

Libraries in the information society: cooperation and identity

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Introduction

Like most European countries, The Netherlands embraces ambitious targets for the knowledge society. In a knowledge-based society, economic growth, instead of being generated by the traditional production factor *labour*, is generated by the factor *knowledge*. Three elements carry fundamental importance within this development: the (financial) investment in knowledge, education and training standards, and innovative capabilities. A further essential aspect is that knowledge must be entrenched in society in the broadest sense. Libraries and information professionals traditionally play an important role in this respect. It is presently observed that The Netherlands is significantly challenged in meeting its formulated objectives for the knowledge society. Likewise, there are considerable gaps in terms of the level of availability and sharing of knowledge for society at large.

Culture, as much as knowledge, delivers an important contribution to the process of innovating society. Digitisation enables new forms of cultural participation.

Information literacy and media savvy are an important requirement in order for citizens to be able to function purposefully in the new reality which is created by digitisation and in which media have become ubiquitous and intertwined. A culture policy on the part of the national government is needed to ensure that all citizens are included as cultural participants in society. Key elements include participation in amateur arts, anchoring culture in the education system, and improving the accessibility of art (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap, 2007).

Libraries, too, play a role in this.

As in many countries, the Dutch library system is very much decentralised, in the sense that the system is funded through various agencies and that there is limited

cooperation. The present situation is regarded as an impediment in terms of enabling the library system to fulfil the role one would expect it to fulfil in an information society. This chapter explains why it is necessary to intensify cooperation and describes how this is currently being pursued within the Dutch library system, among others, through the creation of a national infrastructure.

The Dutch library system

In the Netherlands, three categories of libraries exist that are available to the public: public libraries, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) (National Library of The Netherlands), and the university libraries. A description of the three categories is given below.

Public libraries

The first public libraries in The Netherlands were established by private initiatives at the beginning of the 20th century. The majority of public libraries in those days were in the cities. However, after the Second World War, large regional libraries known as *Provinciale Bibliotheekcentrales* were set up to support the smaller municipalities with the provision of library services. Traditionally, the social function of the public libraries was to endorse the fundamental values of the constitutional democracy: freedom and equality. It is the duty of the government to encourage diversity (of information supply, reflecting a range of opinions and interests), independence (objective and independent service provision), accessibility (physically accessible and affordable services) and to safeguard the quality of the public library system (cohesion and effectiveness of the library system). The social significance of the

public library extends to the following domains (WRR, 2005):

- **Democracy:** providing opportunity for citizens to become acquainted with a range of viewpoints to encourage individual opinion and social participation
- **Education:** supporting life-long learning, with ample attention to the development of reading, language and media education
- **Culture:** stimulating cultural participation by actively presenting cultural heritage material and other cultural expressions, in conjunction with other cultural institutions
- **The economy:** providing working people with access to professional, academic or scientific knowledge and information
- **Leisure time:** offering opportunity for people in their own time and own environment to read, listen to, or view media, for example, by being able to take out or digitally access books and other reference materials

The administration of Dutch libraries in many cases is organised under a foundation structure. However, libraries are primarily funded from the public purse, while also raising contributions for the use of the services they provide. Since 1987, the funding of public libraries has been fully decentralised, and the municipalities and provinces are now themselves responsible for all library funding and planning policy. The national government continues to be responsible for the cohesion, effectiveness and quality of the public library system. As the national government does not earmark the funding which it allocates to the provinces and municipalities, there is a degree of variation in terms of resources made available for libraries. As a result, notable differences have arisen with respect to the quality of the services provided. Of the public libraries, a handful are so-called 'Plus libraries': libraries which offer academic services to all regional libraries and their customers. For some years now, the government has used an additional stimulus subsidy to stimulate the libraries' innovation process on two levels:

- **Restructuring:** creating basic services - libraries to serve the needs of multiple municipalities and provincial networks, and introducing a nationwide quality assurance system

- **Library innovation and social (re)positioning:** improving and broadening the social scope of the library services

An important area for attention is the building of a digital public library. This facility is being developed jointly by a network of public libraries in order to establish a synchronised collective of national, regional and local digital services.

The provincial library organisations have been transformed into provincial library service organisations based in the province. These organisations are funded provincially, and quality can vary from one province to another.

