The Digital Culture Continuum

Summary of the DEN Policy Plan 2017-2020

The Hague, 15 February 2016

This summary is based on the grant application that the Digital Heritage Netherlands (DEN) Foundation has filed with the Ministry of Culture in January 2016 in the context of the Cultural Basic Infrastructure 2017-2020, Article 3:44 (Digitization).
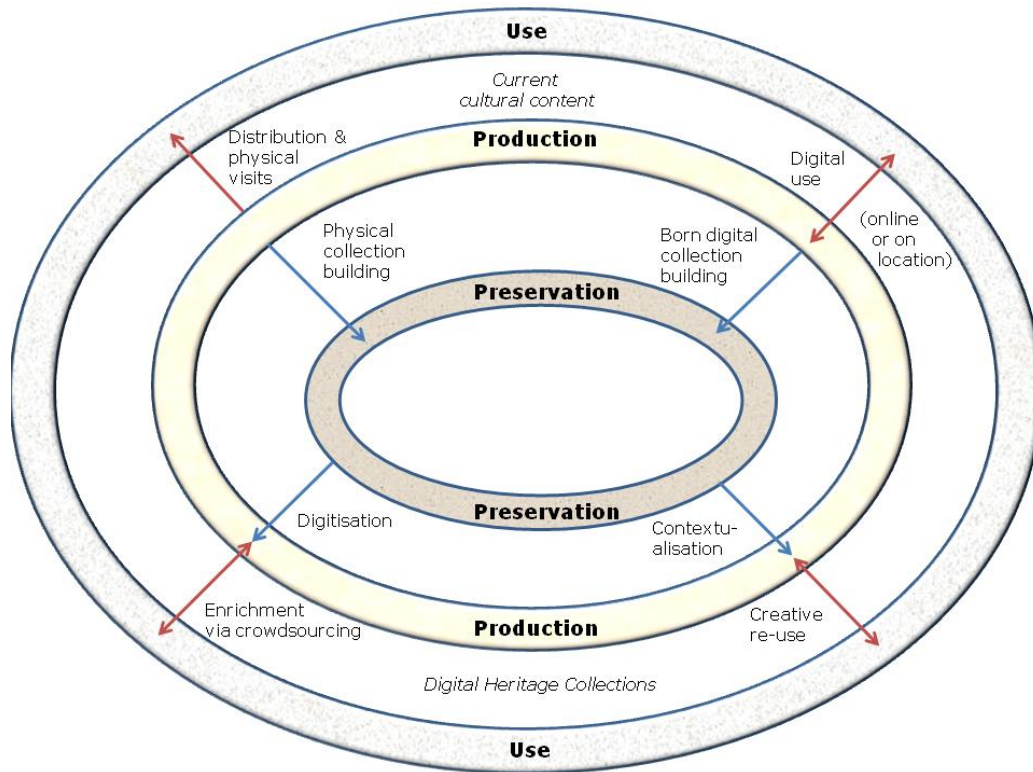
1. Introduction

In the *Agenda for Cultural Policy 2017-2020* by the Dutch Culture Council it was suggested that the current support function of DEN should be broadened. Since 1999 DEN has been supporting cultural heritage institutions in the area's of collection digitisation and setting up and running (shared) digital services with their digital collections. The Culture Council suggested that DEN, from 2017 onward, should support all institutions in the cultural domain, as digitisation is also having a big impact on the way culture is being produced by artists, performers and other actors in the cultural domain. The Dutch Minister of Culture adopted this suggestion and invited DEN to submit a grant application for the publicly funded Cultural Basic Infrastructure for the period 2017-2020. The Minister added that the support function of DEN should focus on enhancing the national ICT infrastructure for cultural information and on strengthening cooperation between cultural sectors and between curators and users.

This summary presents three elements of DEN's policy plan for 2017-2020:

1. a model that DEN developed to represent an integrated approach to digital culture and digital cultural heritage, called the Digital Culture Continuum

2. some principles that scope the new role of DEN in the cultural sector;

3. a short description of the three core tasks that DEN will undertake in order to implement the policy plan.

