National Digital Heritage Strategy

2025–2028

National Digital Heritage Strategy

The aim of the National Digital Heritage Strategy is to make digital heritage more accessible to everyone, enabling people and communities to experience heritage in the ways that suit them best. In order to achieve this goal, work is already underway on a digital infrastructure – a collection of agreements, standards, and facilities that will allow many different kinds of heritage to be linked together. The National Strategy provides guidance throughout this process. It was developed in close consultation between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and all heritage stakeholders who participate in the Dutch Digital Heritage Network.

Dutch Digital Heritage Network

Since 2015, the Dutch Digital Heritage Network has been responsible for implementing the National Digital Heritage Strategy. The network is made up of organisations, communities and individuals from all across the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Participants include museums, archives, libraries and their employees, as well as industry associations, software vendors, researchers, programmers, educators, consultants, historical societies, and local heritage communities. All of them support the goals of the National Strategy and are contributing to connected heritage in ways that suit their expertise and capabilities. Governments also have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging this shared approach, for example through the provincial heritage support centres (*erfgoedhuizen*).

Contents

Preface

In our rapidly changing world, heritage offers people a sense of familiarity. It is a source of remembrance, identity and self-awareness, helping us to understand where we came from and define where we are right now. Access to heritage is vital for the well-being of our society – both in the European Netherlands and in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

Heritage also promotes mutual understanding. Many people seek knowledge about the past. As a bearer of traces of the past, heritage invites us to re-examine and deepen our understanding of what we thought we knew, shining a new light on old stories.

The internet is a popular, easily accessible platform for engaging with information about the past. Along with films and series, the internet remains one of the most important sources of historical insight – not just for young people, but for people of all ages.

It is not surprising that people enjoy exploring the past online. After all, the medium lends itself well to storytelling, and stories are precisely what gives meaning to the past. They are often just as important as physical artefacts, if not more so. The meaning we attach to historical events, people, places, and things changes over time and is influenced by the storyteller and their background. The internet allows for a wide range of perspectives.

There is a growing need for coherence between all the individual bits of information about our history that can be found online. In recent decades, heritage organisations have digitised parts of their collections and made them available through various platforms and websites. As a result, fragments of our collective past are scattered across the web. Users are often unsure where to find the resources or data they are looking for. In short, the information is fragmented.

For years, the heritage sector has been working together to combat fragmentation and to make heritage more accessible to users. Heritage stakeholders have joined forces to form the Dutch Digital Heritage Network, which is responsible for implementing the National Digital Heritage Strategy. The goal of the National Strategy is to improve the accessibility of digital heritage and make it easier for people and communities to experience heritage in ways that suit their needs.

The Dutch Digital Heritage Network seeks to achieve this goal by working towards connected heritage. In this revised version of the National Digital Heritage Strategy, we will explain how this is done and outline the steps the network will take in the coming years.

Eppo Bruins

Minister of Education, Culture and Science

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

The key principles of the National Digital Heritage Strategy

Anticipating (re)use

Everyone should be able to experience heritage, regardless of their interests, prior knowledge, or the questions they may have. Connected heritage is the key to making this happen. Connecting our digital heritage is not an end in itself, but a means to support heritage use (and reuse) as effectively as possible. It results in a clear overview of the available heritage information and enables users to experience heritage without being limited by the boundaries between individual collections and organisations. When developing applications, users' behaviour and the characteristics of target groups should be determining factors.

Decentralising where possible, centralising where necessary

Sustainably connected heritage requires a decentralised approach. Heritage and information, knowledge and expertise are distributed throughout the network. The goal is not to bring them together in one place, but to ensure they can be linked (in the case of information) or exchanged (in the case of knowledge and expertise) as needed. This should be done directly at the source by heritage stakeholders themselves, as much as possible. They can use the shared facilities to do so, making sure to follow the guidelines established within the network. In this way, they can contribute to connected heritage at their own pace while remaining autonomous.

Everyone has a part to play

Connecting digital heritage is a collaborative effort. Heritage stakeholders each contribute to this goal in their own way. To achieve connected heritage, they must work together within the network. Network participants share their knowledge and experience and develop shared facilities. This allows them to accomplish far more than any one could individually. By definition, connecting digital heritage is not something network participants can do on their own – they all rely on each other's efforts.

Agreements take precedence

Network participants formulate agreements about making heritage information available online. In doing so, they adhere to international (web)standards whenever possible. Their agreements are recorded in the Digital Heritage Reference Architecture (DERA) and are not static, but are continuously being updated. When it becomes necessary to revise the agreements, the Dutch Digital Heritage Network will take into account new technological developments and changing work practices.
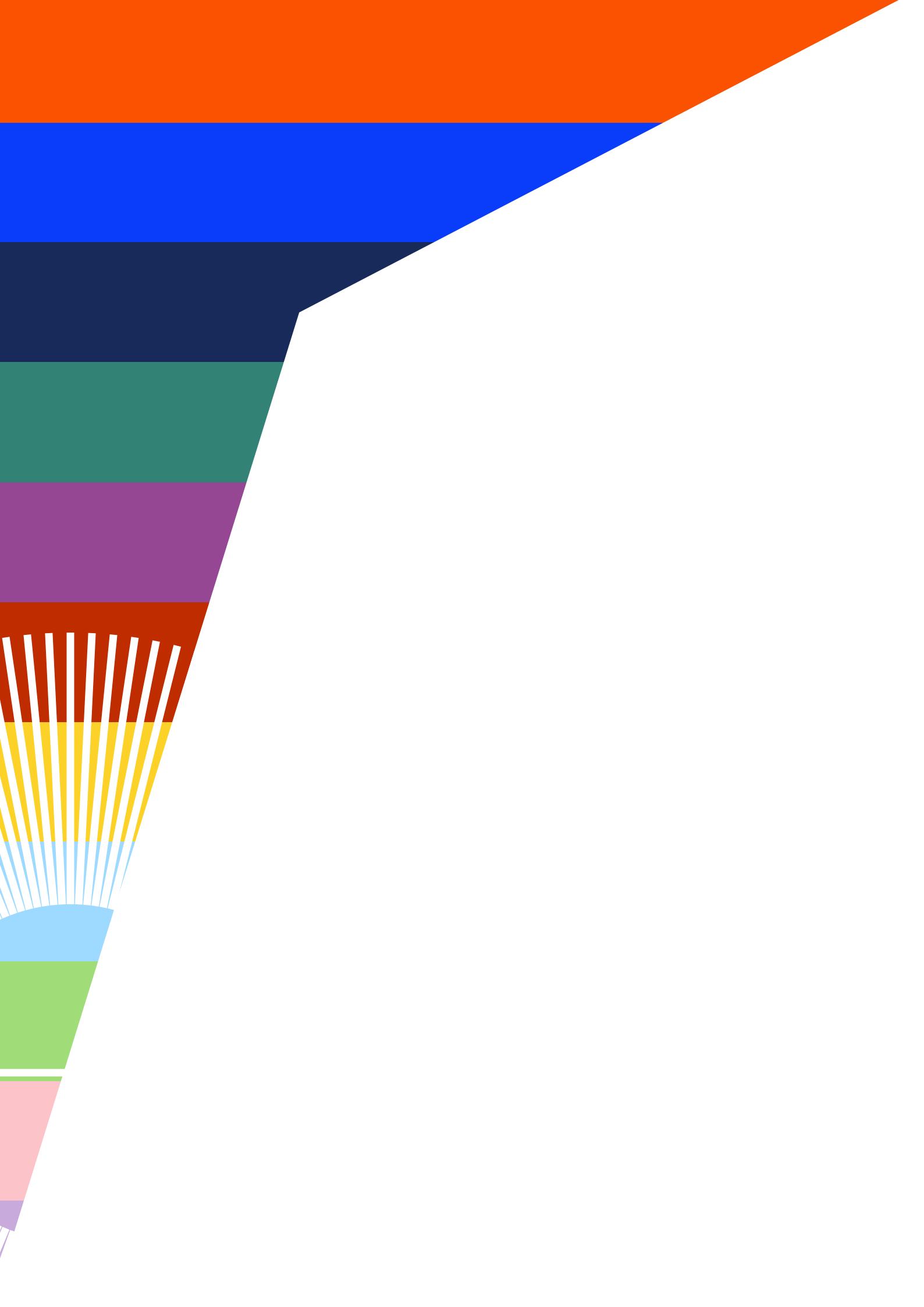
1. Building a public digital infrastructure for connected heritage

