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## CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARCHIVAL NETWORK IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Izlaganje sa znanstvenog skupa

*Rad daje kraću povijest arhiva i bavi se suvremenim razvojem arhivske mreže u Nizozemskoj, gdje postoje tri razine javne uprave: država, provincija i municij.*

*Početak 19. stoljeća u Haagu je osnovan Nacionalni arhiv. Mnogi su stari gradovi imali svoje vlastite arhive, a u jedanaest glavnih gradova provincija postojala su provincijska spremišta za arhivsko gradivo prethodnika provincija. U razdoblju od 1877. do 1888. godine država je preuzela provincijske arhive. Jedini je razlog preuzimanja bila želja da se osigura zaštita regionalne arhivske baštine.*

*Prvi nizozemski arhivski zakon donesen je 1918. godine. Postavio je osnove za mrežu vladinih arhiva: državni arhivi čuvaju gradivo državnih institucija, provincijske uprave i njihovih prethodnika. Municipalni arhivi čuvaju gradivo gradske uprave. Uz ove dvije vrste javnih spremišta određenih zakonom, postoje još dvije kategorije institucija koje čuvaju gradivo. Prve su arhivi crkava, udruženja i poduzeća, a drugu tvori veliki broj dokumentacijskih centara kao što su Bibliotečni muzej, Međunarodni institut za socijalnu povijest, Nizozemski institut za arhitekturu i mladi Foto i Filmski arhiv.*

*Državni arhivi tvore Državnu arhivsku službu. Od sedamdesetih godina postoji jak i odlučan pokret prema preoblikovanju slabo povezane grupe državnih arhiva u stvarnu državnu službu pod centraliziranom upravom i kontrolom. Nizozemske gradske uprave imaju veliku autonomiju, koju arhivski zakon također podržava i one su slobodne u svom izboru da arhivista postave ili ne postave. Uz izuzetak nekih pro-*

*ceduralnih odredbi, zakon ne daje opća pravila ili standarde za brigu o gradivu, niti u zakonu postoje osnove za organizacijske veze bilo između samih municipalnih arhiva ili između njih i državnih arhiva.*

*Takva je bila nizozemska arhivska mreža do 1998. godine kada su u Utrechtu spojeni municipalni i državni arhiv kako bi se osnovala nova, veća arhivska institucija. U isto su vrijeme počeli pregovori kako bi se osnovali novi zajednički arhivi u provincijama Overijssel i Zeeland.*

*U Groningenu se odvijao sličan proces. Provincijski arhiv u Groningenu je transformiran u državni arhiv krajem 19. stoljeća. Početkom 19. stoljeća staro je gradivo grada i provincije bilo preneseno u gradsku vijećnicu. Od 1918. nadalje gradivo provincije i grada je razdvojeno. Provincijski fondovi i zbirke ostaju pod brigom državnog arhivista, a novoimenovani municipalni arhivist se brine o gradivu nastalom djelovanjem grada. Budući da su državni i municipalni arhiv dijelili zajednički prostor, razdioba nije predstavlja ozbiljan problem za čitače. Tek je relativno nedavno, od sedamdesetih, situacija postala stvarno nezgodna, budući je zbog nedostatka prostora u zajedničkoj zgradi, municipalni arhiv bio prisiljen preseliti se u drugi dio grada. Krajem osamdesetih iznenada je donesena odluka da se Državni arhiv smjesti u novoj državnoj zgradi, a odlučeno je i da će se municipalni preseliti u istu zgradu.*

*U ljeto 1997. godine, nova arhivska zgrada otvorila je svoja vrata. Postoje zajednički ulaz i izložbena dvorana, zajednički prijemni prostor i kantina, zajednička soba za sastanke i velika, veličanstvena čitaonica s jednom jedinstvenom recepcijom, jednim zajedničkim općim pregledom fondova i zbirki i jednom serijom obavijesnih pomagala. Od prvog je dana svakodnevna praksa pokazala da su prednji i stražnji uredi pretijesno povezani, da je apsolutno nemoguće imati dvije različite sekcije zadužene za brigu o fondovima iza jedne integralne sekcije koja služi čitačima. Ako se problemi komunikacije i koordinacije žele izbjeći, a postići daljnji probici od sinergije, nepochodno je uvesti jedinstvenu rukovodeću strukturu.*