The KB, National Library of the Netherlands

The KB was founded in 1798. Since 31 August 1993 it has been an autonomous administrative body, financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science.

The main activities of the KB are:

- Preservation, management, documentation and accessibility of the national cultural heritage
- Deposit library for Dutch printed and electronic publications and the national bibliography
- Research library for the history, language and culture of the Netherlands
- Stimulating and coordinating a common information infrastructure for Dutch libraries
- Centre of expertise for digitisation, preservation and digital preservation

In contrast to most other national libraries, the KB archives Dutch publications on a voluntary basis; publishers are free to decide if they wish to donate publications to the KB. In many other countries, this depot function is a mandatory one.

Notwithstanding this, some 95% of all Dutch publications are deposited in the KB.

Over the next four years, the KB will be working intensively to realise a digital library that will offer everyone access to all digital and printed publications appearing in The Netherlands. This implies that, increasingly, digital born publications will be acquired, in parallel with the digitisation of the existing printed collection. Another

priority is the long-term archiving of digital information. Since 2002, the KB has had a digital depot (e-depot) for digital publications, and assuring long-term archiving and access is one of its priorities. Also archived in the digital depot of the KB are digital periodicals of the large academic publishers, ensuring permanent access to international academic publications. From the perspective of its role as national library, the KB, together with the public libraries and the university libraries, will work intensively in the years ahead on the improvement of the national infrastructure. In the area of cultural heritage material, the KB works closely with other cultural institutions to build a shared infrastructure for digital cultural heritage.

University libraries

There are 13 universities in The Netherlands, each with its own university library. The purpose of the university libraries is to support the university's primary processes: education and research. Thus, they serve their own staff and students primarily. The Dutch university populations vary from 29,000 students and 2,800 academic staff (Utrecht) to 5,000 students and 1,200 academic staff (Wageningen). There are three technical universities and one agricultural university. The 13 university libraries work together in an informal consortium, called UKB, which also includes the KB. This consortium is not formalised. Although negotiations take place on behalf of the consortium, none of its members can commit or sign on behalf of the consortium. Each university library is financed by its parent organisation which, in turn, is financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture & Research.

There are differences in the way the libraries are organised and financed within the university. The older and more comprehensive, more conventional, universities had a decentralised library organisation during the last decades of the 20th century. In addition to a central library, there were faculty libraries reporting not to the university librarian but to faculty management. All conventional university libraries are currently, or have recently been, involved in a process of organisational centralisation. There are also differences in the way the universities finance their library services. Some libraries do not receive any budget allocations directly from university management, but have to 'collect' their resources in yearly negotiations with the faculties. Others are entirely centrally financed, and several hybrid forms are known to exist as well. In

most of the universities, however, the resources for the acquisition of information resources (books, journals, databases, etc) are provided by the faculties, rather than directly by university management (Savenije, 2009). Unlike the public libraries, university libraries fulfil an archiving role: information resources, once acquired, remain available. The premises of the Dutch university libraries are accessible to non-members of the university community, who can apply for a library pass at a cost comparable to membership of a public library.

The need for cooperation

As is the case in other European countries, The Netherlands is facing considerable challenges in achieving its ambitions for the knowledge economy, for various reasons. A precondition for the successful creation of a knowledge economy is that there is a proper information infrastructure, providing educational institutions, companies and individuals adequate access to any available information sources. The present information infrastructure in The Netherlands is inadequate. A citizen who seeks reliable information will meet with various barriers. The information infrastructure is very fragmented, and the lack of cooperation between the different organisations implies that even for something as basic as merely consulting the national catalogue, a fee must be paid. Not only individuals, but also journalists, patient organisations, educational institutions and medium and small businesses face similar obstacles.

The Dutch library system suffers from the fairly rigid distinctions that exist between the public libraries on the one hand, and the university libraries on the other. There is little central direction and cooperation. For information seekers who know little about how the library system works, the system appears to be either a maze (it is not clear where information can be found) or a fortress (users feel that information is not available to them). The result is that people resort to Google: Googling is free and easy; however, it is often not possible to determine the quality of the information found. Libraries, on the other hand, select relevant information on behalf of their target groups and make those resources accessible. It is nevertheless difficult to gain an understanding of the actual totality of certified information, i.e. information of

which one or more libraries have established that it is reliable on the basis of source, author, or creation procedure. And getting access to those documents is usually even more difficult.