Everyone should be able to experience heritage, regardless of their interests, prior knowledge, or the questions they may have – both now and in the future. Connected heritage is the key to making this happen. The National Digital Heritage Strategy aims at developing a public digital infrastructure that makes it possible to link heritage from different sources.

The infrastructure for connected heritage is a collection of agreements, standards, and facilities. The Dutch Digital Heritage Network has been developing and expanding this infrastructure since the launch of the National Digital Heritage Strategy in 2015. Network participants use the infrastructure to make heritage easier to find and to use.

When it comes to connecting our heritage, the guiding principle is 'sharing from the source'. This means that all parties that manage heritage information (for example, descriptions of museum objects, archival records, or publications) must share the relevant data online without any loss of quality. In doing so, they adhere to national and international data standards. Agreements on the use of these standards can be found in the Digital Heritage Reference Architecture (*Digitaal Erfgoed Referentie Architectuur*, DERA), which is updated periodically. Sharing from the source ensures that information can be linked to information from other sources. This results in connected heritage that transcends the boundaries of individual systems and institutions.

Connected heritage makes it easier to develop audience applications. Consequently, it is possible to make heritage accessible for everyone – a core principle of public service.

Greater ease of use for online visitors

The Rijksmuseum stores data and information about their collection in a variety of systems, including a collections management system, a library system, an image database, an archive and documentation system, and (eventually) a research data repository. In order to bring this data together and make it more accessible, an integration layer was developed based on the principles of the Digital Heritage Reference Architecture (DERA). An online platform called Collection Online serves as the Rijksmuseum's front-end interface to this data integration layer. The data and information can also be accessed directly, in accordance with the museum's expanded Information and Data Policy. The Rijksmuseum's digital strategy aims to connect heritage across disparate systems and types of information. This approach will not only benefit their own users, but also users of applications made by others.

Connected heritage

Digital heritage is available in many different places online. This can make it difficult for users to find the information that is relevant to them. Developers of audience applications, such as websites and apps, bring information from multiple sources together based on subject matter, location, etc. This helps users to find their way through the fragmented heritage landscape.

In order to develop these applications in efficient ways, developers must have access to information that has been linked in a uniform way. Otherwise, they will be forced to copy data from one source (for example, a heritage organisation's collection information system) to another location, modifying it to fit the new context. This is undesirable because it obscures the origin of the information and results in data that is difficult to use in other applications.

Developing audience applications therefore relies on 'connected heritage': information about (physical and digital) heritage that is linked together in an effective way across various locations. To this end, the National Strategy advocates that data be shared 'from the source' by those responsible for managing this information (also referred to as the 'source holders'). Sharing data in this way allows source holders to maintain control over the accuracy and completeness – and therefore the quality – of their own data. This, in turn, ensures that applications that make use of this data do not contain contaminated or outdated information, helping them remain up-to-date for longer.

Connecting heritage in this way requires that source holders adhere to shared standards for representing and processing data. The use of standards will improve the visibility of the available information both now and in the future, when as-yet-unforeseen questions about the past arise in response to societal developments.

Currently, these standards are still being underutilised. As a result, developing and maintaining websites, apps, and other resources remains time-consuming and expensive. The lack of standardisation also makes it difficult for developers to respond to users' rapidly changing needs.

Connected heritage yields more comprehensive narratives

Both the Utrecht Archives and the Zuid-Utrecht Regional Archive are home to a wealth of archival material about the inhabitants of Amerongen Castle, with documents dating back as far as the 13th century. Amerongen Castle also manages its own collection of artefacts. Information about these objects, archival documents, and stories has thus far been isolated in separate collection information systems. With the help of linked data, they are now been brought together, enabling us to appreciate them within their wider historical context. This achievement represents a major milestone for Amerongen Castle, which has long sought to enable the public to gain insight into the rich history of the castle and its inhabitants.

Agreements, standards, and facilities

Improving the standardisation of heritage information at the source is clearly a prerequisite for connected heritage. The Digital Heritage Reference Architecture (DERA) forms the backbone of the agreements on the use of standards made by the Dutch Digital Heritage Network.[1] In addition, more detailed agreements are made about topics such as the use of certain data models in specific heritage domains.

