

# Online urban heritage

The societal value of participatory heritage websites

Arno van der Hoeven





*A mashup image of Briggate in Leeds, combining a photo from the early 1900s and a photo shot in 2013.  
(Tom Blackwell, Flickr / CC BY-NC 2.0)*

# Online urban heritage

The societal value of participatory  
heritage websites

Arno van der Hoeven





# Online urban heritage

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Case study: hidden chapters of music history in a digital archive</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Key developments</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Case study: heritage as open and linked data in the city of Leiden</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>A closer look at participatory heritage websites</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Case study: researching the Amsterdam School with a wider public</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Key benefits of local participatory heritage websites</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Case study: mapping financial heritage</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Case study: crowdsourcing lost heritage</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Literature</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Colophon</b>	<b>33</b>

# Introduction

*This report presents the different ways in which online media can foster public engagement with urban heritage. It also discusses the societal benefits of participatory heritage websites and provides recommendations on how such online heritage projects can be designed effectively. In so doing, the report targets people who want to learn how online media can be used to keep the past of cities alive.*

The involvement of citizens in online heritage initiatives leads to a richer understanding of the urban past and the multiple histories of cities. These participatory activities can take different shapes and forms, such as crowdsourcing projects by way of city archives, heritage blogs and Facebook groups with historical photos. As the digital tools for recording the past become more user-friendly and widely available, a larger number of people can participate in urban heritage projects. Moreover, social media provides urban communities with accessible ways of presenting and interacting with their heritage. Consequently, new private and public heritage initiatives are emerging in online spaces. These activities can be defined as participatory heritage websites: places where heritage content is presented that is either contributed by citizens on their own terms or crowdsourced by cultural institutions.

Participatory heritage websites give the diverse communities of cities a voice in heritage activities. A key characteristic of cities is their dynamic nature. Urban environments are places where a rich diversity of people come together in ever-changing compositions. Each community and generation adds to the ever-expanding tangible and intangible heritage of cities. They give shape to the buildings, stories, songs and traditions that we pass on to future generations. This urban heritage is an important resource, providing a sense of belonging, pride and continuity. It is this attachment to their urban environment that motivates people to contribute to participatory heritage websites - be it as (digital) volunteers, professionals or heritage enthusiasts.

In order to draw on the knowledge of the crowd effectively, this report argues that it is vital to find ways of combining professional expertise with the enthusiasm of citizens. Many heritage institutions, however, are concerned that audience participation harms their authority and credibility as providers of reliable information; as a result of participatory activities, it may seem that they are losing control over how heritage content is interpreted and disseminated. Nevertheless, collaborations between citizen experts and heritage professionals are vital when it comes to enriching existing collections and fostering public involvement. Indeed, contemporary heritage policies and funding schemes increasingly encourage the participation of citizens in heritage preservation.

Despite the many online experiments with public involvement in heritage, there is a lack of comparative research on the benefits and success factors of these projects. This report therefore presents the latest research on participatory heritage websites and makes recommendations for their development. It also discusses several case studies of inspiring projects. In so doing, the report aims to demonstrate the societal value of using online media to involve a wider public in urban heritage activities.

# **Case study: hidden chapters of music history in a digital archive**

## Manchester Digital Music Archive ([mdmarchive.co.uk](http://mdmarchive.co.uk))

The Manchester Digital Music Archive (MDMA) is an online community archive that aims to celebrate the music and social history of Greater Manchester. At the heart of the archive are the Manchester music ephemera and memories shared by fans all over the world.

As underscored on the website, audience participation is a vital aspect of the project: "We believe that through crowdsourcing artefacts we can democratise heritage and provide a platform for multiple versions of history to be shared. There is no hierarchy of 'merit' within our archive. The general public decides what is important and what is 'heritage'."



*The Ritz music venue in Manchester (Mikey, Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-2.0)*

The inclusive approach to heritage is reflected in the themes that are highlighted by the MDMA. Through online and physical exhibitions, the project pays attention to under-represented communities and lesser known histories. Examples are the Queer Noise exhibition about "The Hidden History of Manchester's LGBT Music Culture" and Suffragette City about women in Manchester's music scene.

# Key developments

*Four key developments have altered the ways in which people engage with the heritage of urban spaces:*

- *Cities are changing and growing rapidly.*
- *They are becoming increasingly diverse.*
- *Smart technologies are used in cities and heritage activities.*
- *Growing attention is paid to the social dimensions of heritage.*

*As will be discussed in this section, these trends shed light on the phenomenon of participatory heritage websites in cities.*

## Changing and growing cities

The 21st century has been described as the century of the city, as cities worldwide are growing rapidly. In 2007, the global urban population surpassed the number of people living in rural areas. It is anticipated that this process of global urbanisation will continue, with two-thirds of people expected to be living in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations, 2014). The old photos posted in Facebook groups dedicated to local heritage illustrate how many cities have changed dramatically over the years.