An additional obstacle is that certified information – in particular information published in academic journals and periodicals – is expensive. Likewise, the ‘marketing’ by, for example, university libraries to external groups (non-academics) is hampered by the publishers: access is restricted to their own target group and publishers will not or only very occasionally cooperate with other groups, whereby a licence granted for payment may be extended to include externals (affiliated institutes, alumni). Electronic inter-library loan traffic is also resisted by the publishing industry. Furthermore, few people are aware that it is possible to request academic publications from a university library, via a public library. The academic population appears to be well catered for by the university libraries, and usually knows where to find (and get) the required information. Others, however, face considerable problems finding the information they need, and many are ill-served. This situation has been identified by the Dutch Council for Culture:

Public libraries in the Netherlands are currently working on ... the construction of a collective, multi-layered network collection uniting text, imagery and sound from a number of sub-collections. However, the public libraries have very limited digital *content* and in that respect are largely reliant on cooperation between the university libraries, the libraries of cultural heritage institutions, the National Library (KB) and many other, related institutions, such as the National Archives, the Dutch Literature Museum, and the Digital Library for Dutch Literature. As more digital material becomes available, greater synergy between institutions not only becomes *possible*, but, moreover, is *necessary*. Especially in the digital domain, there is a need to integrate services, so that people no longer have to go door-knocking with many different institutions...

(Raad voor Cultuur, 2007)

The Council for Culture considers the establishment of a broad, primary infrastructure, offering free public access to all available resources of culture and

information, as both a logical and necessary step in the process of library innovation. To build a 'collection infrastructure' of this nature will require intra and inter-sector synergy and harmonization, both between public libraries and between the various library groups (Raad voor Cultuur, 2007). Lorcan Dempsey (2006) has described a comparable situation in the United States; lack of integration increases transaction costs. By integration, Dempsey means integration within processes (there are many discovery options, for example) and between processes (the processes are not always seamlessly connected):

- **Discover:** the discovery experience is a fragmented one. A user has a range of discovery **tools** available and may not always know which is the most suitable
- **Locate:** having identified an item of interest, a user needs to find a service that will supply it
- **Request:** this is another transaction, which may involve one or more steps
- **Deliver:** again, several potential options exist for resource delivery, which may involve more or less difficulty depending on how the delivery options are presented and on the disposition of supplier and user

(Dempsey, 2006).

The picture outlined above contrasts sharply with the ambitions of the Dutch government in the context of the knowledge economy. Knowledge should be easily accessible to the entire Dutch community, and that includes individuals as well as organisations. Information professionals, who want to work on the basis of a demand-focused approach, are finding themselves faced with a daunting task. People are unaware of what information is available, or where it can be found: the full array of the information supply is so fragmented that the obstacles for users are simply too many. Once a full view has been created of the totality of the information supply, a more articulated information demand will develop and this will create a basis for interaction between information requesters and providers (Savenije, 2008).

With regard to books, some significant progress has already been made in the Netherlands. The Dutch university libraries have a tradition of cooperation in infrastructure. PICA (Project for Integrated Catalogue Automation) was formed in

1969 and soon became a foundation for academic libraries in the Netherlands, but it is now part of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). As the Dutch organisation for library automation, PICA was responsible for a national catalogue in which most of the university libraries and also the larger public libraries participated. Connected with this catalogue was a system for interlibrary loans (Bossers, 2005).

These efforts are not enough, however. The need for access to up to the minute information and the speed of communication drives the demand for digital information at ever higher speeds. Clearly, the current infrastructure falls short in meeting that demand. Recently, there has been an improvement in this situation. At the initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, an innovation process has been set in motion in the public library system that relies on central direction. In this context, the necessary cooperation with university libraries is a matter requiring attention. Also, the university libraries and the KB (united in the UKB) have emphasised the necessity of increased cooperation between libraries in planning longer term policies.

With respect to digital information, the following current status can be observed:

- The public libraries offer a minimum of content that is accessible from the private home
- All university libraries are increasingly making the same information available
- Public library members, the secondary education system, professional education and the business community, all want to access academic publications, but the average Dutch person is not aware of how he/she can access the information
- Essentially, we all want access to all information, but we accept that the conditions of access may be different for different target groups

The conclusion is very clear: one must pursue the creation of a common digital library in The Netherlands; the question being how to design it in the most efficient, customer-oriented, manner. For this it is necessary to work together closely, across the traditional boundaries.