*U ovom je vremenu integracija državnih arhiva u provincijama s odgovarajućim partnerima službena politika Ministarstva kulture. Usvojeno je stajalište da za arhivske institucije više nije dovoljno čuvanje gradiva i njegovo davanje na korištenje. Spoznalo se da stvarni povjesničari ne koriste samo arhivsko gradivo, već jednako tako i druge izvore. Arhivi se stoga trebaju transformirati u opsežne povijesne centre, gdje će se uz gradivo čuvati i davati na korištenje i knjige, fotografije, tisak i filmovi. Arhivi trebaju posvetiti više pažnje obrazovanju, stvoriti programe suradnje sa školama, organizirati izložbe i druga izlaganja. Ministarstvo kulture danas govori o "regionalnim povijesnim centrima", naglašavajući tim izrazom široki raspon aktivnosti koje trebaju pokriti nove institucije. U slučaju suradnje između državnog arhiva i njegove municipalne dopune, ministar kulture, gradonačelnik i gradski vi-*

*ječnik jesu i ostat će nadležni za ono što se u arhivskom zakonu zove "zaštita" arhiva. Čuvanje arhivskih zbirki i fondova bit će u rukama upravnog direktora, koji će sjediniti dužnosti i kompetencije državnog i municipalnog arhivista.*

*Suvremen razvoj će dovesti do kraja dosadašnju Državnu arhivsku službu. Ona će se u budućnosti usredotočiti na čuvanje nacionalnih arhiva (gradivo središnje vlade i gradivo privatne provenijencije nacionalne važnosti). Teško je od regionalnog povijesnog centra očekivati da optimalno funkcionira i ostvari sva velika očekivanja bez aktivnog sudjelovanja provincijskih vlasti. Ministar kulture je oformio radnu grupu, koja će prikazati zahtjeve i mogućnosti novog arhivskog sustava Nizozemske i dati prijedloge. Buduća uloga provincija je bez ikakve sumnje jedno od središnjih pitanja u diskusiji koja stoji pred nama. Samo će vrijeme pokazati hoće li ta suradnja osigurati plodnu i trajnu ravnotežu između lokalnih i nadregionalnih interesa.*

*Sažetak izradila Živana Hedbeli*

Currently the structure of the public archives network in the Netherlands is changing in a way that will put an end to a situation that has lasted for more than a century. The strange thing is that with this change we will in a sense return to the constellation which existed in the 19th century, at least in that part of the country where I happen to be working.

What was this constellation like?

In the Kingdom of the Netherlands there are three layers of public government: the State, the Province, and the Municipality.

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Hague a national archives was established as a repository where the records of the central institutions of the former Republic of the Seven United Provinces would be kept. Many old towns had their own archives, the traditions of which in many cases go back to the era before the French Revolution. Furthermore, in the eleven provincial capitals there were provincial repositories for the archives of the predecessors of the provinces, the former autonomous provinces that had been the constituents of the pre-revolutionary State.

For the cultural heritage, the 19<sup>th</sup> century has not been a glorious time. Local authorities had hardly any notion of the value of the remnants of the past. Castles and manors-houses, townwalls and gates were demolished without many scruples, mobile objects of art were sold to the highest bidder, in most cases abroad, archives and libraries were neglected and wasted away in unsuitable buildings without professional custody. Especially in the last quarter of the previous century the State began to interest itself in the fate of the heritage under threat. The nobleman Jhr. mr. Victor de Stuers, a civil servant in the Ministry of Home Affairs, took the lead in this matter. In his view, the responsibility of the State should not be limited to the cultural heritage

of national importance. It should protect the heritage on the regional level as well. In the framework of this policy in the period between 1877 and 1888 the provincial archives were taken over by the State. Later on, these state archives in the provincial capitals were the obvious repositories for the old records of province-based branches of state agencies, such as courts of justice, prisons, and registries of mortgages. But, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this function of the state archives lay still far beyond the horizon. The only reason for the take-over was the desire to ensure the preservation of the regional archival heritage, consisting by that time almost entirely of records dating from before the French period.

The first Dutch archival law dates from 1918. It laid the foundation of a network of government archives which survived the new versions of the law of 1969 and 1995. The structure of this network is very simple: the state archives keep the records of the institutions of the state and those of the provincial government and their predecessors. The municipal archives keep the records of the municipalities. As is the case in many countries, Dutch public archives have in their custody also records of private provenance, such as archives of churches, associations, enterprises and individual persons. These records have not been transferred to the public archives by virtue of any legal prescription, but have been taken in custody as a result of agreements with the owners.