These urban transformations put pressure on heritage preservation. As UNESCO observes: “Rapid and frequently uncontrolled development is transforming urban areas and their settings, which may cause fragmentation and deterioration to urban heritage with deep impacts on community values, throughout the world” (UNESCO, 2011). Mass-tourism and large-scale urban development might therefore undermine the unique character of places.

Against this background of rapid urbanisation, UNESCO’s general conference adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in 2011. This instrument on the historic environment seeks to integrate the goals of urban heritage conservation with those of social and economic development. Its focus is not only on the preservation of the physical environment, but also on the intangible qualities of urban spaces as related to diversity and identity. As a result, UNESCO addresses the challenge of accommodating the growing population of cities without harming the identity of these places.

As this report will discuss, the use of new media means that participatory heritage websites can contribute to UNESCO’s goal of documenting the tangible and intangible heritage of cities. These online platforms provide insights into how citizens experience the identity of cities in both the past and present.

### Diverse cities

A vital characteristic of cities is the diversity of their people, communities, cultural activities and lifestyles. This means that the heritage of cities is equally diverse. Multicultural cities thus require heritage practices that include the stories and experiences of different communities. Such an inclusive approach means that the voices of minority groups are also represented in heritage institutions.

The importance of community participation is increasingly recognised in heritage policies. This results in more attention being paid to public outreach and community involvement. Meanwhile, bottom-heritage practices emerge outside established institutions, as people set up new projects using digital media such as blogs and Wikis. In so doing, lay experts, collectors and cultural entrepreneurs bring new voices to the heritage sector (Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland, 2017). Together, these different initiatives document the diverse heritage of urban landscapes.



*Summer Carnival in Rotterdam (1984, Photographer Rob C. Croes, collection national archive / CC0)*

### Smart heritage in smart cities

In smart cities, information and communication technologies are integrated in urban planning to enhance the livability of urban areas. The heritage sector can contribute to the development of smart cities by using new media to involve citizens in heritage activities (Borda and Bowen, 2017). The content crowdsourced through participatory heritage websites can be presented using new technologies such as Near Field Communication (NFC) and Augmented Reality (AR). NFC allows people to scan a sticker at a particular significant location to access historical information on their smartphones. AR enables the real-time augmentation of the physical environment with audio-visual heritage content.



### **The social values of heritage**

The scope of what is defined as heritage has become much broader over the years (Van der Hoeven, 2016). This is highlighted by Graham and Howard's (2008, p.2) definition of heritage as "the ways in which very selective past material artefacts, natural landscapes, mythologies, memories and traditions become cultural, political and economic resources for the present." Intangible forms of heritage like traditions and social practices are now also included in heritage definitions. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasises the communities to which this 'living heritage' belongs - it is people themselves that pass on traditions, skills and memories to future generations.

Attention in the heritage field thus shifts from heritage objects to their social value in the present. This has been defined as a process of heritage-making, underscoring the active work of giving meaning to heritage (Schwarz, 2017). As part of this process, people decide in a collaborative and participatory manner which aspects from the past they regard as valuable to preserve for the future. Such a social approach to heritage raises awareness of the strong sense of pride and belonging that people derive from it.

# **Case study: heritage as open and linked data in the city of Leiden**

## Heritage Leiden ([erfgoedleiden.nl](http://erfgoedleiden.nl))

The Heritage Centre of the city of Leiden hosts many projects to engage a wider audience in heritage activities. On its website, visitors can help to enrich existing heritage collections by mapping the exact location where historic photos were taken, sharing historical knowledge and personal stories, and reusing open data such as genealogical archives.

Project leader Ellen Gehring explains that a guiding principle for this heritage centre is to be as open as possible: "Our activities are funded with public money, so everyone must be able to benefit from it." This means, for example, that the software they develop is released under an open source licence and all data is accessible, except when copyright or privacy issues prevent this.



*Queen Juliana in Leiden on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Leiden University in 1975  
(National Archives of the Netherlands via Wikimedia Commons / CC0)*

In a current project, the Heritage Centre is using linked data to improve access to local archives. "We aim to integrate our different collections", Gehring explains. "If geographical locations are added to all collections, people will be able to click on a map and see all archival material associated with that place such as newspapers and photos." This makes it easier for citizens to find more information about the past of their house, while researchers can answer new questions about urban history and urban planners have better access to historical data.