A variety of tools have been developed to support participants of the Dutch Digital Heritage Network in applying standards. Two facilities are of particular importance because they contribute to connected heritage in a very direct way: the Network of Terms (*Termennetwerk*), which helps collection managers use standardised terminology in their descriptions of heritage, and the Dataset Register (*Datasetregister*), where heritage information is registered in a uniform way, making it easily retrievable and providing a clear overview of what is available.[2]

Network participants also have access to an extensive support network that provides help and guidance on implementing standards and practices and utilising the available facilities. (For more information, see chapter 2, 'Collaborating on connected heritage'.)

The more this infrastructure is used, the easier it becomes to develop new applications for users, as growing inputs lead to a more accurate picture of the available data and where to find it. Standards also allow source holders to automate time-consuming tasks such as adding to object descriptions and converting data to standard formats.

What is the name of this church?

The Dutch province of Brabant is home to numerous churches and monasteries, many of which are known by several names. This makes it difficult to search for information about a particular building. Local historical societies are often the best sources of knowledge on nearby churches and monasteries. Heritage support centre Erfgoed Brabant has therefore teamed up with local experts to create an authority file for churches and monasteries in the province. This list has been added to the Network of Terms so that everyone can use the same names for the same buildings. This makes it quicker and easier for people to find the right information.

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1. For more information about DERA, please see the Dutch Digital Heritage Network's website: https://netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/activiteiten/dera/.

2. The Network of Terms is available online at https://termennetwerk.netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/; the Dataset Register can be found at https://datasetregister.netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/.

Public digital infrastructure for connected heritage in a wider context

There is a growing awareness of the many benefits of sharing data from the source, also in other sectors. Local, regional, and national governments are increasingly rallying behind this principle.[3] Dealing with complex social issues like climate change, housing, and healthcare requires compiling data from a wide variety of sources, which must be compared and analysed in their mutual relations. This is only possible when source holders publish their data in a clear, unambiguous way and if information is well-connected between different sources.

Information from the heritage sector is often of interest to parties in other sectors. For example, researchers in the social sciences and humanities need to be able to find and analyse heritage information. In turn, data generated by researchers can be of value to heritage stakeholders. The research field, like the heritage sector, relies on shared infrastructure to facilitate access to data and tools (such as INEO, the user portal for the CLARIAH infrastructure).[4] Coordination between parties in the Dutch Digital Heritage Network and partnerships in the research field will improve the accessibility and usability of information in both sectors. Tools that are part of the infrastructure, such as the Dataset Register, have a key role to play in this regard.

Interoperability and the ability to exchange data effectively is one of the primary objectives of EU data policy. The EU's 2020 data strategy calls for the development of 'data spaces' to make it easier to exchange data within and across sectors. For the cultural sector, the European Commission initiated the common European data space for cultural heritage, where heritage information from all EU member states is made findable and reuseable.

