

## Summary

### Yesterday today. Interest and involvement in cultural heritage

How many people in the Netherlands are interested in cultural heritage? How many come into contact with it through media and visits to cultural institutions? How many become actively involved? And who are they? This report answers these questions.

Heritage interests many people in the Netherlands. Many have been touched by the debate about Sinterklaas' Moorish companion 'Zwarte Piet' (*Black Pete*). There are hundreds of historical societies in the Netherlands, which together have several hundred thousand members. A survey in 2012 asked about people's interest in five topics: history in general; family, regional or local history; historic towns, villages or buildings; historic objects; and old customs, traditions or crafts. Of the population aged 12 years and older, 80% were interested in one or more of these five topics, and 20% reported a strong interest in at least one of them. That is almost three million people.

Those with an interest in heritage have access to an enormous amount of information in books, magazines and newspapers as well as on the radio, television and the Internet. Three-quarters of the population (aged six years and older) engage with heritage at least a few times a year via the media, while 20% do so once a week or more. Printed media (newspapers, magazines, books) and broadcasters (radio, tv) both have an occasional reach of 60% and a frequent reach of 10%. The Internet lags behind slightly (for now), with an occasional reach of just under 50% and a frequent reach of 6%.

The annual Heritage Day (*Open Monumentendag*) has drawn approximately 1 million visitors in recent years. Museums, which house much of the nation's heritage, received 23 million visits in 2013. Almost half the population (aged six years and older) visited a museum at least once in 2012, with an average of four visits per visitor.

In the context of heritage, the notions of volunteering and active involvement require some explanation. Talking about amateur heritage in a similar way to the amateur arts meets with resistance from those active in the field, especially millers and archaeologists, who see themselves as volunteers. The term 'volunteer' is however reserved here for those who support institutions, associations or events by carrying out administrative or other tasks on a voluntary basis. We have chosen the terms 'heritage practice' and 'heritage practitioner' for millers, archaeologists, genealogists, etc..

Heritage organisations report that many tens of thousands of people volunteer in the cultural heritage field. This is an underestimate, because it covers only registered organisations. The 2012 survey shows that in that year at least 200,000 people (aged 12 years and older) were active as volunteers in the sector.

More than a quarter of the Dutch population are active as heritage practitioners, by collecting or renovating historical objects, studying genealogy or local or other historical events, or depicting a craft or historical event. That makes a total of three and a half million people; more than 1 million people do this with some intensity (12 times a year or more).

Studying the social heritage infrastructure in the Dutch municipality of Alphen aan den Rijn offers a picture of the multifaceted reality that lies behind these abstract figures. This municipality contains six historical groups (in Alphen aan den Rijn, Benthuizen, Boskoop, Hazerswoude, Koudekerk aan den Rijn and Zwammerdam), with a total of more than 4,000 members or donors. They publish magazines or yearbooks, look after club premises, organise exhibitions, lectures and open days, build archives, provide guided tours and support the preservation of historic monuments. The regional archive, the archaeology centre, the 'old timers' club, the arboricultural museum (*Boomkwekerijmuseum*), the Granny's time museum (*Grootmoederstijdmuseum*), several websites and numerous foundations set up to maintain and protect windmills and other historic buildings are all largely run by volunteers. Members of the archaeological working group help on digs and contribute to infrastructural activities. And this summary is by no means exhaustive.

Interest in heritage lags behind the interest in the arts. Museums have a smaller reach than performances. More than twice as many people (sometimes) practice the arts (55%), compared with 26% who actively participate in heritage activities. This difference is even greater when it comes to intensive engagement (12 times a year or more): five times as many people intensively participate in some form of the arts as in heritage (40% versus 8%). Almost three-quarters of all those who practise the arts do so with a degree of intensity, whereas this applies for only a third of those actively engaged in the heritage sector. This begs the question of whether these differences are inherent in heritage as an area of interest or whether there are opportunities for the heritage sector in stimulating public interest and engagement.