In addition to these two kinds of public repositories which are governed by law, there are two other categories of recordkeeping institutions. The first one is that of church, association and company archives, the second consists of a large number of specialised documentation centres such as the Literary Museum, the International Institute for Social History, the Netherlands Institute for Architecture, and, more recently, the Photo- and Filmarchives. These archives and documentation centres do not belong to the network of public archives in the sense of the archival law and their holdings are not subject to the archival legislation.

The state archives make up the State Archival Service. At first there was not so much of a real National Service. In accordance with the technical and cultural conditions in government administration of the time the state archives in the provinces were more or less independent institutions, at the head of each of which stood a state archivist. The General State Archive in the Hague, where the records of the central government were being kept, was led by the General State Archivist, whose position among his colleagues state archivists I would prefer to characterize as *primus inter pares* rather than as chief. Only from the seventies on there has been a strong and purposeful movement towards reshaping the loose bunch of state archives into a real State Service under centralised command and control. Nevertheless, as a inevitable consequence of their holdings and, closely linked up with these, the knowledge and professional interests of their staff, the state archives in the provinces remained sim-

ply what they were: regional cultural institutions with strong ties with other agencies and associations in the field. They used to play an important role in regional cultural life (they counted as what in officialese is called 'parts of the basic cultural infrastructure') without being themselves parts of the administrative structure of the provincial government.

Dutch municipalities enjoy a large amount of autonomy which is also honoured by the archival law. Municipalities are still free in their choice to appoint an archivist or not. With the exception of some procedural prescriptions the law offers no general rules or standards for the custody of records. Nor is there any basis for organisational links between municipal archives among themselves or with state archives. Most municipal archives heed closer connections with the institutions of the local administration and with their direct cultural environment than with other archival institutions and the profession in general. As I said earlier, some of them continue old traditions, in some cases together with town libraries of museums. Many smaller sized municipalities, not being able to maintain a appropriately staffed repository of their own, sought and found co-operation with their neighbours and established common archives. All kinds of co-operation among municipal archives is based on voluntariness. Attempts at co-operation frequently meet with local differences. Nevertheless, there are many examples of successful joint efforts, both in the field of cultural projects and in the custody of records.

Such was the Dutch archival network up to the year 1998, when the municipal and state archives in Utrecht merged to establish a new, large archival institution. At the same time talks started between the State Archival Service and the municipalities in Zwolle en Middelburg in order to set up new common archives in the provinces of Overijssel and Zeeland.

I myself, as director of the municipal archive of Groningen, am closely involved in a similar process. Like the others, the provincial archive of Groningen was transformed into a state archive at the end of the 19th century. It is not without reason that our province is called after its main town: Groningen. This town has always been the only big population centre in the region. Already in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the old records of the town and the province had been transferred to the town hall of Groningen. In a singular spirit of harmony they had been kept there by an official who carried the title of provincial archivist. Between 1882 (the year in which the provincial archivist became a state official) and 1918 (the year when the archival law forced the municipality of Groningen to establish an archives repository of its own) the records of town and province of Groningen were kept by a State Archivist.

From 1918 on the records from the province and the town were separated. The provincial holdings remained under the custody of the state archivist, the newly ap-

pointed municipal archivist took care of those that originated from the town. Because state and municipal archives shared a common accommodation the splitting up caused no serious trouble for the public.

Only in relatively recent times, in the seventies, the situation became really inconvenient as lack of space in the common building forced the municipal archives to move to a building in another part of the town. This physical separation happened to take place at the same time as the public interest in archival information showed a sudden increase. A rapidly growing number of professionals and amateurs had to be referred from one archive to the other and vice versa. For the visitors the reason why was often hard to understand. And really, it takes some time to explain to people who have no special knowledge of institutional history why one should go to the State Archive in order to find the records of the Chamber of Commerce of the town of Groningen, but that you can find the archive of the medieval monastery of Ter Apel, some 50 kilometers outside the town, in the municipal archives.

When, in the middle of the eighties, my colleague in the state archive was working out plans for a new repository, this seemed to offer a splendid opportunity to do something about this problem. Unfortunately, the State Archival Service wouldn't hear of a close co-operation in a new common building. A few years later, when suddenly the decision was made to accommodate the State Archive in a new large multi-purpose office building, I was told to prepare plans for moving to the same building and to find out in what ways state and municipal archives should be able to co-operate without losing their independence and identity.

