

The mission of the Dutch public library

And how to realize it in an increasingly digital society

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Abstract

The mission of the Dutch public library was, and remains to be “the elevation of the people” through the access to information and the culture of reading. Unfortunately, the Dutch public library sector today deals with declining numbers in the number of library members, library visits, library branches, loans, and the scope of the collection. These facts are often assigned to budget cuts, but likewise to societal changes. Dutch citizens are increasingly making use of the Internet and digital media, and are making less and less use of traditional print media. Therefore, the Dutch reading culture is turning more and more into a digital reading culture. That is why Dutch public libraries – to remain relevant in the increasingly digital society – need to think about a new or adjusted realization of their mission. Public libraries in Scandinavia show that success can be found in a combination of the modern and the traditional. Most library visitors like to have a public space where they can physically meet and talk – surrounded by filled bookcases – but, simultaneously, to have access to new digital technology. Therefore, Dutch public libraries should attempt to find a middle way between the modern and the traditional. They should continue to offer a public place for the local community, with the traditional library services, but likewise offer access to digital technology.

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Introduction

At the start of 2017, I read an article on the expansion of library branches in Rotterdam.¹ The *Stichting Bibliotheek Rotterdam* wants to expand from 16 libraries in 2016 to 23 in 2020.² The foundation aims to achieve this by building a customized library in every district: a public library that is adjusted to the specific needs of the inhabitants of each district. According to the SBR, the realization of the customized libraries is possible with an unchanged budget. This initiative made me wonder about the current situation of the Dutch public library, and why such measures are necessary. It encouraged me to search for the facts of the Dutch public library sector, and eventually brought me to the website of *Bibliotheekmonitor*.³

Bibliotheekmonitor shows a continuous decline in most areas of the Dutch public library: the number of library members, library visits, library branches, loans, and the scope of the collection (fig. 1-2).⁴ These declining numbers are often assigned to budget cuts, but likewise to societal changes such as decreasing reading activities, and the permeation of digital technologies in the Dutch society. These elements, however, need further examination, and might possibly be supplemented by other factors through such examination. Nonetheless, the facts and figures provided by Bibliotheekmonitor show that the relevance of the Dutch public library for the present-day Dutch society might be questionable. Less and less people are making use of the public library, and the number of loans is decreasing.

More than a hundred years ago, the first Dutch public libraries were founded to elevate the people of the less developed Dutch classes.⁵ This remains to be the mission of Dutch public libraries: “the elevation of the people”. Dutch public libraries today still offer individuals and groups the opportunity to develop themselves by providing them with low-threshold access to information and the culture of reading.⁶ Svanhild Aabo, professor at the Department of Archivists, Library and Information Science at the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences,

1 W. Pekelder, ‘Zelfde budget, meer bibliotheken’, *NRC*, 26 January, 2017 <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/01/26/zelfde-budget-meer-bibliotheken-6370453-a1543089> (13 November, 2017).

2 Stichting Bibliotheek Rotterdam (Library Foundation Rotterdam) is a foundation that organizes the management and activities of the public library in Rotterdam.

3 Bibliotheekmonitor (Library Monitor) is a website of the National Library of the Netherlands where the results of research regarding the Dutch library sector are recorded.

4 Bibliotheekmonitor, ‘Trends bibliotheken’, <http://www.bibliotheekmonitor.nl/trends-bibliotheken/item4> (13 November, 2017).

The mentioned figures can be found in the appendix.

5 F. Huysmans and C. Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library: ten years on* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2008), p. 25.

6 Ibidem.

supplements this by stating that the mission of public libraries today is to “further democracy, equality and social justice, increase access to information, disseminate culture and knowledge, contribute to a meaningful and informative leisure time, and act as a communal institution and a social meeting place”.⁷ This definition includes all vital tasks and functions of the present-day public library, and is therefore a perfect explanation of and addition to “the elevation of the people”.