# A closer look at participatory heritage websites

*Participatory heritage websites are places where heritage content is presented that is either contributed by citizens on their own terms or crowdsourced by cultural institutions. This content might concern factual information (i.e. dates and locations of historic events), as well as memories grounded in the experiences of particular communities. Four types of participatory heritage website can be distinguished:*

- *Curated.*
- *Content-hosting.*
- *Social network.*
- *Grassroots initiatives.*

*The first three categories are drawn from an Australian research project on digital applications and social media that host public exchanges on local heritage (Lewi et al., 2016), while the fourth follows on from the research conducted for this report. Their main characteristics are discussed further in this section.*

## Types

Curated sites are institutional projects where user input is very much constrained within the boundaries set by heritage professionals working for professional organisations. This category includes crowdsourcing projects in which heritage institutions invite the public to help with specific tasks. In the NYC Space/Time Directory, the New York Public library asks people to identify the exact locations where historic photos were taken. Some curated websites also share data that can be re-used by a wider public. An example is the work by the Heritage Centre of the city of Leiden, which is discussed as a case study in this report. As part of an open data strategy, they enable access to their archives through APIs (i.e. Application Programming Interface), which provide the technological infrastructure for building applications that use content from archives.

Content-hosting sites are heritage-oriented platforms built with the aim of attracting user-generated content. As Lewi et al. (2016, p. 17) explain: "Although intrinsically related to heritage content, many are created by tech companies operating outside of the traditional heritage arena. Rather than providing a body of curated and navigable content, the central organising principle in these content-hosting sites is an empty database waiting to be 'populated' with public material." On the website Historypin, for example, anyone can add historical material related to specific places. Using this platform, the project Mapping Emotions in Victorian London presents the results of a crowdsourcing initiative that invited anonymous people to annotate passages drawn from novels. The resulting map provides an emotional geography of Victorian London, showing whether novels represented places in a fearful, happy or unemotional manner (<https://www.historypin.org/en/victorian-london/>).

The category of social network sites refers to local heritage initiatives on platforms such as Facebook. The popular Facebook groups dedicated to local history often have a very informal nature, evoking many personal memories and responses. They also have a strong emphasis on historical photos that draw connections between a city's past and present. Other popular social media platforms for sharing heritage are Instagram and Flickr.

Finally, the category of grassroots initiatives concerns projects that are set up by citizens outside formal institutions. These projects often focus on specific areas of expertise. Examples are music fans who document the popular music heritage of a city or residents who collect memories of a particular neighbourhood. While some grassroots initiatives remain autonomous over the years, others develop collaborations with heritage institutions. Such partnerships can be beneficial for both parties; heritage institutions can help grassroots initiatives to professionalise their practices by offering guidance on archival procedures. At the same time, the collaboration with particular heritage communities can enhance the social impact of established organisations. Grassroots initiatives might cover themes that are not represented in existing collections, such as the heritage of minority groups.

These different types of website can be distinguished by the extent to which the contributions by the public are curated and edited (Lewi et al., 2016). While the participation in curated sites is largely constrained within the boundaries set by heritage institutions, social network sites dedicated to the urban past generally have a more informal nature. Of course, there can be overlap between the categories; for example, many bottom-up initiatives also make use of social network sites.



*Kalverstraat Amsterdam (Ben van Meerendonk, AHF, collection IISC, Amsterdam, Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-2.0)*

### Characteristics

All participatory heritage websites share a concern with locally oriented activities that are largely driven by the efforts and contributions of citizens. Another vital characteristic of many of these projects is the passion that participants have for the materials that are preserved. The content on the websites is often the result of the emotional attachment of contributors to their urban environment. Although passion might not usually be associated with archival work, it is a vital aspect of how contributors engage with local histories. This feeds into an emerging approach to archiving that not reduces it to detachment, objectivity and neutrality, but also highlights how archives can foster personal and collective commitment. This is a form of “affective archiving” (Baker, 2015; Long et al., 2017) in which participants are driven by a passion for the material they work with and the pleasure of collaborating on a common goal. The participatory heritage websites thus bring people with a shared enthusiasm for the histories of their urban environment together.

In some cases, the participatory heritage websites involve a form of “activist archiving” (Collins, 2015). Preserving the past could be a way of raising awareness of histories that are neglected in official archives, such as the experiences of migrants. Presenting the heritage of a neighbourhood on participatory heritage websites can also be a protest against the destruction of heritage buildings (Gregoy, 2015).