I shall not bother you with a comprehensive survey of all problems we encountered in making plans for the construction of the building and the co-operation. The lack of a clear idea of the goal we were supposed to reach, the doctrine that both institutions should embark on this enterprise on equal terms, as well as the fact that company cultures in state and municipal archives had grown far apart, all this made that the preparations went on rather laboriously. Our guiding line was that at least the public should gain and that we should do everything to present researchers a common face.

As the new archives building opened its doors, in the summer of 1997, the results of our efforts did not look that bad, after all. A common entrance and exposition hall, a common reception and canteen, common meeting rooms and a large, magnificent reading room with one single counter, one common general survey of the holdings and one series of finding aids. The public appreciated the new facilities even more than we had expected and hoped for. Staff members however were less happy. From the first day on daily practice showed that front and back office are so closely interconnected, that it is absolutely impossible to have two different sections in charge of custody of the holdings behind an integrated section serving the public.

If problems in communication and co-ordination should be avoided and if further advantages should be gained out of the synergy, it would be necessary to implement a unified management structure. But in order to do so, state and municipal archives should be transformed into one new archives institution.

As I said before, in the meantime elsewhere in the Netherlands other attempts at co-operation between a state archive and a municipal archive had been undertaken (Utrecht, Zwolle, Middelburg). They differed from the Groningen model above all in this respect, that their direction was top-down, the initiative coming from the top levels of local and national decision making, whereas in Groningen we had to work our way up to the authorities.

At this moment, the merger of state archives in the provinces with appropriate partners is the official policy of the Ministry of Culture. In its view, keeping records and making them available to the public is not longer enough for an archival institution. Archivists should become 'brokers of knowledge of historical information', whatever this may mean. Secondly, there is a need for more modern, digitalised finding aids and for the communication of archival information via the Internet. Furthermore, one has realised that real-life historians use not only records but other sources as well. Archives should therefore transform themselves into broad historical centres where in addition to records also books, photographs, prints and films are being kept and studied. Finally, the archives should pay more attention to education, set up co-operation programmes with schools, and organize exhibitions and other presentations.

In the view of the Ministry officials and the management of the State Archival Service the state archives in the provinces are not able to reach these goals. Because the minister of culture doesn't want to allocate more money, the solution is being sought in co-operation with local partners. The favourite candidates are the municipal archives in the main towns of the provinces. But also other combinations are possible, e.g. with libraries, museums, or documentation centres. In the Ministry of Culture officials nowadays like to speak of 'Regional Historical Centres', stressing with this term the wide range of activities to be covered by the new institutions.

It is believed that co-operation will stop inefficient spending. It will be the task of the managers of the Regional Historical Centres to cover the costs of the desirable policy with the expected profits of the synergy.

The most likely status of the new institutions is that of what in our country is called an 'independent agency of government administration'. The governing body must be composed in such a way, that the legal responsibility for the archives can remain where it belongs. In the case of co-operation between a state archive and its municipal counterpart the Minister of Culture and Mayor and Aldermen are and will remain in charge of what is called in terms of the archives law 'taking care' of the ar-

chives. The custody of the holdings will be in the hands of a managing director, who will combine the duties and competences of a state and a municipal archivist.

I have already mentioned the reasons why co-operation with regional partners is an attractive option for the State Archival Service. Without going in too much detail I want to consider some other arguments in favour of this co-operation.

- \* Over the last decades the field of the archivist has extended in such a way that several specialisms have emerged. In order to keep pace with the developments an archival institution needs a larger and more differentiated staff than, say, 25 years ago. The technical demands that must be met in merely preserving the records, digital data-processing and communication require huge investments and a cost-intensive maintenance. Under these circumstances it is impossible to survive without extension of scale, and, consequently, broadening of the basis.
- \* With a view to the character of its holdings and its role in society a state archive in a province had first of all a regional function, without being a part of the provincial administrative structure. A merger with a municipal archival institution, which is firmly embedded in the local administration and cultural environment will help to make a better use of local networks, offers better conditions for flexibly and adequately responding to the demands and opportunities in the region, which are necessarily out of sight of a central management in the Hague.
- \* In order to establish and to appreciate the value of pieces of the regional cultural heritage a kind of knowledge is required that is hardly found outside the region itself. Preservation and use will therefore benefit from a management which is sensitive to regional issues.
- \* The state archives service's focus has been directed first of all on the preservation of records, whereas municipal archives frequently have a long tradition in collecting all kinds of documentation. Co-operation will bring about complete heritage centres where various kinds of sources for the study of history are being kept and studied.
- \* A strong regional archival institution can develop into a regional centre of professional expertise, not only in the field of history, but also with respect to the preservation of archives, records and information management, access and communication methods. It may offer professional coaching to staff members of the surrounding municipalities and other workers in the field.  
In addition to all these positive expectations there are of course also some question marks to be set. I want to mention two issues I would like to consider briefly.
- \* The scheme of regional co-operation will inevitably bring about the end of the State Archival Service that we have known until now;
- \* The position of the provincial government is unclear.