For a data space like this to be effective, many existing international infrastructures will have to become more decentralised. Rather than requiring all data to be copied to a central location, data should be shared directly from the source. This will result in a network of connected heritage that extends beyond national borders.
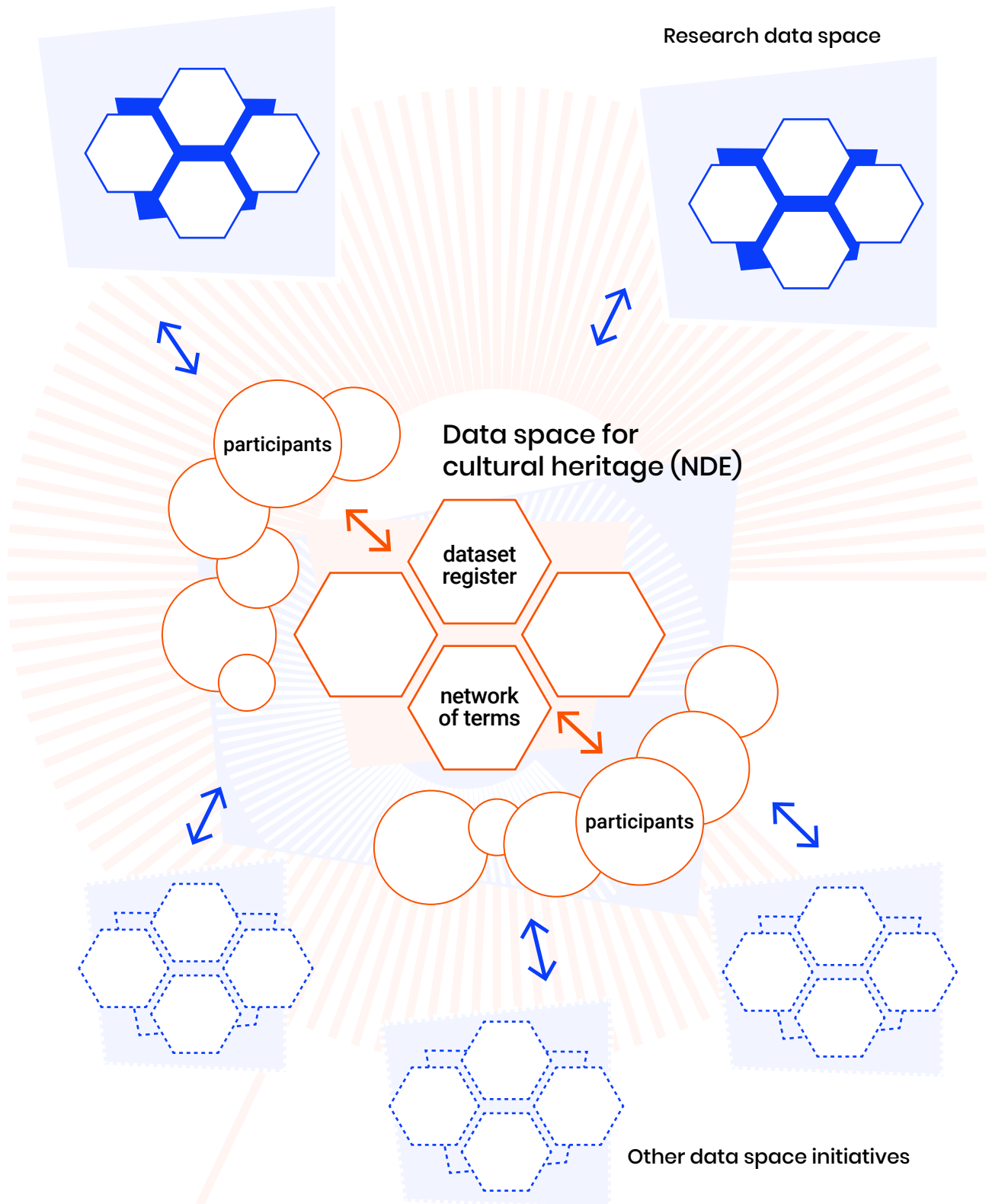
The various organisations and government entities each have their own contributions to make toward a public infrastructure for sharing and linking data. The public digital infrastructure for connected heritage is a cornerstone of this larger whole, at both the national and international levels.
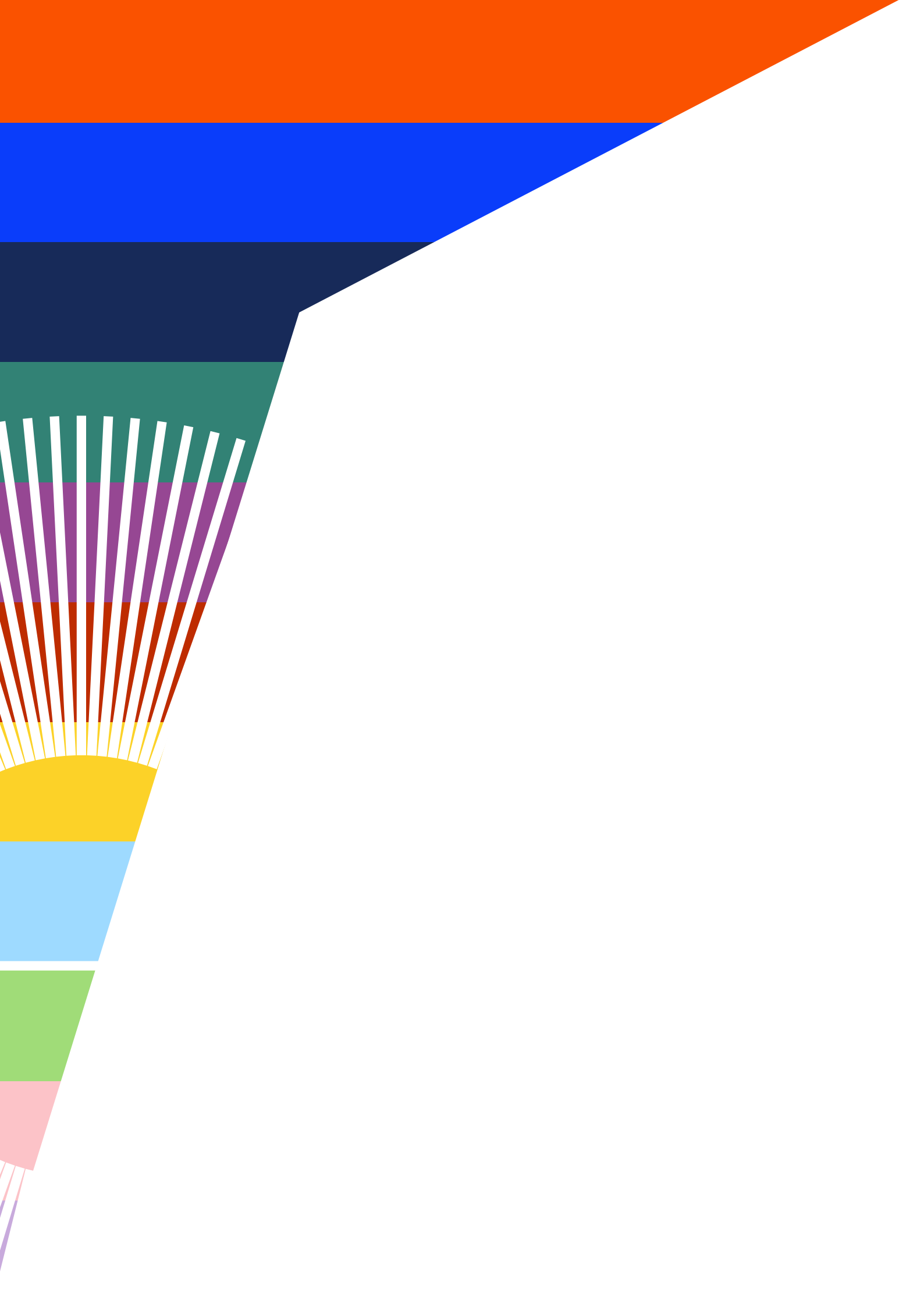
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3. For example: Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), *Data-aanbod: zo maken we het toegankelijk; Op weg naar een Federatief Datastelsel dat werkt voor gemeenten* (2023) https://vng.nl/sites/default/files/2023-12/vng_position_paper_federatief_datastelsel_december_2023.pdf; Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), NL DIGITAAL: *Interbestuurlijke Datastrategie Nederland* (2021), https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-bf2acf54-ad5f-4f32-afe2-0904a1d8e700/pdf; Government of the Netherlands, 'Data bij de bron', *Digitaleoverheid.nl* (n.d.), https://www.digitaleoverheid.nl/data-bij-de-bron.

4. INEO (https://www.ineo.tools/) enables users to access datasets, applications and other resources (including standards) developed in CLARIAH, the Common Lab Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities. Infrastructures are also being developed (in whole or in part) for specific projects, such as the HAICu project ('digital Humanities Artificial Intelligence Cultural heritage'), which aims to develop new ways of interpreting and reusing data from large-scale heritage collections with the help of AI, as well as projects facilitated by the Thematic Digital Competence Centres, or TDCCs (network-based initiatives for conducting open science projects), one of which focuses on the field of social sciences and the humanities (SSH).

European data space
for cultural heritage

Research data space

Data space for
cultural heritage (NDE)

participants

dataset
register

network
of terms

participants

Other data space initiatives

2. Collaborating on connected heritage

Heritage stakeholders are working together to implement the National Digital Heritage Strategy. They collaborate within the Dutch Digital Heritage Network, an association of people and organisations throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands, including archives, libraries, museums, industry associations, software vendors, researchers, programmers, educators, consultants, historical societies, and local heritage communities.

A network-based form of collaboration was chosen at the launch of the National Strategy in 2015 because building connected heritage requires a structural approach that exceeds the capacity of any one party. The network offers heritage stakeholders the chance to pool their efforts, expertise, resources, and competencies. Together, they can achieve results that none of them could individually.

The Dutch Digital Heritage Network is growing steadily, with more and more participants joining each year. It is also becoming increasingly diverse. Heritage organisations in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom are pledging their support for the goals of the National Strategy by signing a manifesto. In this way, the Dutch Digital Heritage Network is evolving into a broad movement made up of heritage stakeholders who are committed to working together to connect our heritage.