However, now that information is constantly and instantly available to all through digital media, our social environment is changing. What do these societal changes – brought about by the increasing use of digital media – mean for the Dutch public library and its mission? Aabo states that the mission is still relevant today, but that the real challenge lies in the ways in which public libraries attempt to realize it.⁸ And that is indeed an important question: how can Dutch public libraries nowadays realize their mission? Apparently – since the Dutch library sector is dealing with declining numbers in most areas – the way this realization has been done in previous years is in need of change. Therefore, discussing a new or adjusted realization of the mission of Dutch public libraries will be the focus of this thesis.

The mission of Dutch public libraries was, and continues to be, the “elevation of the people”. It is however yet unclear how this mission was formed and why. The first chapter will be used to answer this question. Reviewing the history of the Dutch public library, the first chapter will examine how and why public libraries formulated their mission. Eventually, the mission shaped the history of the Dutch public library. Therefore, to start a discussion on the mission, it is important to know how it was formed, and in what context. Besides the history, the present situation of the Dutch public library will be examined as well. Such examination is likewise crucial, since it will clarify the current structure of the Dutch public library sector. Moreover, this investigation will illustrate the existing Dutch library organizations, and the actions undertaken by those organizations to realize the mission. Thus, the first chapter will mainly provide the background knowledge that is necessary to eventually start the discussion on the relevance of the Dutch public library, and the realization of its mission.

An examination of the history will point out that much has changed since the establishment of the first Dutch public libraries. The most important change of the present-day Dutch society is the increasing use of the Internet and digital media. This increasing use has had, and still has, severe consequences for the public library and its mission. In the second chapter, I will consider the scope of the use of digital media, through the provision of facts and figures on the use of digital media in

⁷ S. Aabo, ‘The role and value of public libraries in the age of digital technologies’, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 37:4 (2005), p. 210.

⁸ Ibid.

the Netherlands. Furthermore, these figures can reveal more on the contemporary use of traditional print media and digital reading devices, and the changing reading habits of the Dutch population. These figures will then be used to discuss the consequences of the increasing digital media use on the Dutch reading culture. For example, one of the effects of increasing digital media use is the development of a digital reading culture: a culture wherein texts are read increasingly via digital media and digital reading devices. This has effected the Dutch public library as well, since lending out traditional print media is one of its core activities. Therefore, the digital reading culture – and how it influences the general Dutch reading culture, and the role of the Dutch public library in society – will be discussed in this chapter. Finally, these new examinations will be used to further discuss the mission and its realization. How can the Dutch public library “elevate the people” in this time of increasing digital media use?

Obviously, Dutch public libraries have already discussed the answer to that question, and the answers to other important questions. That is why, in the third chapter, the discussion will be taken further by describing the actions that have already been undertaken by Dutch public libraries in order to realize their mission. Some Dutch public libraries are more innovative than others, and Dutch library branches can probably already learn much from examining each other. Secondly, the practices and approaches of foreign public libraries and library organizations will be examined. Some of these practices might be useful for Dutch public libraries, and the realization of their mission, as well. Eventually, the observations of the previous chapters, the ongoing projects of Dutch public libraries, and the practices of foreign public libraries, will be used in order to conceive ideas on a new or adjusted realization of the mission of Dutch public libraries; a realization that is more applicable to the present-day Dutch society.

Before commencing, some concepts need to be discussed. This is necessary to prevent confusion. Firstly, there is a small but significant difference between the concepts library members and library users. Someone can be a registered library member, but never actually visit or use the public library physically. Contrariwise, someone can visit or make use of the public library without being a library member. Library members are the actual registered members of the public library. Each year, they pay contribution, and can therefore make use of all library services. However, it can be the case that a library member is not or is barely making use of the library services. Perhaps the member only wants to support the public library by paying contribution. Or the member does not want to renounce the library card, since it is often used by a family member or friend. All in all, they continue to be library members, even when they never visit the public library. Library users make use of the library services, without necessarily having to be library members. Some public library services can be used by everyone, without having to be a library member: using the

computer to consult the library database, visiting a lecture, etc. Even other library services – like the borrowing of books – are often available to non-members. For example, when they use the library card from a registered library member. To sum it all up, library members can make use of all the services of the public library, and are actual registered members of that public library. Library users can likewise make use of the library services, but are not necessarily registered members of that public library.