# **Case study: researching the Amsterdam School with a wider public**

## Platform Wendingen ([amsterdamse-school.nl](http://amsterdamse-school.nl))

Platform Wendingen is the website of Museum Het Schip (The Ship), which is the architecture and design museum about the Amsterdam School. Through the contributions of both enthusiasts and heritage professionals, the platform provides an overview of objects (e.g. buildings and furniture) in this style of architecture, as well as biographies of people (e.g. architects and artist) involved in the Amsterdam School. Any registered user can upload photos, post corrections or add their own objects.



Museum The Ship (photographer: Janericloebe, Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-3.0)

As the website's editor, Marcel Westhoff, explains, the involvement of the public enables the museum to describe a larger number of objects: "With our editorial board we would only be able to cover a small area, but now we get responses from all over the country." The information that is gathered in this way is used for research and is showcased in exhibitions. Indeed, the museum has a screen where visitors can access the digital map which forms the core of the digital Amsterdam School platform.

The museum organises an event annually to meet the group of the most active contributors to the website. According to Westhoff, many of these volunteers are motivated by their love for photography and the style of the Amsterdam School: "I have the same passion; it's addictive to search for objects that aren't yet described on the website."

# Key benefits of local participatory heritage websites

*Participatory heritage websites offer diverse benefits to participants, heritage institutions and urban communities. They can enhance our understanding of the past of cities (historical value), enable interactions about a shared heritage (social value), and allow people to relate heritage to their own lives and identities (personal value). These values will be further discussed in this section by considering the following key benefits:*

- *Participatory heritage websites have a significant emotional value to users.*
- *A greater number of people can participate in the preservation of the urban past.*
- *Heritage collections are enriched at a faster pace.*
- *Gaps in urban histories are filled.*
- *The engagement with urban heritage is increased.*
- *Participatory heritage websites are a catalyst for other activities in the city.*
- *The re-use of heritage materials is enhanced.*

## **Participatory heritage websites have significant emotional value to their users.**

The focus on active involvement allows people to express what the heritage of cities means to them. The materials on the websites provide a sense of time and identity in the context of ever-changing cities. According to American urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960, p. 1), the way people experience cities is strongly connected to memory: "Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meaning." Similarly, open and accessible heritage websites allow users to find their own personal trajectory through heritage collections. Local Facebook groups and storytelling websites in particular evoke many memories. Participatory heritage websites illustrate that cities are not just bricks and mortar, but also home to myriad personal and collective memories.

## **A greater number of people can participate in the preservation of the urban past through participatory heritage websites.**

This is important for ensuring that heritage collections represent the diversity of contemporary multicultural cities. Participatory heritage websites can raise awareness of the heritage of different urban communities such as migrants, subcultures or LGBT people. In so doing, the websites present the contributions that these communities have made to urban landscapes. Furthermore, the online activities on participatory heritage websites can affirm the collective identity of the communities involved.

**Crowdsourcing projects in particular ensure that heritage collections and their associated metadata become more complete at a faster pace.** The collective wisdom of the crowds can help to enrich existing collections through specific tasks such as deciphering hand-written documents and geo-tagging the places where historic photos were taken. The content of the participatory heritage websites is thus the result of the collaborative efforts of non-professional participants, digital volunteers and other enthusiasts.



*Evening impression of the Leidseplein in Amsterdam by J.B. Ingwersen (1960–1965, Het Nieuwe Instituut - Architecture Collection, via Wikimedia Commons / public domain)*

**Participatory heritage websites fill gaps in urban histories**, providing access to stories about topics such as the heritage of old factories, the popular music histories of specific cities and the memories of specific neighbourhoods. Sometimes, the websites are actually “unintentional archives” (Baker and Collins, 2017) of the everyday life of cities. This is particularly the case when the initiators of these projects do not formally define their activities as archiving. Similarly, researcher Mechtild Stock argues that even local heritage Facebook groups could inadvertently be a source of “micro-history” (2016, p. 237): “Facebook can be an important historical source record that complements other historical sources. On Facebook, one can find information that would rarely be found elsewhere: first-hand impressions, images, and comments from the ‘common people.’” While participatory heritage websites do not always focus on major historical events, they do pay attention to smaller developments that matter in the everyday life of cities. As Stock (p. 214) reminds us about this history from below: “It is not enough for historians to focus solely on a major global event, such as a world war or global economic crisis. These greater events have often been launched by smaller developments.”