Manifesto promotes collaboration and knowledge exchange

As of late 2024, approximately 200 organisations have endorsed the manifesto of the Dutch Digital Heritage Network. In doing so, they have pledged to help ensure that heritage is accessible to both current and future generations. Participants include not only organisations, but also various partnerships. These partnerships strengthen the network by focusing on specific themes or regions. For example, some provide support for managers of heritage collections in fields like the performing arts (Podiumkunst.net) or design and digital culture (Network Archives Design and Digital Culture, or NADD), while others connect sources on topics like World War II, fashion, or the Zuiderzee region (such as Stichting WO2Net/Oorlogsbronnen.nl, Modemuze, and Netwerk Zuiderzeecollecties). More and more funding organisations are recognising the value of network participation and have begun asking applicants to sign the manifesto. By fostering a shared awareness of common goals in this way, the manifesto is driving collaboration and knowledge exchange between organisations.

Network roles

Each participant in the network has a unique role to play based on their expertise, position in the field and (financial) resources. Organisations and partnerships each take on the responsibilities that they can carry out most effectively or economically, complementing each other as they do so. For example, one of them may contribute to the development of shared facilities, while another shares their expertise on how to use those. By working together in this way, network participants collectively lay the foundation for connected heritage.

Within the Dutch Digital Heritage Network, six institutions serve as national hubs. Each of these hubs plays a leading role in one of the following domains: archives (National Archives of the Netherlands), libraries (National Library of the Netherlands), museums (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands), audiovisual heritage (Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision), heritage created by cultural institutions and designers (Nieuwe Instituut), and research data (the Humanities Cluster of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). These hubs provide essential expertise that organisations need in order to create connected heritage within their respective domains. They share this expertise with others in the field and dedicate their resources, budget, and organisational capacity to expanding and strengthening the network. They also lead by example, promoting data standardisation at the source and sharing high-quality data with heritage organisations and users.

Tailor-made support

Parties contributing to connected digital heritage receive support in a variety of ways. For instance, the activities of the Dutch Digital Heritage Network are coordinated by a network team. This team brings network participants together, helping them avoid duplicating each other's work and ensuring that parties with similar goals strengthen each other instead of working against one another. The team also identifies relevant new developments, (learning) needs, and opportunities for the network and oversees the development of the digital infrastructure.

Network participants can also receive help from digital heritage coaches, who provide support tailored to the needs of individual organisations and partnerships. These coaches offer strategic guidance and practical advice on how to ensure that the many forms of digital heritage remain accessible in the long term. They are based in the same region as their users, working from the provincial support centres for heritage (*erfgoedhuizen*). These support centres bring together a variety of forms of heritage support.

Supporting volunteers

Over the past 35 years, many volunteers have worked on the registration of the collection of Museum 'De Koperen Knop', using a variety of systems. As a result, there is a great deal of variation in the terminology used to describe objects. For example, a plate might be referred to as a 'plate', a 'dish', 'dinnerware', or something else entirely. The museum asked Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland to help them with cataloguing objects in a more consistent manner. Thanks to the use of standardised terms, the museum now has a clear overview of its collection and can easily locate specific objects for exhibitions.

Heritage stakeholders can also contact organisations offering domain-specific expertise that contributes to the implementation of the National Strategy, such as the Netherlands Museum Association, KVAN, UKB, AVA_Net, and KIA.[5] DEN, the knowledge institute for culture and digital transformation, helps cultural organisations develop a comprehensive digital strategy that encompasses all aspects of their organisation, and provides guidance on specific digital opportunities and challenges, such as cybersecurity or engaging new audiences.

Government support

When it comes to fostering collaboration on connected heritage, governments also have an important role to play. For example, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science provides financial support for the Dutch Digital Heritage Network and is responsible for the management and further development of the Digital Heritage Reference Architecture. The ministry encourages the implementation of the National Strategy by discussing with government-funded institutions their contributions to connected heritage and by requiring projects that make use of public funds to adhere to the reference architecture. The ministry also meets regularly with the network hubs to discuss their plans for implementing the National Strategy and review their progress.

Most provinces in the European Netherlands actively promote the development of expertise at the regional and local level. They do this among others through the provincial heritage support centres, which employ the digital heritage coaches. The heritage support centres work together in Stichting OPEN (the foundation of provincial heritage support centres). OPEN engages in dialogues with government bodies at all levels.

Digitally connecting heritage not only requires the heritage sector to work together towards a common goal, but also to sustain their efforts over the long term. Government support, ensuring the right conditions are in place, is key in this regard. For example, policymakers help the heritage sector by keeping the goals of the National Strategy in mind when developing new policy initiatives and funding schemes. This calls for effective coordination between different levels of government. Cultural funds can also contribute to establishing the right conditions by setting appropriate requirements in their schemes.