Towards a digital library of The Netherlands

It is an illusion to think that libraries could become *the* information portal for the Dutch population: the website everybody would use as the starting point of any information search. But why would the libraries even wish to pursue that ambition? Booking a holiday or a flight, finding a hotel, checking for the opening hours of a museum, or the competition timetable of your favourite football club are all quite basic actions and one would hardly expect the libraries to offer similar services. However, it gets a little more complicated when, for example, you are searching for certain medical information. Family doctors and even specialists are increasingly advising their patients to check the Internet to find out what their complaint really is about. Clearly, this type of information must be reliable. The family doctors themselves would probably find it helpful to have access to scientific publications, as would organised patient groups. When looking for information – historic information, for example – it is important to have an understanding of the reliability of that information. Google cannot deliver here, as it does not select information. Libraries, on the other hand, do select, and this is where they offer added value. Anyone seeking information would benefit from a collective and integrated libraries and archives information resource, in a way that would enable the user by a single action to search the totality of the information that has been earmarked by the Dutch libraries and archiving institutions as relevant and of sufficient quality. A collective, integrated information supply must be presented in a user-friendly manner with a clear overview of all the available information: a one-stop search, in other words, and one that matches a Google type of service in terms of user convenience. Various services are currently available that offer certified information selection in specific fields. However, these cover particular, limited areas only, and unless provided by a library, in most cases charge a fee. Many libraries select and certify their information resources but they do this only for their own target groups.

It is not difficult to imagine how the sub-processes ‘discover’ and ‘locate’ could be improved. By providing integrated public access to all publicly funded library services, anyone can obtain an overview (at no cost) of the availability of information of a reputable quality, in any area. Once the searcher decides he or she wishes to

obtain the information, there would normally be a charge. Such a system would need to provide an understanding of the various options to acquire information (such as 'Go to a library nearest to you'; 'Register with your public library for inter-library loans,' along with advice of anticipated delivery time and cost; 'Use enclosed form to request direct digital delivery,' again, specifying delivery time and cost.) The customer chooses the relevant option. It may not always be very easy to actually obtain the information. In such cases a 'Help' function should be available (to be consulted digitally or by telephone), for example, referring to the local public library.

This type of service could be realised even within the current business models that exist in the information sector. It may be noted that, once the public develops a clear view of the information supply, this will start to generate requests, possibly leading to comments on efficiency – or lack thereof – on the manner in which the requested information is made available. Associated costs are also likely to invite criticism. However, if we are to achieve substantial improvement in the subsequent processes 'request' and 'deliver', it will be necessary to create a new, joint infrastructure. As described above, for printed materials a national catalogue has been available for many years in which the National Library, the university libraries, and the large public libraries disclose their collections. This national catalogue is also linked to a system of inter-library traffic, and could be extended to include the collections of the public libraries that do not currently participate in it. The network of public libraries is currently working on this with financial support from the national government. The intention is to create a new structure that would not only include the catalogue but also provide possibilities for offering additional services such as user generated content, book cover scans, and so on.

With respect to digital information resources, the challenge is a greater one. Currently, the public libraries have only limited digital content available to their users. The university libraries on the other hand have substantial digital collections, notably academic periodicals. The licences under which this content is accessible are often contracted in the form of 'Big Deals': agreements covering all digital content of a particular publisher, whereby termination of parts of the content is discouraged by pricing. Direct digital supply to persons not covered under the licence is not permitted: the requested article must in such cases be printed first and then scanned