**Participatory heritage websites can increase the public's engagement with urban heritage and foster a sense of place.** In a study of the Facebook group "Beautiful buildings and cool places Perth has lost", Jenny Gregory (2015) finds evidence that such popular social media sites enhance the collective attachment to heritage. Through the sharing of historic photos, this group stimulates discussion and protest about the destruction of Perth's built heritage. According to Gregory, the Facebook group led to increased civic engagement among its members, resulting in protests against the loss of local heritage. This illustrates how the activities in such groups are not only confined to online spaces, but also affect offline heritage engagement. Participatory heritage websites are often strongly embedded in the local community. As an example, citizens contribute through crowdsourcing or even crowdfunding, while in many cases local businesses sponsor the website.

**Participatory heritage websites are a catalyst for other activities and uses in both the digital and physical realms of cities.** Digital maps, for example, are used to host walking tours in a city or can be presented in exhibitions. Some storytelling projects use face-to-face meetings to elicit and share memories that are subsequently posted online. In some cases, the websites are established with the aim of eventually opening a physical museum. Initially starting with a participatory heritage website can help to 'test' the wider public interest in a topic. Furthermore, the initiators of these projects often share the knowledge accumulated on their websites through presentations, lectures and media appearances. This underscores that their efforts are not confined to the digital realm. Participatory heritage websites can also inform activities in other sectors such as tourism and education, fostering partnerships between different organisations.

**Participatory heritage websites enhance the potential re-use of heritage materials.** This is particularly the case when their content is put in the public domain without copyright restrictions. Since heritage institutions have a public task and are expected to have a social impact, it is important to make collections as accessible as possible so that everyone can benefit from them.<sup>2</sup> Although it might seem that heritage organisations will lose control over how the content is used, the actual engagement with their work is greatly enhanced. Content that is shared through public domain repositories (e.g. Wikimedia Commons) reaches a wider audience than material that is only available on an institution's website (Ridge, 2017). The Chief of Content and Communications Strategy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives (Kapsalis, 2016), for example, reports that images on Wikimedia received a million times as many views as those on the institution's own website. If copyright restrictions are removed, heritage content can be re-used more easily in publications such as books, Wikipedia pages and tourist brochures. Furthermore, open content licences allow for the development of digital tools and applications to re-use material from heritage collections. A "digital cultural biography" (de Kleijn et al., 2016), for example, can be created for architects and spatial planners to show the heritage features of particular locations. Such a digital biography could include the photos, memories and historic information shared on participatory heritage websites. The content of these sites can thus be innovatively re-used to incubate new products and ideas.

---

<sup>2</sup> Europeana provides useful online resources to measure impact: <https://pro.europeana.eu/what-we-do/impact>

# **Case study: mapping financial heritage**

## **Financial Heritage** ([financieelerfgoed.nl](http://financieelerfgoed.nl) & [financieelerfgoedopdekaart.nl](http://financieelerfgoedopdekaart.nl))

The internet offers a platform for new perspectives on the heritage of cities. An example of such a grassroots project is the website Financial Heritage on the Map. This is an initiative by Simon Lelieveldt, an industrial engineer who works in the banking and innovative payments sector. The project allows him to share his passion for the financial history of Amsterdam with a wider audience. According to Lelieveldt, the curation of online information by experts helps to make heritage more accessible: "In the chaos of the world wide web, the public needs reliable entry points to structured information about particular themes. I provide this by relating the history of the financial sector and financial innovations to specific locations."



*Main hall of the city giro, Amsterdam, 1953 (Amsterdam City Archives)*

The Financial Heritage on the Map website shows the historical locations associated with, among other things, banks, exchanges, offices and even the place where, in 2011, the Occupy Movement voiced its concerns about the financial sector. The user can access a story, photos and information from Wikipedia for each item. Furthermore, the project has a strong social media presence and posts relevant videos on YouTube. Like many other initiators of participatory heritage websites, Lelieveldt shares the knowledge documented on Financial Heritage on the Map through guided and audio tours, workshops and presentations. This underscores how online urban heritage ties in with face-to-face activities in a city.

While this website makes information more accessible, Lelieveldt stresses that he also benefits greatly from the increasing availability of digital archives: "I'm very lucky that a growing amount of information is becoming available. Digitised collections ensure that a wider audience can be reached - even if you can't predict exactly where, when and how."

# Recommendations

*This section makes recommendations for people who want to set up or further develop a participatory heritage website. A distinction is made between strategic recommendations on the organisational level and practical recommendations for the design of websites.*

## **Strategic recommendations on the organisational level**

**For each participatory heritage website, someone within an organisation needs to be responsible for managing community relations and the contact with contributors.** Active collaborations with urban communities potentially enhance the social impact of a heritage organisation. Nevertheless, this is only achieved

when enough time is invested in community building and communication with participants. Crowdsourcing activities are more successful when contributors receive feedback and are well-informed about project aims, the intended uses of their input and the project's progress (Liew, 2015; Baruch et al., 2016). The person responsible for community relations can act as a mediator between the heritage organisation and the wider public. This requires social skills in order to align potentially diverging approaches to heritage both within and outside the organisation (Van der Hoeven, 2016). The person responsible for public outreach can bring the formal archival procedures of heritage professionals in tune with the potentially more informal nature of working with communities.

