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Metamorfoze: The Dutch national preservation program

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Introduction

is the national Preservation programme of The Netherlands. It was launched in 1997. The name of the program was inspired by the title of a novel by one of the foremost Dutch 19th Century authors: Louis Couperus, which was published exactly 100 years earlier. The title, *Metamorfoze* (metamorphosis) was spelled with a Z instead of an S which is the regular spelling of the word in our language. Couperus used an onorthodox spelling in some of his novels. In *Metamorfoze* he describes the changes in an artists' life. The programme is about change too: from acid paper to microfilm or digital image, but it is also about keeping things from the past, preserving them. So the title of this nineteenth century novel seemed appropriate. And the Z could serve as an eyecatcher.

The programme is financed by the Ministry of education and culture and is coordinated at the KB by the National preservation Office (NPO). It provides a 70% subsidy for mass preservation projects. *Metamorfoze* focuses on the problem of the acid paper, which was used mostly in the 1840 to 1950 period.

How did we get this program under way? What are the principles, the method and the results. My presentation will focus on these issues.

Principles

These are the principles or necessities for a national preservation programme. If one of these is missing you have a problem.

1. Institutions (libraries, archives) must be aware that their collections are in need of preservation measures. Whether they are threatened by acid paper decay or suffering from any other type of damage. In the

Netherlands the problems were being underestimated or the attention of libraries was focused on other tasks, so the NPO had to raise awareness.

2. Substantial funding for dealing with preservation problems on a national level is necessary. Private or institutional funding can hardly be sufficient. So government funding should be obtained. This means that the problem has to be put firmly on the political agenda. This also was a task for the NPO.
3. A national preservation programme is a joint effort of all institutions participating. Cooperation is the basis of the success of such a program. Institutions that already have expertise in preservation issues must be prepared to share their knowledge with others.
4. Which brings me to the issue of expertise. It is of great importance that expertise on preservation methods is present. If you are dealing with mass preservation for instance, there have been efforts in the past that have not led to satisfactory results. (Bad microfilming, wrong deacidification methods, using acid materials for wrapping and boxing. The Dutch NPO has brought together as much expertise as possible and has shared that knowledge with the participants in the program.
5. Finally, no preservation program without infrastructure and logistics. Whether you are doing large-scale restorations, wrapping, boxing and improving storage facilities, or mass deacidification, microfilming and digitisation, workflow, transport facilities, administration and control. All these things have to be well planned, organised and monitored and evaluated afterwards.

Background

At this point you might ask: how did you get there. In The Netherlands it took us almost ten years.

We started with research: focusing on the acid-paper problem our first concern was to establish whether there was a problem, what was its cause and where did it exist. Need assessment studies were carried out, resulting in conclusions that were published: 1840-1950 was the key-period, large numbers of books and documents in Dutch libraries and archives were already brittle or in danger.

Step two, we had to make inventories. How many manuscript collections, books, periodicals and newspapers from this period were still present in libraries and archives, how bad was their condition and what was their importance. In view of the quantities we were dealing with it was clear from the beginning that choices had to be made and priorities had to be set.

In the early nineties a platform was created for further discussion on the issue. A cooperation of the National Library and the National Archives. There were meetings, workshops, conferences and reports which carried the flame for several years. This drew the attention of politics

Politics

But first of all I have to point out that in the Netherlands from the early nineties on there has been a certain degree of political concern on the issue of preservation of our paper heritage. The ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences furnished funding for research and inventories.

For preservation in archives and museums a large budget was made available in the nineties, the so called Deltaplan. This was an overall plan to (aanpakken achterstanden) preservation in Dutch heritage institutions. Libraries were not included in this plan.

But a dialogue with libraries on preservation was already going on in these years. The KB carried out several specific research projects for mass preservation of library materials. And finally in 1996 we developed a scenario for a national preservation programme.

Based on this scenario political decisions were made: The Ministry provided 8 million Euro to carry out a national preservation program for the duration of 4 years. We could get started.

Approach

The Metamorfoze Program is based upon selection. To reduce the enormous quantity of the endangered material to reasonable proportions, priorities were set to enable a practical approach.

We calculated as well as we could what we would be able to accomplish with the budget provided. The Ministry wanted hard figures. How many books and documents could be preserved in four years and what would be the situation after the program had been carried out. This led to a down-to earth and cost-effective practice.

Selection criteria

First we defined the criteria for selecting library material for the program. From the millions a choice had to be made. We followed the suggestions of the Selection Scenario of 1996.