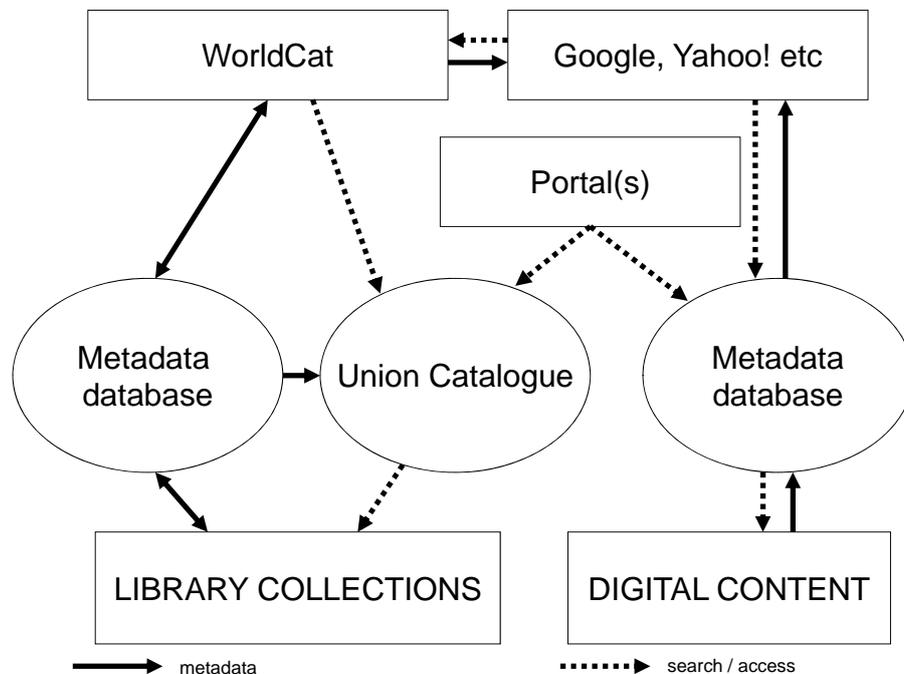
in order for it to be forwarded digitally. With national standard rates of around €10 on average per article, this is a highly cumbersome procedure that does not recover its costs, and is therefore discouraged. There are currently negotiations taking place with several large publishers with a view to allowing one or more libraries digital delivery direct, on the proviso that commercial customers are excluded from the service.

In order to build a national infrastructure, it is necessary to create a publicly accessible database of all digital content offered to the users by publicly accessible libraries. This database must also be approachable via all current search engines. Negotiations are currently in progress between the public libraries, the university libraries and the KB to discuss this. The discussions are organised by a steering group in which all relevant parties participate. In this context, it is relevant to note that the KB owns and operates a digital depot in which it archives all current and future digital content published in The Netherlands. The KB in addition archives digital articles from a large number of publishers of academic journals and periodicals in its digital depot. Thus, the KB has assured the future availability of all the digital information resources that are relevant to Dutch libraries.

With respect to the database containing the metadata, connection to the KB's digital depot is already possible. This provision could be used in the near future for delivery of material to those who are not covered under a licence agreement and who can only access the websites of the various publishers upon payment of a relatively high fee (e.g. €30). The KB plans to conduct a pilot for this in the near future, including a large number of journals and periodicals from Elsevier Science. Thus two databases are created for metadata: one for printed material, and another for digital material. The intention is to create a single search function that will enable the user to simultaneously search either type of file. An important requirement of this search function is that it must be able to select and organise results on relevance and within a particular context. The search function could be enhanced by adding specific parameters based on the user's personal interests profile to generate a personalised search outcome. It is conceivable that a number of libraries will decide to use a shared search system. This is actually already envisaged by the public libraries and similar joint initiatives are currently being undertaken by university libraries. It is,

however, not a precondition. Schematically, the infrastructure can be represented in Figure 14.1:

Figure 14.1 – Schematic infrastructure of a shared search system



Once a structure as outlined in Figure 14.1 is operational, the cooperation can be further extended.

The common catalogue effectively renders redundant the need for every library to maintain its own catalogue. Furthermore, it will make it possible to create a common subscribers' file, e.g. one for the public library system, and one for the university libraries. Similarly, a collective library pass can be introduced. A possible next step is replacing the existing logistic systems within the libraries (cataloguing, acquisition, circulation) with a central system, with resultant significant cost savings. Within such a central system it would still be possible for the individual libraries to set or maintain individual presentation for their own target groups, or to include specific additional services. An efficiency change of this magnitude is not, however, expected in the short term. A second area in which expansion is possible is content. At present, the public libraries are only buying digital content jointly to a limited extent. The

university libraries are doing this on a much larger scale. As noted above, the current, broad licensing agreements of the universities could be extended to include digital document delivery or pay-per-view for those not directly covered under the licence agreement. This will effectively create a national licence: an information supply that is accessible to all, possible on varying terms (direct access, pay-per-view, and different rates, e.g. profit versus not-for-profit).