**Acknowledge the heritage activities by digital volunteers, community archives and other enthusiasts.** Their work should not be dismissed as mere amateurism. Specific communities such as fans, migrants or former employees of an historic business know their heritage best and might already have their own heritage initiatives, so why not share knowledge and collaborate with these grassroots organisations and collectors? In fact, there are many enthusiastic volunteers who study their local environment eagerly and like to learn new digital skills in the process. The person responsible for public outreach in heritage organisations can play a particularly vital role in supporting the work of community driven heritage projects.

**Seek active collaboration with grassroots heritage initiatives.** The partnerships between official and grassroots organisations can take three different forms. The first option is that they occasionally share content, resources or knowledge with each other in an informal manner. In this case, they operate in an urban network of smaller and bigger organisations that sometimes connect to each other, but remain autonomous and keep their own separate identities (Van der Hoeven, 2017). A spare meeting room, for example, can be made available every now and then to local Wikipedia groups or community archives. Secondly, official organisations can have formal links to community initiatives, for example through financial support or by hosting their website. This more intensive form of collaboration can help grassroots initiatives to enhance the sustainability of their work. A drawback for them might be that this increases the pressure to conform to the norms of professional organisations, which can be at odds with the social goals of community initiatives. Thirdly, established heritage organisations might acquire heritage content from private collections to enrich their own archives. This ensures, for both parties, that the heritage materials are preserved for the future in an institutional context. Regardless of

the approach chosen, successful participatory projects often tie in with existing offline social networks in cities (Liew, 2014). Digital heritage brings new ways of engaging with the past, but online activities are perhaps most successful when they also resonate with offline urban life.

**It is important to make a plan for the sustainability of participatory heritage websites right at the outset of a project.** This policy plan should include information on whether and how the website is updated after a project's funded period ends. Preferably, the contributions made by users remain available for a significant period of time. While a project might have ended from the perspective of its initiators in an organisation, the content remains valuable to potential users. This requires that databases, software and technologies are looked after over a longer period of time. If external companies are commissioned to develop specific digital tools, future investments might be required to keep the technologies up to date. In order to avoid such costs, a solution might be that content is deposited at other places, such as repositories for open data (e.g. Wikimedia Commons). Finally, this sustainability plan can include information on how the privacy of contributors is protected over time.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, users who share photos or memories might want to withdraw their contribution at a later stage.

#### Practical recommendations for the design of a website

**A vital decision for the design of participatory heritage websites is the level of curatorial presence and moderation.** If participation is used to gain concrete information (i.e. filling gaps in existing collections), clear guidelines need to be given to potential contributors about the required input. However, a more informal approach is recommended if the aim of the website is to foster interaction about heritage. In this case, the threshold for participation should be kept as low as possible by setting minimal entry barriers (e.g. no registration requirements) and writing texts that are accessible to a wide audience. Opportunities for self-expression and conversation can also be integrated in the design of the website. Easily accessible comment sections, for example, allow visitors to express their opinions or share memories.



*Classic view of The Hague Buitenhof in the 1920s. (Wikimedia Commons / public domain)*

---

<sup>3</sup> Addressing the privacy of contributors is particularly important given the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) implemented in the European Union on 25 May 2018.

**Heritage organisations must decide to what extent the input from the crowd is integrated with existing content and collections.** Sometimes, public participation raises concerns about the reputation and authority of the heritage organisation involved. In this case, it is feared that incorrect or undesirable content will be uploaded by participants. To address this issue, the website can be designed in a way that the input from users is clearly separated from the organisation's own verified content. Another option is to develop an editing system to first check the input before it is added to existing collections. In any case, a European report on the participatory governance of cultural heritage underscores that the right balance must be struck between professional standards and room for audience perspectives (European Expert Network on Culture, 2015, p. 76): "The challenge for public authorities is to encourage people's real energy, commitment and responsibility while all the while being conscious to avoid killing their cultural heritage initiatives with too much of a heavy-handed, top-down approach." Very formal or procedural forms of interacting with audiences can have negative consequences for public engagement. In the words of an aptly titled event at the Digital Strategies for Heritage (DISH) conference: "Lose control, gain influence!"<sup>4</sup>



*Night impression of De Bijenkorf in The Hague by J.F. Staal (Het Nieuwe Instituut - Architecture Collection, via Wikimedia Commons / public domain)*

**It is vital to design websites in a way that enhances the re-use of data.** To this end, indicate clearly which copyrights apply or not. Furthermore, state explicitly how the work of photographers must be attributed when it is re-used. Preferably, licences should be used that extend the range of products available in the public domain, with an example being the Creative Commons licence. This allows users to easily share content (e.g. high-resolution photos) through other media platforms. Furthermore, the applications developed for a particular website can be made available on the software development platform Github under an open source licence. In this way, other people can benefit from the tools produced.