Secondly, the concept of library branches needs further explanation. This concept is used to indicate the individual public libraries in the Netherlands. All library branches have their own, local library board, but are likewise accountable to the National Library of the Netherlands, the provincial support institutions, and the local municipality. The concepts of library branches and public libraries are therefore the same, and will both be used throughout this thesis.

1.1 Introduction

The aim of the first Dutch public libraries was to provide everyone, including the lower classes, with access to information and the culture of reading.⁹ According to Huysmans and Hillebrink, this continues to be their mission; public libraries aim for “the elevation of the people”. Aabo supplemented this definition by stating that the mission of public libraries today is to “further democracy, equality and social justice, increase access to information, disseminate culture and knowledge, contribute to a meaningful and informative leisure time, and act as a communal institution and a social meeting place”.¹⁰ Furthermore, she adds that this mission is still relevant today, but that the way in which public libraries attempt to realize it is in need of change. Before a discussion on a new or adjusted realization of the mission can begin, it is necessary to develop more background knowledge on the history and on the present-day organization of the Dutch public library. Therefore, an overview of the history of the Dutch public library, and an outline of the present-day situation, will be made.

Firstly, it will be examined how and why the Dutch public library, and the mission “the elevation of the people” was established. The continued pursuing of the mission eventually formed the history of the Dutch public library, although historical events have possibly affected that mission and somewhat altered it in time. To be able to discuss the mission, it is important to know if and how the mission has been affected and altered over time, and how this, in its turn, influenced the management and activities of the Dutch public library. Therefore, an examination of the Dutch public library over time will be made. Such examination will eventually take us to the present situation, which requires new questions to be asked. What is the present situation of the Dutch public library? How does the present-day Dutch public library system function?

1.2 The history of the Dutch public library

The idea of the public library was formed in the eighteenth century during the Enlightenment.¹¹ During this period, the development of all citizens was advocated, which called for a public space in which people could meet and access information. Therefore, reading groups were formed all over Europe – and likewise in the Netherlands – in the second half of the eighteenth century. These groups firstly only comprised of affluent citizens meeting in reading rooms to read and debate the

⁹ Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Aabo, ‘The role and value of public libraries’, p. 210.

¹¹ Ibidem.

materials they read. They read books to increase their knowledge, and to acquire personal taste. These books had to contain “useful knowledge”: information that helped the readers become intelligent and educated people, and better-behaved citizens.¹² For example, they read dictionaries, grammars, atlases, histories, or works of science or agriculture. Through these reading groups, this useful knowledge was firstly only accessible to the bourgeoisie. However, during the industrial revolution, the lower classes started fighting for their rights, demanding to likewise receive access to education and information.¹³ As a response, some of the reading rooms were turned into public libraries by the bourgeoisie, providing each citizen – regardless of their social or educational background – with access to the same useful knowledge. Thus, at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dutch public library was founded, along with its corresponding mission: the elevation of the people. During the decades that followed, this mission was left unchanged. However, the views on the mission, and the way in which the mission was realized, eventually did change. This was caused by societal and technological developments, and the changing beliefs of the Dutch population.

Besides the establishment of the first Dutch public libraries, influential changes of the overall Dutch book industry took place during the beginning of the nineteenth century as well. This was the result of rapid development of schooling, urbanization, industrialization, and communication.¹⁴ Because of this, the spread of books accelerated. The printing presses improved from mechanization and industrialization, which made it possible to print and spread books in a much cheaper way. This made books accessible to those who earlier did not have that access because of their lack of education and/or financial means. Moreover, the Netherlands experienced a mass extension of literacy and schooling during the nineteenth century. Dutch publishers profited from this, having more readers. Most publishers choose to publish works from authors who reached the most readers, like serial writers who wrote fiction published in periodicals. They particularly reached the lower classes, who massively bought cheap illustrated weeklies. This eventually resulted into a debate about the literary value of such works. The Dutch bourgeoisie acknowledged this kind of work as inferior. They thought novels to be badly written fiction from vulgar serial writers, who were paid per line, and were only trying to make the most profit. Nevertheless, the lower classes kept preferring novels. The bourgeoisie therefore believed that these classes lived in ignorance, poverty and immorality, and that the right books could help them to get rid of those sins

12 W. A. Wiegand, ‘Libraries and the Invention of Information’, in S. Eliot and J. Rose (ed.), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 535.

