsible for the development, transfer and sharing of knowledge.
- The Nationaal Archief is strengthening the cooperation between the countries with which the Netherlands has historical links and participates actively in international networks of archival institutions.

enter- prising

6. A new structure for an enterprising service

In 2002, in line with the developments in national cultural policy, the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* (General State Archives) became the *Nationaal Archief* (National Archives). The most important part of the change involved a transition to a more public-oriented institution. Since this time, the organization and business operations of the Nationaal Archief have evolved from those of a traditional official service into a modern institute, providing a service not only for the parent government department but also for other departments, the province of Zuid-Holland, national and international research programmes, and third parties. This means that the cost is not borne solely by the Minister of Education, Culture & Science. Furthermore, efficiency is enhanced and the Nationaal Archief can contribute to government-wide information policy. In order to make this possible, and for other reasons, the Nationaal Archief became an 'agency' of the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science.

But developments are continuing. National and international scientific programmes are calling on the expertise of the Nationaal Archief and are willing to make a financial

contribution for this. Major conservation projects require new partnerships that are keen to be based at the Nationaal Archief. The shared database for genealogy (www.genlias.nl) and the ABS/Archeion archiving programme are already *hosted* by the Nationaal Archief. International developments require new business models that combine public and private resources. *Printing on demand* and paid access to special sites can generate costs, but they can also generate benefits in the form of new revenues. This will place even greater demands on the entrepreneurship of the Nationaal Archief. Enterprise in a public context.

The need for an entrepreneurial approach means that the Nationaal Archief must provide scope for an entrepreneurial approach on the part of our staff: professionals in fields such as archival science, history, public administration, conservation and management of archives, education, presentation, etc. We will create this scope by modifying our organizational structure and entering into new collaborative partnerships.

Ambitions and objectives

- The Nationaal Archief fulfils its public tasks in a public environment and with public resources (the 'first funding stream'). In the future, as now, major conservation and research programmes, international cooperation and the extension of public services will be financed from the second and third funding streams.
- The new organisational structure of the Nationaal Archief is based on the core tasks (selection, management and presentation) and facilitates the approach of the Nationaal Archief as an 'enterprising service'.

What will remain unchanged?

So will everything change at the Nationaal Archief?

No, fortunately not. Many aspects satisfy all the requirements, and do not need to be changed.

One thing that will not change is the Nationaal Archief's responsibility for permanently keeping and making available the most important documents of national government. These documents provide insight into the functioning of our parliamentary democracy and, together with the archives of private individuals, social organizations and companies, they document important developments in our society. Something else that will not change is the role of the Nationaal Archief as a knowledge centre for the history of the Netherlands serving a wide public. We will continue to care for old and contemporary archives – because by tomorrow, today will be history.

Colophon

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