<sup>4</sup> "Lose control, gain influence!" was one of the events at the 2015 DISH conference organised by the DEN Foundation, The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Europeana, and Het Nieuwe Instituut.

If possible, try to track the ways in which content is re-used, because this can help to demonstrate its social impact to funding bodies. In fact, the use of digital content could be designated as a key performance indicator of an organisation. Useful on-line resources with respect to this recommendation are the guide to understanding copyright when reusing cultural data ([kl.nl/en/publications/cultural-heritage-data-us-age-ipr-guide/](http://kl.nl/en/publications/cultural-heritage-data-us-age-ipr-guide/)) and the Open Data Handbook ([opendatahandbook.org/](http://opendatahandbook.org/)).

# **Case study: crowdsourcing lost heritage**

## Rekrei ([rekrei.org](http://rekrei.org))

A video was released in 2015 that showed ISIS fighters destroying cultural heritage in the Mosul Cultural Museum in Iraq. After seeing the video, Matthew Vincent and Chance Coughenour initiated Project Mosul to reconstruct this lost heritage digitally. By gathering crowdsourced images, they aimed to create digitally reconstructed 3D models of the lost monuments. These images can be stitched together using a technique called photogrammetry to produce models that can be shared on platforms for 3D content (e.g. Sketchfab). This makes it possible to, for example, 3D-print models of lost heritage.



*Using virtual reality to see lost heritage recreated with crowdsourced images.*

Right from the start, this project received overwhelming support from volunteers across the globe. This inspired its initiators to expand their work to other places where heritage is threatened due to war or natural disasters. Following this broader geographical scope, they renamed the project Rekrei, which means recreate in the universal language of Esperanto. As well as the continued use of crowdsourced images, Rekrei experiments with recreating lost heritage by drawing on the ever-growing number of geotagged photos shared on platforms such as Flickr. Inadvertently, the endless flows of audiovisual material posted on social media already contribute to documenting our ever-changing urban landscapes.

# Literature

Baker, S. (2015). Affective archiving and collective collecting in do-it-yourself popular music archives and museums. In S. Baker (ed.), *Preserving popular music heritage: do-it-yourself, do-it-together* (pp. 46–61). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Baker, S., & Collins, J. (2017). Popular music heritage, community archives and the challenge of sustainability. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(5), 476–491.

Baruch, A., May, A., & Yu, D. (2016). The motivations, enablers and barriers for voluntary participation in an online crowdsourcing platform. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 64, 923–931.

Borda, A. & Bowen, J. P. (2017). *Smart cities and cultural heritage – a review of developments and future opportunities*. Electronic Visualisation and the Arts (EVA 2017), London, UK, 11 - 13 July 2017. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA20172>

Collins, J. (2015). Doing-it-together. Public history-making and activist archiving in online popular music community archives. In S. Baker (ed.), *Preserving Popular Music Heritage: Do-it-Yourself, Do-it-Together* (pp. 77–90). New York: Taylor & Francis.

De Kleijn, M., Dias, E., & Burgers, G. (2016). The digital cultural biography, a tool for interdisciplinary knowledge exchange on the history and heritage of the urban landscape. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 6(1), 72–94.

Europeana and JAM Visual Thinking. (2016). *Europeana for smart cities*. Retrieved from: <https://jamdots.nl/view/190/Europeana---Smart-Cities?divFallback=1>

European Commission. (2017). *Special Eurobarometer 466: Cultural Heritage*. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/resource-centre/content/special-eurobarometer-report-466-cultural-heritage>

European Expert Network on Culture. (2015). Mapping of practices in the EU member states on participatory governance of cultural heritage to support the OMC working group under the same name (Work Plan for Culture 2015-2018). Retrieved from: <http://www.interarts.net/descargas/interarts2541.pdf>

Graham, B.J., & Howard, P. (2008). Heritage and identity. In B.J. Graham and P. Howard (Eds.), *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity* (pp. 1–15). Ashgate, Aldershot.