13 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 31.

14 J. Molier and M. Cachin, ‘A Continent of Texts: Europe 1800-1890’, in S. Eliot and J. Rose (ed.), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 305-308.

and to elevate them.¹⁵ This was one of the main reasons for the bourgeoisie to establish Dutch public libraries: to help moralize the reading materials of the masses, to provide the lower classes with useful knowledge found in dictionaries, grammars, atlases, histories, works of science or agriculture, etc.¹⁶ Furthermore, the reading of the right books was likewise promoted by special societies – like the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* – that established libraries for the lower classes: *Nutsbibliotheken*.¹⁷ In these libraries, volunteers searched for and offered books that were suited for the less civilized classes – the members were not allowed to pick the books themselves. It was vital that the loaned books stimulated the – cultural – development of the less developed members of society; it was forbidden to give members critical or dangerous reading materials: novels. Eventually, hundreds of *Nutsbibliotheken* were run by thousands of volunteers.

Some of the first Dutch public libraries tried to imitate English public libraries, since the English public library system proved to be very successful.¹⁸ In 1850, the Public Libraries Act was passed in England, providing municipalities with the opportunity to raise special taxes with which public libraries could be funded. This act was adopted to improve the education and social situation of the English working classes.¹⁹ The main goal of the act was – alike the mission of Dutch public libraries – to elevate the people through the spread of useful knowledge. Dutch public libraries tried to likewise embrace this approach in the second half of the nineteenth century, but all attempts failed.²⁰ A Library Act for Dutch public libraries would only be introduced at the end of the nineteenth century.

At that point in time, more and more people learned how to read because of improved education.²¹ Capitalism and political democracy, two major influences at the end of the nineteenth century, required intelligent and developed citizens. It became generally accepted that one had to know how to read if one wanted to partake in society. Europe experienced a true reading frenzy: people read a lot, turning magazines and newspapers into the first mass media.²² Fact was that

15 P. Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen* (Den Haag: Nederlands Bibliotheek en Lektuur Centrum, 1990), p. 28.

16 Molier and Cachin, 'A Continent of Texts', p. 306.

17 The *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (The Society of the Common Good) was a Dutch society that promoted activities and initiatives for the development of the Dutch population.

Maatschappij tot nut van 't algemeen, 'Historie', <http://www.nutalgemeen.nl/over-t-nut/historie> (3 January, 2018).

18 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 32.

19 Historic England, 'The English Public Library 1850-1939: Introduction to Heritage Assets', *Historic England*, July, 2016 <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-english-public-library-1850-1939/heag135-the-english-public-library-1850-1939-iha.pdf/> (3 January, 2018).

20 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 36.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-51.

22 A. van der Weel, 'Modernity and Print II: Europe 1890-1970', in S. Eliot and J. Rose (ed.), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 354.

books were cheaper than ever. This was the effect of further improvements of the production, distribution, and consumption of books. Cheap series and paperbacks were introduced; products that eventually helped building a mass-consumer society. These movements were already visible in the nineteenth century, but intensified years later by the rising literacy, increasing leisure time, population growth, and – as was said – by cheaper and faster print production. In the Netherlands around 1920, novels could be bought for 17,5 to 45 cents. Around 1935, two-thirds of the books could be published for less than 2 cents. Despite these low prices, not every Dutch citizen was able to buy books, and these citizens relied on the public library. That is why the Dutch public library remained very influential until at least the end of the second World War.