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5. KVAN is the association of professionals and institutions in the archival sector. UKB is a partnership between thirteen university libraries and the National Library of the Netherlands (KB). AVA_Net is the expertise network for audiovisual archives. KIA is a knowledge community for parties involved in information management and archiving.
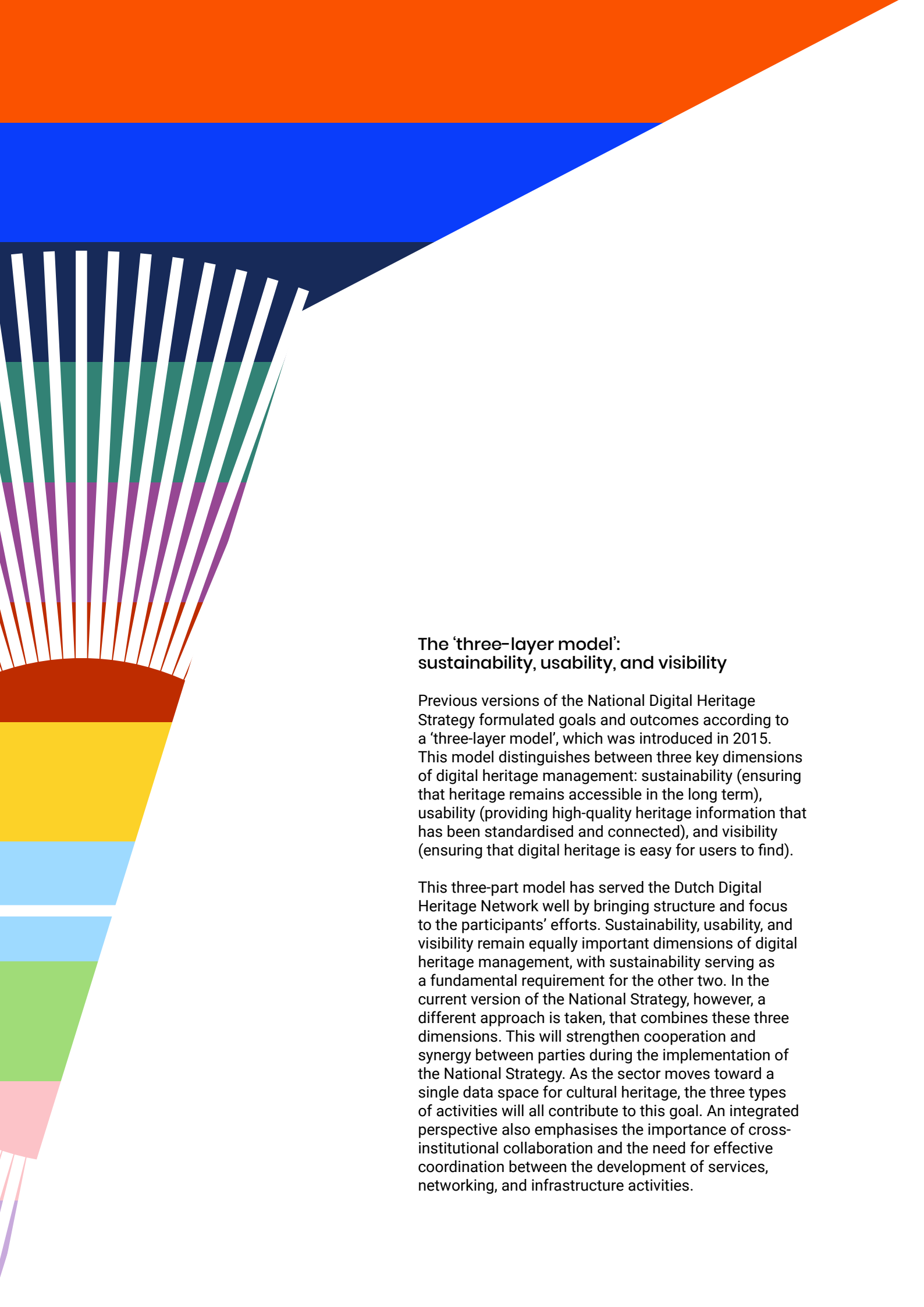
The 'three-layer model': sustainability, usability, and visibility

Previous versions of the National Digital Heritage Strategy formulated goals and outcomes according to a 'three-layer model', which was introduced in 2015. This model distinguishes between three key dimensions of digital heritage management: sustainability (ensuring that heritage remains accessible in the long term), usability (providing high-quality heritage information that has been standardised and connected), and visibility (ensuring that digital heritage is easy for users to find).

This three-part model has served the Dutch Digital Heritage Network well by bringing structure and focus to the participants' efforts. Sustainability, usability, and visibility remain equally important dimensions of digital heritage management, with sustainability serving as a fundamental requirement for the other two. In the current version of the National Strategy, however, a different approach is taken, that combines these three dimensions. This will strengthen cooperation and synergy between parties during the implementation of the National Strategy. As the sector moves toward a single data space for cultural heritage, the three types of activities will all contribute to this goal. An integrated perspective also emphasises the importance of cross-institutional collaboration and the need for effective coordination between the development of services, networking, and infrastructure activities.

3. Strategic goals for 2025–2028

Connected heritage is a precondition for making historical sources widely accessible to users. Participants in the Dutch Digital Heritage Network are working together to make sure this precondition is met. In doing so, they are laying the foundation for the use of heritage in the digital domain, in both the short term and the long term. The National Digital Heritage Strategy provides guidance on how to accomplish this.

During the 2025–2028 period, the National Strategy will remain focused on sharing heritage information from the source. Much has already been achieved on this front in recent years. More and more heritage organisations have begun using facilities like the Network of Terms and the Dataset Register. Vendors of collection information systems have helped by making sure their software is compatible with these facilities. Digital heritage coaches at the provincial heritage support centres have launched programmes and expanded opportunities for knowledge sharing.

In the coming years, the heritage field will continue to build on these efforts by focussing on the following strategic goals.

GOAL A data space for cultural heritage for the entire Kingdom

By sharing data from the source and linking this data together, heritage stakeholders in the Netherlands have in recent years been working towards a national data space for cultural heritage. Each stakeholder contributes to this space from within their own specific context – whether a neighbourhood, village, city, province or region.

The European Netherlands however is only one part of a larger Kingdom, which also includes the public entities of Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius and the countries of Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten. The histories of the European and Caribbean parts of the Kingdom are inseparable. Accessing this shared past requires us to work together to share and connect heritage information of, from and about the Kingdom as a whole.

On the Caribbean islands, a lot of effort goes into making heritage accessible in digital form. Collections are being digitised and made available and searchable online. To this end, collection holders in the region are increasingly working together to connect heritage across institutional boundaries. In addition, heritage stakeholders in the Caribbean are taking steps to build networks and exchange knowledge through the Dutch Caribbean Digital Heritage Network, as well as the Dutch Digital Heritage Network. The aim of the participants of the Caribbean network is to make heritage – in all its forms – relevant to the communities they serve.

Building a data space for the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands still requires much effort – on both sides of the ocean. Parties in the Caribbean network seek to build on the knowledge gained in the European Netherlands about connecting heritage information. In order for this to be possible, they will also need access to the digital infrastructure. This will require tailored knowledge-sharing initiatives, and components of the infrastructure will need to be adapted and developed further. Since the current state of digital heritage differs from island to island, the facilities the network offers will need to accommodate a wide variety of needs. Heritage organisations in the European Netherlands can contribute to a more inclusive data space by making collections related to the Kingdom's shared past accessible in accordance with agreements.

GOAL Making heritage information widely usable

In order to be widely accessible, heritage information should also be made available according to general web standards: agreements about how data is shared and used online. Web standards allow us to access information that is scattered across the web. Adherence to such standards is necessary if we want users from other subfields – and from outside the heritage sector altogether – to be able to locate and work with heritage information effectively. The use of these standards facilitates exchange with data spaces in other domains, such as those focused on public sector information, research, education, or tourism.