Gregory, J. (2015). Connecting with the past through social media: the "Beautiful buildings and cool places Perth has lost" Facebook group. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21(1), 22–45

- Kapsalis, E. (2016). The impact of open access on galleries, libraries, museums and archives. *Smithsonian Emerging Leaders Development Program*. Retrieved from: [https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/2016\\_03\\_10\\_OpenCollections\\_Public.pdf](https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/2016_03_10_OpenCollections_Public.pdf)
- Lewi, H., Smith, W., Murray, A., & Cooke, S. (2016). Visitor, contributor and conversationalist: Multiple digital identities of the heritage citizen. *Historic Environment*, 28(2), 12-24.
- Liew, C. L. (2014). Participatory cultural heritage: A tale of two institutions' use of social media. *D-Lib Magazine*, 20(3/4).
- Liew, C.L. (2015). Collaborative construction of digital cultural heritage: a synthesis of research on online sociability determinants. *D-Lib Magazine*, 21(11/12).
- Long, P., Baker, S., Istvandity, L., & Collins, J. (2017). A labour of love: the affective archives of popular music culture. *Archives and Records*, 38(1), 61–79.
- Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Ridge, M. (2017). Do people want access to digitised collections? Retrieved from: <http://www.openobjects.org.uk/2017/09/bother-releasing-digitised-collection-images/>
- Roued-Cunliffe, H., & Copeland, A. (2017). *Participatory heritage*. London: Facet publishing
- Schwarz, M (2017). Heritage-making and placemaking in the sustainist era. In R. Knoop & M. Schwarz (Eds.), *Straatwaarden: in het nieuwe speelveld van maatschappelijke Erfgoedpraktijken* (pp. 42-57). Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academie.
- Stock M (2016) Facebook: a source for microhistory? In K. Knautz & K.S. Baran (Eds.), *Facets of Facebook: use and users* (pp. 210-240). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- UNESCO. (2011). Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions. Retrieved from: [http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1026/URL\\_ID=48857&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1026/URL_ID=48857&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- United Nations. (2014). *World urbanization prospects: The 2014 revision highlights*. New York: Department of economic and social affairs, Population Division.
- Van der Hoeven, A. (2016). Networked practices of intangible urban heritage: the changing public role of Dutch heritage professionals. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Advance online publication, November 7, 2016. doi: 10.1080/10286632.2016.1253686
- Van der Hoeven, A. (2017). The mediatization of urban cultural heritage: Participatory approaches to narrating the urban past. In O. Driessens, G. Bolin, A. Hepp & S. Hjarvard (Eds.), *Dynamics of mediatization: Institutional change and everyday transformations in a digital age* (pp. 293-312). London: Palgrave Macmillan

# Colophon

## Author

Arno van der Hoeven  
(Erasmus University Rotterdam -  
[vanderhoeven@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:vanderhoeven@eshcc.eur.nl)).

## Advisory panel

Behrang Mousavi and Frans Neggers  
(Het Nieuwe Instituut) and Marco  
Streefkerk (DEN).

## Publisher

Erasmus Research Centre for Media,  
Culture and Communication (ERMeCC).

## Partners

Het Nieuwe Instituut  
([hetnieuweinstituut.nl](http://hetnieuweinstituut.nl)) and DEN  
(the Dutch Knowledge Centre for Digital  
Culture, [www.den.nl](http://www.den.nl)).

## Funding

this project was funded by The  
Netherlands Organisation for  
Scientific Research (NWO) as part of the  
programme Creative industry -  
Knowledge Innovation Mapping (KIEM)

## Design

Kris Kras context, content and design

The author is grateful to the following  
people who were interviewed in the  
preparation of this report or made  
thoughtful suggestions: Marcel Westhoff  
(Platform Wendingen), Simon Lelieveldt  
(Financieel Erfgoed op de kaart),  
Dennie Talma and Marijn Smeehuijzen  
(Achteruitkijkspiegel), Bert Spaan (The  
New York Public Library - NYC Space/  
Time Directory), Pim Odekerken  
(Heerlen Vertelt), Ellen Gehring (Erfgoed  
Leiden), Olaf Janssen (National Library  
of the Netherlands), Anouk de Haas and  
Wanda Waanders (The Rotterdam City  
Archives), Michel van der Hoeven and  
Joost Groenendijk.

## Licence

Unless otherwise noted, everything in  
this report is licensed under a Creative  
Commons Attribution 4.0 licence.  
This means that the document can be  
reused for any purpose, built on, and  
adapted - even for commercial purposes  
- when proper attribution is given to  
the authors.



ISBN: 978-90-76665-34-4  
Publication date: June 2018