### **The State Archival Service**

As I said, the recent development will put an end to the State Archival Service as we know it. In the future it will concentrate on the custody of the National Archives (records of the central government and records of private provenience with a national impact). The management of the regional record centres will no longer be directly subordinate to the central authorities in the Hague. This means the loss of the advantages of central steering. This problem is the more urgent as the rapid developments in the field of information and communication technology require more and more standardisation. When the breaking up of hierarchical lines will do away with the possibility of enforcing standardisation and adjustment through a nation-wide network of state archives, it will be necessary to look for other instruments with which a desired level of co-operation can be ensured. One of these is already there: recently a co-ordinating board has been established in which representatives of various kinds of archival institutions take part and which will act as the official counterpart of the Ministry of Culture.

In addition to that, much can be gained by the establishing of a comprehensive set of quality standards for the functioning of archival institutions, in combination with a new system of archives inspection.

### **The role of the Provinces**

In the opening of my contribution I said that we are returning to the organisational picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the one that was in place before the state took over the regional archives. It will be clear to you that the similarity between the new and the old situation is not more than a small one, especially in a formal sense.

In fact the only similarity is that in the management of regional archives the regional element will once again play a leading role. The difference with the 19<sup>th</sup> century however is great. In the management of the new Regional Historical Centres there is no substantial role for the provincial government. The reason is that, according to Dutch archival legislation, the provinces have no task of lasting care for their (and other regional records), or in other words: they have no public repositories of their own. At the same time the province is the authority responsible for regional culture. In the new constellation a province might decide to take part in the local Regional Historical Centre and bring in some additional features. In some provinces there is a lively attention for the work of archives, in others there is no interest at all. But common to authorities of all levels and all places is the fear for new structural expenses. So what may be expected is largely unclear.

As a matter of fact, it is hardly possible for a Regional Historical Centre to function optimally and to meet the high expectations without an active participation of the provincial authorities. The Minister of Culture has set up a working part which

will map the demands and possibilities for a new archival system in our country and must come forward with proposals. The future role of the provinces will without any doubt be one of the central issues in the discussions that lie before us.

### **The Groningen example**

These organisational pros and cons lay beyond the horizon of the average researcher. In Groningen there is still no formal fusion, but our public service is fully integrated. This is what matters to the public and where the most important objectives have already been reached.

Because in our province there are no other old and large towns, we can say that, if anywhere, then at least in Groningen there is a possibility for the bilateral co-operation between state and municipal archives to result in a comprehensive regional archival service. At this moment, the process is in a crucial stage. One thing is already clear, the fusion will not yield any money, at least not in the short term. On the other hand, if we manage to find the means to bridge the financial gaps of the first years, the perspective of a really new and interesting institution will become reality.

Although it will go to my heart, seeing the municipal archive which I led for more than 20 years being absorbed in a much bigger organisation, I am very happy with the forthcoming merger. The municipal archives with its staff of 13 people is too small to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the new institution we can go on together with our colleagues of the state archive, without losing our regional face and our place in the cultural environment. Whether this co-operation will secure a fruitful and lasting balance between local and supra-regional interests only time can show.

#### Summary

### **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARCHIVAL NETWORK IN THE NETHERLANDS**

In the Netherlands a process is under way that will change the archival network thoroughly and strengthen the regional element in archives management. The state archives in the provinces will combine with the municipal archives of the provincial capitals to form new so called Regional Historical Centres. These new archival agencies, which will operate independently of the State Archival Service in The Hague, are expected to be better equipped than the existing ones to serve the public in a client-oriented and cost-effective way and to meet the technical demands of the information society. The paper gives a brief general survey of the situation and pays special attention to that in the province of Groningen, where state and municipal archives share a new accommodation and where a successful attempt has been made to integrate the public services of both institutions even before the process towards an official fusion started.