2. The digital culture continuum

The idea for the Digital Culture Continuum (referencing to the Records Continuum as used in the context of e-government), emerged from the observation that production, distribution, use and preservation of culture are forming less and less a linear chain, but instead relate to each other in a dynamic, interactive way, where the stakeholders involved influence each other in a dynamic way. Specific functions are not (or: no longer) reserved for specific parties. The distinction between what cultural resources are and what can be classified as cultural heritage is getting blurred in the digital domain. Because of this, a certain degree of convergence between the cultural sector and the heritage sector can be expected. For a person with a cultural interest it will become increasingly easier to choose between a current performance of a stage play or a recorded performance of some years ago.

The top half in the figure refers to cultural producers (performing arts, visual arts, music, film and photography, design, e-culture etc.) that jointly offer a current cultural programme to society. The bottom half refers to memory institutions that are individually and in collaboration creating large digital collections with cultural heritage. The essence of a continuum is, of course, that no sharp boundaries can be drawn and that roles and functions are becoming mixed. The double arrows indicate what the most impact is of digital interaction between providers and users, so where digital cultural information flows freely to and fro.

The traditional analog relationships between production, distribution, use and preservation are located in the figure at the top left(this is outside the scope of my organisation).

The area top right depicts how culture-producing institutions are using digital media in their current cultural offerings. It also indicates that born digital cultural collections are being formed. A selection from these collections are acquired by or donated to memory institutions for the purpose of long-term management and preservation.

Once heritage institutions have taken custody of physical cultural objects, they may decide to digitize them and create a new outlet for them (bottom left). Via crowdsourcing users can contribute to the digitisation and enrichment of the digitized objects.

The area bottom right refers to the main role of heritage institutions to contextualize born digital cultural heritage and support use and creative re-use. This re-use may result in the creation of remixed or remashed cultural content, which may be treated similarly to production of new cultural content, meaning that it may also become part of new cultural productions or be collected by memory institutions for long term preservation purposes.

3. Scope

During the policy period 2017-2020 it will be DEN's role to support and enhance all operations that makes this digital culture continuum run smoothly. In order to determine the role of DEN in this continuum, we have formulated the following principles:

a. DEN's role will focus on supporting the connections between the production, use and preservation of digital cultural offerings (both born digital and digitized).\

b. DEN will limit its active support to publicly funded cultural and heritage institutions.

c. DEN's involvement in activities of individual institutions should always translate to results that will be beneficial to wider collaborative efforts.

d. DEN is committed to working with intermediaries in the cultural sector that can multiply the knowledge and quality tools that DEN provides to specific user groups in the cultural domain.

e. DEN will actively seek connections with domains that are adjacent to the cultural sector (e.g. science, education), but will liaise mostly with authoritative intermediate/supporting parties in those domains, in order to identify opportunities for cross domain co-operation.

4. Core tasks

In the period 2017-2020, the following three tasks will be the heart of the work agenda of DEN:

a. Maximizing the use of digital cultural information (value creation)

The objective of this task is to influence policy making at cultural and heritage institutions in such a way that their digital cultural products and services can create high value for society. DEN will

contribute to understanding successful methods to create value with digital cultural content, both online and in a hybrid physical / digital context. DEN will take the social, the cultural and the economic perspectives into account. Within this task, DEN will create products that cultural and heritage institutions can use to enhance their digital producs and services.

2. Harmonizing digital collection development and the archiving of digital culture

In the model of the digital culture continuum, digital collections are a key element that connect cultural producers and heritage institutions. Domainwide collaboration in the area of acquistion, management, curation and long-term archiving of born digital culture is still in its infancy. DEN will make the effort to strengthen the relationships between cultural producers and heritage institutions in order to support the presence and visibility of born digital culture in the so-called Digital Collection Netherlands.

3. Enhancing acceptance of international quality criteria (effect of the continuum)

The use of open standards is an important precondition for the proper functioning of the digital culture continuum. DEN will promote the use of open standards not only to support the exchange of data and digital objects among culture-producing and heritage institutions, but also to strengthen the role of digital culture on global online platforms (eg. social media). The objective of this task is to promote the acceptance and implementation of open information technology standards and other quality criteria for the purpose of open exchange and wide use of digital cultural content.