

Summary: the recommendation in overview

The reorganisation of the Dutch museum system from 2017 will result in a sustainable, future-focused museological sector with an extensive social reach. Its aim is to grant the public optimum access and opportunities to enjoy the Netherlands Collection. To achieve this goal, institutions will cooperate, share knowledge and bear collective responsibility for a high-quality and professional sector. The various levels of governmental authority in the Netherlands will coordinate their museum policies. A Core Netherlands Collection will be established and protected. This will all result in a more efficient use of public resources to serve social, cultural and economic objectives.

A three-way system featuring chain cooperation, the Core Netherlands Collection and a Heritage Act

This recommendation is composed of three elements. First, a coherent system is proposed based on chain cooperation between museums. Second, from all existing public collections, i.e. the Netherlands Collection, a selection will be made that will contribute to core collections which together will form the Netherlands Core Collection and enjoy extra protection. Third, it is recommended that these two developments be anchored in a Heritage Act which will set out the roles and responsibilities of the various government authorities, collection owners, museums and related organisations, thus mapping the contours of the system.

Benefits for all government authorities, institutions and the public

The recommendation analyses both bottlenecks and opportunities in the current system, including the visibility, accessibility and mobility of collections; comprehensive administrative policy with collection and system responsibility, backed up by a future-proof support structure; lack of cooperation and pressure on public finances. There are benefits to be gained for all government authorities and institutions in the new system, but most of all for the public. Museums have a socio-cultural task whereby they contribute to the functioning of an open, democratic society that enables and invites citizens to participate. Museums are uniquely positioned to shape the cultural life of citizens through art and heritage.

From institutions to a system characterised by generosity

Current policy is primarily institution focused and not system focused. This needs to change. The basic starting point is to increase public access. Museological heritage, including modern art as well, must reach as large an audience as possible – an audience that is entitled to access this collectively shared treasure. This will require a vibrant and future-focused museum sector that generously allows the public to share on the basis of equally generous cooperation between museums.

System responsibility of the central government with roles for the National Service for Cultural Heritage (RCE) and the Dutch Museum Association (NMV)

The Dutch national government will assume responsibility for organising a coherent museum system, an effort that will include the professional involvement of the Dutch Museum Association (NMV) as the relevant sector organisation. There will also be a role for the National Service for Cultural Heritage (RCE) in evaluating collections. After 2017, the national government will be responsible for the social function of the museum system as a whole in order to serve as large an audience as possible.

Core institutions with geographically spread chains per collection area

Coherence and cooperation will be fostered by designating core institutions in eight collection areas. Core institutions will operate within a museum chain in which they will play an initiating, facilitating and coordinating role. The central government will designate eight top-quality core institutions. The council has made an indicative suggestion for each collection area in terms of both a core institution and a regional partner institution. All participating institutions in these chains will also be assessed with regard to their active cooperative participation.

The Netherlands Core Collection will also contain pieces from regional and local collections

A selection from the Netherlands Collection will be made: the Netherlands Core Collection. This will contain both national pieces – from which selections will also be made – and pieces from regional and local collections. As is currently the case, the owners will remain financially responsible for conservation and management. Existing instruments for quality assurance and collection policy, such as the Guideline for Disposing Museum Properties (LAMO), the Museum Register and the Cultural Heritage Protection Act will continue playing their current roles in the new system.

Rewarding self-regulating cooperation with programme funds

The desired cooperation can be largely organised by museums themselves in the new legal framework. Sustainable chain formation will be facilitated and rewarded by deploying additional programme funds (e.g. via the Mondriaan Fund) via the core institutions. Inter-museum cooperation will nevertheless be the norm and should be organised from existing budgets. Core institutions are also able to operate on the regional and local levels, even if not specifically instructed by the central government. Organic cross connections can once again link the various chains, with themes or functions, in addition to collection areas, serving as starting points.

Professionalism with a vision of a community of museums

The Council agrees with the views of the Asscher-Vonk committee and, in addition, also foresees the connectedness – i.e. cooperation that engenders added value – the opening up of museum institutions and their spheres of activity as points of departure. The report sketches a future in which museums imaginatively work to transcend existing borders and barriers. This will affect areas such as involvement in current affairs, operating outside the traditional museum building, merging material and immaterial culture, entering into new relationships, opening up genres, talent development, international orientation and reflecting on heritage of our own and that from beyond our borders. All of this in the spirit of professionalism working towards a community of museums.

Knowledge is power: education and talent development

Core institutions will draw up a knowledge agenda for their chain, with a major role for cultural education. Cultural education is to include both the general transfer of knowledge and education conducted in and outside of schools. It is recommended that performance agreements between government authorities and their museum institutions include ways of monitoring and measuring the quality and quantity of cooperation taking place with schools and other social sectors. Under the new system, for example, the government might expect all school pupils in primary and secondary education to be actively introduced to heritage three or four times during their education.

The Council argues for a comprehensive approach to cultural education (including art, media and heritage education) to be coordinated by the National Knowledge Institute of Cultural Education and Amateur Art (LKCA) through teaching guidelines in primary and secondary education that will include the Culture Map and the subject 'cultural and artistic formation'. Research will be conducted in cooperation with universities in museological academic workplaces, for which museums must seek accreditation to be able to independently apply for research budgets (from the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research). Knowledge management will be a focus of attention for museum boards, with staff are expected to increasingly be capable of multiple competencies. Study programmes must reflect these new requirements in their curricula, as must museums in their own talent development programmes.

Tools, phasing and effects

The tools required for the organisation and consolidation of the new system will be provided by the prevailing Heritage Act (of which a Museum section will form a part) and quality assurance provided by the government and the sector, with supervision of conservation and management tasks performed by the Heritage Inspectorate. There will be no changes to the financing structure for the time being, apart from the deployment of programme funds to stimulate the new system. The new system will be introduced in phases and be in place in 2017. The Council will regularly assess progress, particularly that of the chain and networks, in impact assessments.