The use of general web standards furthers accessibility not only for humans, but also for machines. For example, the standard known as Linked Data, which the Dutch Digital Heritage Network follows when connecting heritage information, ensures that computers can easily 'read' data and make connections between bits of information from different sources.[6] This makes heritage information suitable for use by algorithms, among others in (safe and responsible) AI applications. Another set of guidelines, Schema.org, describes how to represent data so it can be processed by search engines.[7] In this way, heritage can be shared around the globe and used in countless different contexts.

Over the next several years, the adoption of general web standards will be a key focus area. Greater efforts must also be made when it comes to data quality. Making heritage information easy to find and to use for both people and machines is only possible when the source data is of high quality to begin with, meaning it is both accurate and easily interpretable, such as item descriptions containing links to external terminology sources. In 2023, the data workshops were established to help collection holders clean up and enrich their datasets.[8] In the coming period, workshop participants will also explore whether AI can help with this process and will look for opportunities to collaborate with other relevant initiatives.

GOAL Towards a sustainable approach, from source to audience application

The ways in which heritage organisations present their digital collections has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades. After digitising their collections, larger institutions mostly tended to make them available through their own channels, such as their own institutional websites. Smaller organisations were more likely to share their data – if they had the resources to do so at all – on platforms centred around a particular topic or location, such as a provincial website. Today, more and more initiatives are bringing together data from larger and smaller organisations so that users can see all heritage in context.

The process of building platforms to combine heritage information from different organisations is not yet as efficient as it could be. Platforms are often developed using data that has not been sufficiently standardised, resulting in significant costs for making the data more uniform. Data enrichment also tends to take place at the platform level. Since no lasting improvements are made to the source holders' data, all of this work must be repeated each time. In addition, most platforms are developed for a specific project and are no longer updated after their launch, causing them to become obsolete quickly. Resources for developing heritage applications are scarce, so it is important to use them as effectively as possible.

A more sustainable approach would not only involve high-quality data and further standardisation at the source, but also the development of generic technical solutions for processing data for common use cases (such as functionality to display data on a map or in a timeline, or to browse through images). These are all prerequisites for the creation of a fully functional data space: one that allows each application to become an entry point into a much larger network of connected heritage. In addition to saving time and money, this approach is more environmentally friendly because it allows us to use heritage information and technology more efficiently.

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6. For more information about Linked Data, please see the Dutch Digital Heritage Network's website: https://netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/activiteiten/linked-data/.

7. For more information about these guidelines, please see https://schema.org.

8. For more information about the data workshops, please see the Dutch Digital Heritage Network's website: https://netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/activiteiten/datawerkplaatsen/.

Effective coordination among heritage stakeholders is also needed. Depending on their role, these stakeholders are responsible for ensuring that their data is made accessible as agreed (source holders), or for the proper functioning of applications (service providers).[9] In the coming period, the Dutch Digital Heritage Network will define the requirements and conditions for fulfilling these responsibilities more thoroughly.

GOAL Fostering a dynamic understanding of heritage

In recent years, people have begun to see the relationship between heritage and society in a different light. Heritage organisations have come to realise that the professionalisation of heritage management has unintentionally created a certain distance between the institutions charged with managing heritage and the people for whom they do it.[10] It is important to remember that it is people who give meaning to heritage.

In early 2024, the Netherlands signed the European Faro Convention.[11] This convention encourages member states to consider how to define heritage, why we should preserve it and for whom, and who should be involved. It draws attention to the role that heritage can play in society: not only as the bearer of memories and identities, but also as a driver of social cohesion, health, and well-being. This role is not static, but changes over time.

In the run-up to its implementation, there has been an increased focus on how citizens and communities can participate in the interpretation and safeguarding of heritage and its use in the here and now. Ideally, anyone who is interested should not only have access to heritage, but should also have a say in what is considered heritage and how it is handled. This requires a better balance between the management of heritage by professional organisations and input from individuals and communities.

This same balance is also important when it comes to building connected heritage. For example, the Faro Implementation Agenda calls for greater involvement, input, and decision-making power for (heritage) communities within the Dutch Digital Heritage Network.[12] To encourage greater participation, other parties in the network will need to adequately support these communities in using tools for finding and using digital heritage. Knowledge held by communities should be better utilised, also within professional heritage organisations. Alternative sources, such as non-institutional collections, must become part of the network of connected heritage.

Throughout this process, the Dutch Digital Heritage Network can learn a great deal from the Caribbean part of the Kingdom when it comes to the role of heritage and how to incorporate perspectives on this issue into the development of heritage activities. The Dutch Caribbean Digital Heritage Network, after all, takes the grounding of heritage in communities as a starting point.

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9. For more information about these roles, please see the following page on the DERA wiki: https://dera.netwerkdigitaalerfgoed.nl/index.php/Rollen.

10. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, in cooperation with the heritage field, *Onderweg naar Faro: Uitvoeringsagenda Faro (deel I)* (2022), https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/binaries/cultureelerfgoed/documenten/publicaties/2022/01/01/uitvoeringsagenda-onderweg-naar-faro/Uitvoeringsagenda_Onderweg+naar+Faro.pdf.

11. Council of Europe, *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society – Faro Convention* (treaty no. 199) (2005), https://rm.coe.int/1680083746.