These involved:

- All material must originate from the 1840-1950 period
- Only institutions with a preservation function and policy can participate. This excludes most public libraries
- All material must be of national importance. This excludes regional and local collections.
- All material must be of Dutch origin. This is based on the idea that each country has a responsibility for its own cultural heritage. This excludes foreign material But an exception is made for former colonies.
- Only one copy of a book, periodical or newspaper is preserved. For books this may not be necessarily the best copy. Comparising copies would be very time-consuming and beyond any budget. For newspapers and periodicals an attempt is made to create an ideal copy for preservation by bringing together the holdings of several institutions.
- Books will not be further selected on their contents. It has proven difficult to establish what is important and what is not, now or in the future. In our view a natural selection of what is worth to be preserved has already taken place. Libraries have acquired these books, and kept them available for over hundred years at considerable cost. This justifies an effort to preserve them now.

When these selection criteria for a national preservation programme were applied to the books and documents kept in Dutch libraries, we faced a problem that was still vast, but within reasonable limits.

Figures

We are now dealing with

400.000 books

30.000 volumes of periodicals

1500 newspaper titles

Two million manuscripts and letters in 500 collections

Preservation Projects

The preservation projects within the Metamorfoze programme can be divided in five subcategories:

1. Collections
2. Books
3. Newspapers
4. Periodicals

Collections

We have defined three types of collections:

1. Literary collections. Archives or libraries of Dutch authors, publishers and literary periodicals or societies, but also including children's books, song books, theatre, trivial literature.
2. Collections of cultural interest. Archives or private libraries of important scientists, artists, research institutes, firms or organisations. A very wide range from arts and sciences to industry, politics, sports and games.

3. Collections of international value. Here we transcend the national cultural heritage. I said before that the programme preserves only material of Dutch origin. The Dutch government considers it her responsibility to preserve these collections.

Because of their ensemble value collections are preserved as a whole. So the programme does not set priorities **within** collections. The only condition is that the majority of the material is from the 1840-1950 period.

We do make distinctions and set priorities **between** collections. We have drawn up lists of collections, based on extensive research and enquiries and devised methods to establish their preservation need. This is mostly based on a calculation of their present condition, their risk of further deterioration and their scientific or cultural value.

This has resulted in lists of about

- 200 literary collections
- 250 collections of cultural interest.
- 23 collections of international value.

Books

For setting priorities for the 400.000 printed books we have used the results of a damage survey carried out by the Royal Library of The Netherlands in 1991. This survey was the basis for our 1840-1950 approach, but it also gave an indication of the paper condition by decade. It appeared that the worst paper originates from the 1880-1890 period. So it seemed obvious that a preservation programme should give priority to books from this period and subsequently work in both directions towards 1840 and 1950.

Newspapers

As everyone knows the overall quality of newspapers is by far the worst. So in 1994 we had already carried out a pilot project for preservation of newspapers in the region of The Hague. We applied the same method in a large Metamorfoze project for preservation of 50 newspapers published nationwide. This method involved checking of all newspapers page by page. And making lists of pages or issues lacking and when necessary lending copies from different institutions, libraries, archives and publishers to complete the sets.

These institutions could profit by receiving a copy of the microfilm (for free or with discount, depending on the size of their contribution).

Furthermore, small reparations were carried out.

A project for preserving newspapers from the DutchEast Indies will start this year.

Two projects for digitising 3 newspapers that have already been put on microfilm will broaden the access of this material.

Periodicals

Periodicals require a slightly different approach. We first made a distinction between scholarly periodicals and popular magazines of general content. It appears that the paper quality of the latter category is generally worse so they should be given priority. The vast number of titles remaining made it necessary to narrow down this category.

We focus on:

- Illustrated magazines
- Nationwide distribution
- Timespan of publication more than 25 years within period 1840-1950

This resulted in a list of 35 periodicals.

In the periodicals project, which started in 2001 we apply the same procedures as we did for the newspapers:

- Page by page checking
- Completion of incomplete sets
- Minor restorations

In this project we benefit much from the experience of the newspaper project

Method

The focal points of the programme are microfilming, registration, and reliable storage of the paper originals. All originals are being repaired when necessary, wrapped and boxed acid-free and stored under optimal conditions. On a smaller scale deacidification and digitisation is applied.

- The NPO has drawn up guidelines for microfilming, following existing international standards for preservation microfilming, but also adding new elements. In the Royal Library a specialised microfilm unit was set up. Microfilm firms in the Netherlands were invited to meet our preservation microfilm standards and participate in the programme. Two of them did.
- Registration takes place in the national, automated cataloguing system (GGC/Pica), thus facilitating access to the books and documents filmed, but also preventing printed material to be microfilmed more than once. The same is possible on a European level, because these data are also delivered to the European register on Microform Masters (EROMM).
- The program demands that the participating libraries provide adequate storage for their material after preservation has taken place. If an institution cannot meet these requirements, it is excluded from participation. Of course the possibility exists to store the material (temporarily) elsewhere.
- Deacidification is applied to material which we expect to benefit most from this method. Criteria for selection involve presence of woodpulp and acid degree in the paper and sufficient stability of the binding and the paper itself. We are using the Bookkeeper method which is provided by the Dutch firm Preservation Technologies. We have been monitoring the process closely and in cooperation with PT some improvements have been made.
- We consider digitisation as such not yet a reliable preservation method. Digitisation projects within the Metamorfoze program focus on access. Digitisation can only take place after microfilming, using the microfilm as an intermediate.