It is important, furthermore, that the new infrastructure should also provide access to all freely available content. Firstly, this concerns *Open Access* information resources: journals and periodicals published via the *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) as well as repositories containing freely accessible publications of academic institutions. In addition, there is digitised heritage material: scans of printed works, at least covering all materials not subject to copyright. Over time, links could be established between the materials of various different heritage institutions: archives, photos, films and museum materials. Thus, it will be possible to meet the ever increasing expectations of users, which place such a significant demand on libraries' investment capabilities, and to achieve the following aims: improving availability, strengthening cooperation and interoperability, reducing overlap, and assuring long-term availability of heritage material. The result, for many libraries, will be reflected in improvements with respect to the current situation in terms of service provision, as well as cost reductions for all parties concerned as compared to the current situation.

Conclusion: changing roles in a network of organisations

The previous section outlined the development of one digital library for the Netherlands, to which every Dutch citizen has access, either from home or from work, albeit under varying conditions. Realising such a joint information infrastructure requires an effort on the part of all parties involved (public libraries, academic libraries, the KB) with regard to expertise, content (including cultural heritage), technology and administration. Some type of management structure will have to be designed for the joint infrastructure. This does not, however, mean that we are

heading for a system in which every user gets identical services. Libraries will have to take into account the fact that there are different user communities, such as:

- Scholars, differentiated by discipline
- Students and lecturers, differentiated by education level and branch of studies
- Professionals, such as doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, management consultants
- Interest groups, such as patients' associations and political groups
- Local communities, such as community committees

The services and activities of the libraries may well differ. Academic and public libraries may present themselves by adjusting their services to specific target groups: by offering additional content that is relevant exclusively to these groups (for instance semi-finished products), by offering their own presentation of the content (depending on the online behaviour of the target group) and by adapting their services to the wishes and working processes of the target group. In addition, some activities will be location-based, aimed at the institution's own target groups. Successful examples include the Amsterdam Public Library, with its wealth of cultural activities, and the Utrecht University Library at the Uithof, which has developed into a cultural centre on this campus. It is evident that the KB is well placed to play a coordinating and facilitating role, and in doing so may carry out an essential part of its task under the law:

As the national library, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek is active in the areas of the library system and information provision...

At any rate ... it promotes the materialization and maintenance of national facilities in the areas mentioned above.

(Article 1.5 of the Higher Education and Research Act)

By means of its digital repository, the KB may play an important role in the national infrastructure. It does not however, imply that every citizen should approach the KB to find the information he or she requires. Local libraries have their own target groups, and the members of these target groups will have easier access to their own

libraries. Therefore, the digital repository of the KB is part of the common back office and every library may serve as a front office to its own target group. Public libraries may serve as help desks, making research information accessible to their members. Of course, they have to work on their local position as well by offering differentiated services and location-based activities to their specific target groups. The integration of services concerning education and research processes sets an important challenge to academic libraries. Since the differences between these disciplines are more substantial than the differences between individual institutions, a more discipline oriented cooperation between the library institutions is required. They may present themselves by means of additional services for their local target groups, whether location-based or not.

At the moment, the quality of a library is determined to a large extent by the content made available and by the infrastructure of its services. Since these elements are shared ever more, content and infrastructure will hardly be discriminating factors in the future. The manner in which libraries will succeed in targeting services to their own groups will be of vital importance. In the future, the quality of the library staff and the facilities will determine the quality differences, and libraries will have to stress their distinctive features in this respect. But this is not all. As a consequence of developments in the areas of information and communication technology, many traditional boundaries will disappear or blur. This applies, for instance, to the traditional demarcation lines in the information chain, such as those between libraries and publishers. The same applies to the relationships among libraries, and between libraries and other institutions in the cultural sector. All over the sector, the boundaries between the active institutions will fade, and cooperation within the network becomes essential (Raad voor Cultuur, 2010). The identity and the significance of an institution will be determined less and less by its mission alone, as long as this mission is restricted to the institution's core business and focuses on its own identity. Increasingly, an institution's identity within a network of relevant institutions will come into play through the number and type of partners to which it is connected.

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