12. See note 10.
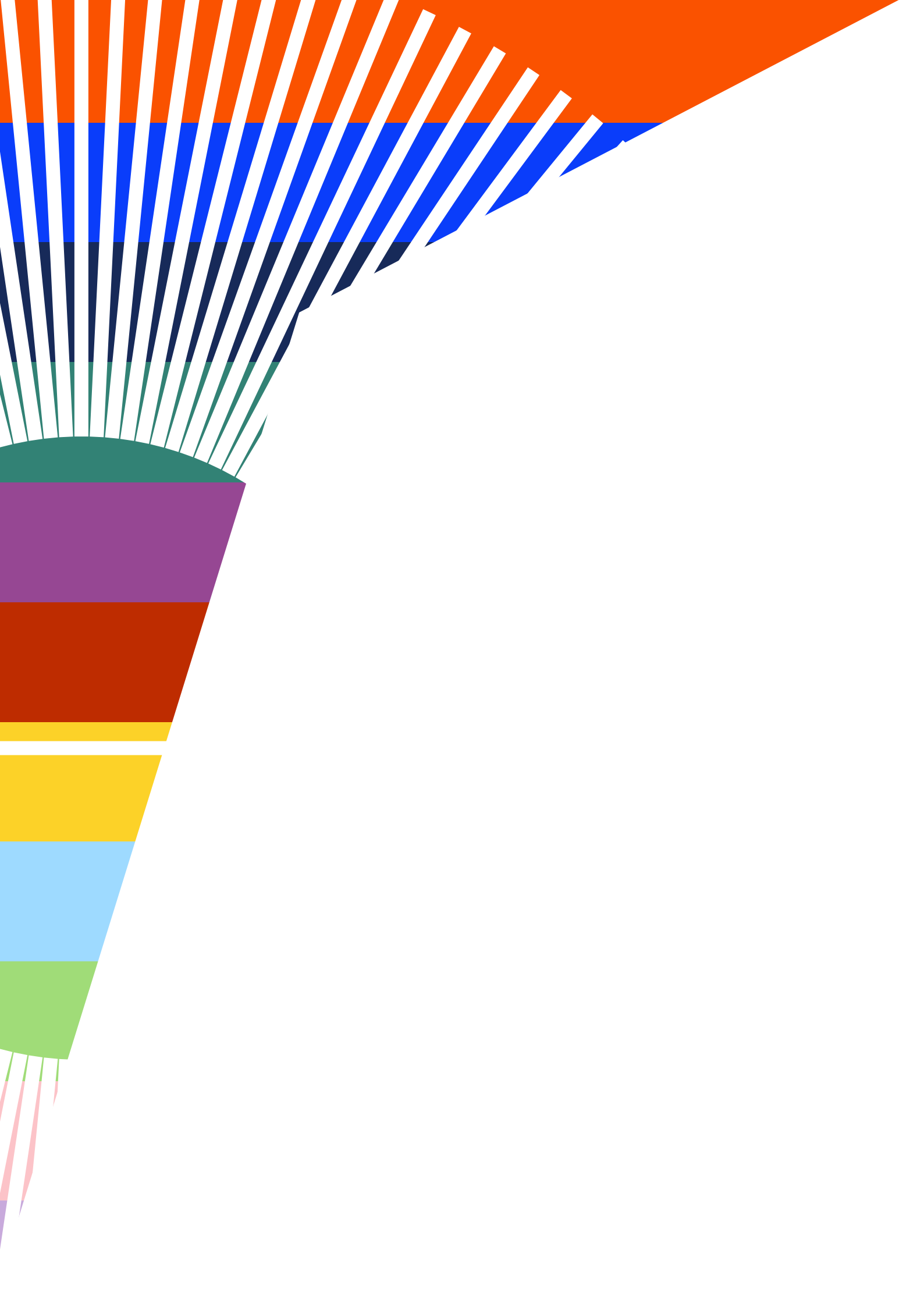
4. Contributing together – an agenda for the network

The agenda for the network makes the National Digital Heritage Strategy more concrete. It contains four lines of action that enable all partners in the Digital Heritage Network to contribute to its implementation, each in a way that aligns with their specific capabilities and practice.

How the agenda came about

The lines of action emerged from dialogues and workshops with heritage stakeholders in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. In these lines of action, the strategic goals of the National Strategy have been translated into practical steps that are based on a dynamic understanding of heritage. This aligns with the Faro Implementation Agenda, which calls for greater involvement and decision-making power for (heritage) communities within the Dutch Digital Heritage Network. Their heritage, indeed, also deserves a place within the broader network of connected heritage.

The four lines of action will be put into practice by individual partners, working groups, networks and various partnerships. Collaboration can take the form of new or existing alliances, including partnerships that connect heritage stakeholders from the European Netherlands with those in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

LINE OF ACTION Continuing to build a solid foundation

This line of action focuses on establishing a strong foundation for connected heritage. More and more organisations are currently developing – or have already implemented – collective agreements, standards, and facilities. These strategies make heritage information easier to find and to use. They result in heritage that is more accessible and more visible online, with greater ease of use. They also open up new opportunities for bringing connected heritage to the public.

Steps everyone can take:

- Work together: put expertise, technology, and financial resources to effective use and encourage cross-organisational teamwork for connected heritage.

- Leverage the agreements, standards, and facilities of the digital infrastructure to ensure that digital heritage remains accessible, connected, and visible in the long term.

- Work with an information plan for preserving, connecting, and presenting heritage information in a sustainable way, as part of an overall strategic plan for the organisation.

- Make heritage information inclusive and accessible and ensure that it is easy to find within the data space for cultural heritage.

LINE OF ACTION Contributing to an inclusive data space for cultural heritage

This line of action focuses on strengthening the data space for cultural heritage by making it more diverse. There will be a greater emphasis on incorporating heritage from all parts of the Kingdom, as well as community heritage and forms of intangible cultural heritage such as oral histories and stories. This will result in a network of connected heritage that transcends regional, national, and organisational boundaries and encompasses many different forms of heritage – a useful basis for a wide variety of applications.

Steps everyone can take:

- Pay particular attention to heritage information that reflects the shared history of our Kingdom.

- Improve the diversity of connected heritage by making participatory collecting, archiving, interpreting, and presenting part of everyday practice.

- Include intangible heritage, oral histories, and stories in the network of connected heritage.

LINE OF ACTION Making digital heritage easier to find and use

This line of action focuses on enabling heritage to be shared and used in a wide variety of contexts. Linked data allows computers to establish connections between information from different sources. This facilitates information exchange with existing and future data spaces across various domains, including government, research, education, and tourism.

Steps everyone can take:

- Make heritage information easier to locate by adhering to general web standards as well as domain-specific standards.

- Enrich metadata with the help of technology, such as safe and responsible AI applications.

- Record the provenance of heritage information in such a way that it stays accessible in the long term.

- Use inspiring examples to demonstrate the benefits of connected heritage for education, research, tourism, or the creative sector.

LINE OF ACTION A sustainable approach from source to application

This line of action focuses on maximising the effectiveness of all efforts to make digital heritage visible through audience applications. Developing a sustainable approach, in this context, not only requires expertise, high-quality heritage information, and standardisation at the source, but also an understanding of one's role and the use of generic technical solutions in the creation of applications.

Steps everyone can take:

- Use the digital infrastructure and adhere to the role-based responsibilities defined in the Digital Heritage Reference Architecture when developing audience applications.

- Experiment with new ways of making digital heritage visible, share experiences, and maintain the results.

- Make conscious decisions to reduce the environmental impact of digital heritage. This requires sharing knowledge and working together in order to reduce the carbon footprint of digital collections, data storage, websites, and social media.

Colophon

collaborating in
dutch digital heritage network

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

National Digital Heritage Strategy