Scope and procedure

- Metamorfoze has to deal with a wide range of materials: manuscript letters, printed books, illustrated magazines, newspapers each with their different preservation demands. Furthermore different types of participants are involved in the programme: libraries, archives, museums and research institutes, each having a different approach towards preservation. This makes the program complex, but it is also its strength: the wide scope of Metamorfoze is one of the most important reasons that it is now firmly settled in the Netherlands.
- Another important factor is standardisation. The guidelines that were set up for Metamorfoze preservation projects are now accepted throughout the country. A number of projects are being carried out outside the programme, using our standards and guidelines.
- The bottom line is quality control. The results of each project are being thoroughly checked by specialists from the NPO. This has increased the confidence in the program, both by the heritage institutions and the government.

Success Factors

There are several other factors that have contributed to the success of the program

- From the start the approach of the NPO towards potential participants was pro-active. We didn't lean backward beside our pot of gold waiting for things to happen. We actually travelled around the country visiting libraries, telling them (!) that they held collections that were in need of preservation and generously offering them 70% subsidy. There were situations that the libraries were not even aware of the presence of these collections. Sometimes a lot of talking and calculating was needed before a project proposal was submitted.
- In these years most of the knowledge about mass preservation was concentrated in the KB. We were inclined to tell others what to do. Gradually the other participating institutions became more and more involved in the

programm and made tyheir own contributions to standards and procedures, infrastructure and logistics of the program as a whole. The institutions became aware of their own responsibility. A fine result is the publication this year of the Handbook Metamorfoze, the result of the cooperation of a number of participants in the programme.

- The importance of publicity cannot be stressed enough. Two staff members of the NPO are spending most of their time, making our newsletter, keeping the website and discussion list updated, writing articles, organising workshops, conferences and seminars and promoting the program wherever and whenever possible. We have learned that explaining the necessity of this program once is not enough. You have to tell the same story over and over again. To the heritage institutions, to the politicians, and to the general public.
- You also have to look forward. Look at new developments in preservation methods. Conduct research and publish the results (in paper and on the web). Metamorfoze has published ten reports on issues as deacidification, microfilming and digitisation, speed of acid paper decay and other subjects. Research carried out in the earlier years has since then been put into practice. And now, again we are preparing for the future.
- Finally, in the Netherlands we have been fortunate to find a partner in the National Library Fund, an influential group of former politicians and managers who has been succesful in lobbying on behalf of our paper heritage.

Problems

I will no not only tell the success story but also to make some remarks on problems and setbacks.

- From the beginning a number of participating libraries experienced diffucilities in setting up project organisations and conduct project management.
- Calculating costs of preservation projects has proven very hazardous. Estimates of numbers of exposures were sometimes far from accurate, with consequences for costs.
- Time management within the projects was a problem too. Many projects exceeded their calculated time limits by far.
- Institutions could not always match the 30% of the preservation costs themselves. No budget for large-scale projects was available or preservation policy was directed at other, mostly older material.
- A problem remaining to this day is the quality of microfilms made by commercial microfilming firms. A constant monitoring of the production process, extensive instructions and frequent quality control is consuming much time of the specialists of the NPO.

Results 1997-2004

The first phase of Metamorfoze was concluded in 2000. In that year the Ministry decided that continuation of the program was necessary and provided another 10 million Euro for the period 2001-2004.

These are the results in 2004:

Microfilmed

65.000 books 1870-1909

50 newspapers

35 periodicals

150 literary collections

50 collections of cultural interest

15 collections of international value

Deacidified:

6000 books

Digitised:

12 Literary collections/highlights
3 newspapers 1900-1930

Research:

15 reports

Now I go back to the figures I mentioned at the beginning. Where do we stand in 2004?

	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>
Books	16%	84%
Newspapers	14%	86%
Periodicals	7%	93%
Literary collections	76%	24%
International collections	43%	57%
Cultural collections	19%	81%

As you can see we have done a good job for the collections. But we will have a long way still to go with books, newspapers and periodicals. How are we going to do that?

At this moment all efforts are aimed at structural government funding for a long-term period. We calculated that the job can be done in 20 years time with 5 million Euro a year.

We will have to focus on:

- Books 1910-1950 and 1840-1869
- Regional newspapers
- Periodicals (here setting priorities is necessary)
- Remaining collections