Despite these developments, the discussion on reading materials – especially on books provided to the lower classes – continued within the Dutch public library: high-quality literature containing useful knowledge could enlighten the reader, low-quality literature – novels – could only cause damage.²³ Librarians and volunteers continued to offer the books to the members; books that stimulated the – cultural – development of the members. It was still not allowed for the members to choose their own books. Reading and acquiring knowledge were considered by many as civilizing forces.²⁴ In the light of personal development, the Dutch public library likewise struggled to keep the working class out of the pubs.²⁵ In this, the Netherlands again drew inspiration from their English counterparts – especially the libraries created by the Englishman Arnold Toynbee. Toynbee wanted public libraries to be part of a complex of services that stimulated the development of the people. He therefore created several institutions where the people could drink non-alcoholic drinks, play games, and read. The example of Toynbee eventually spread throughout the Netherlands. This resulted in the creation of reading rooms for the lower classes, public reading rooms and libraries, and confessional reading rooms and libraries; each with the goal to help the members in their development by providing them with proper reading materials. These reading rooms and libraries worked independently, and were divided on the basis of strict social and religious beliefs. The public reading room in Dordrecht started lending out books in 1899, and is therefore often considered the oldest Dutch public library.²⁶ The public reading rooms and libraries continued to aim for the elevation of the people through the improvement of knowledge and the development of literary taste.²⁷ Furthermore, they aimed to increase the solidarity among the Dutch population; to reduce the gap between the higher and lower classes. This gap still existed, despite the improved

23 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, pp. 41-51.

24 Van der Weel, 'Modernity and Print II', p. 357.

25 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, pp. 41-51.

26 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 33.

27 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 67.

education and increased literacy. The people of the lower classes still preferred novels above other reading materials, while the bourgeoisie did not want anything to do with “the vulgar taste of the plebs”.²⁸ This resulted in a gap between popular taste and the opinions of the cultural elite, but likewise in a gap between the higher and lower classes of society. The Dutch public library wanted to reverse this effect by elevating the lower classes of society.

In 1908, the *Centrale Vereniging voor Openbare Leeszalen en Bibliotheken in Nederland* (CV), the precursor of the *Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken in Nederland* (VOB), was established by the six first Dutch public reading rooms (Dordrecht, Utrecht, Rotterdam, The Hague, Groningen and Leeuwarden).²⁹ The CV was the most influential advisory organization for the management of Dutch public reading rooms and libraries.³⁰ It was the central organization until it merged with the *Katholiek en Christelijk Lector Centrum* and the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* into the *Nederlands Bibliotheek en Lector Centrum* (NBLC) in 1972.³¹ Around 1930, the public reading rooms and libraries had truly influenced the Dutch reading culture.³² Many books, newspapers and magazines were now freely available to the Dutch population. The reading rooms and libraries were valuable centers of culture, information, education and recreation. They became institutions that were truly part of the public sphere.³³ Many public reading rooms and libraries considered themselves to be educational institutions, alongside schools and the church. They therefore called themselves the third pillar of civilization. However, this was complicated by the library users, who still preferred to read novels. While public reading rooms and libraries wanted to spread useful knowledge, and wanted to be seen as educational institutions, they also had to acquire novels to retain their members.

The management and activities of the Dutch public reading rooms and libraries did not change much during the decades that followed due to the economic crisis, the Second World War and the period of reconstruction after the war.³⁴ The economic crisis of the thirties likewise caused a

28 Van der Weel, ‘Modernity and Print II’, p. 357.

29 Centrale Vereniging voor Openbare Leeszalen en Bibliotheken in Nederland = The Central Association of Public Reading Rooms and Libraries.

Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken in Nederland = The Dutch Public Library Association.

De bibliotheken, ‘Geschiedenis VOB’, <http://www.debibliotheken.nl/de-vob/informatie/geschiedenis-van-vob/> (3 January, 2018).

30 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 79.

31 The Katholiek en Christelijk Lector Centrum (Catholic and Christian Center for Literature) was the most important organization for the management of Dutch Catholic reading rooms.

The Nederlands Bibliotheek en Lector Centrum (Dutch Center for Libraries and Literature) was the successor of the CV.

32 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 112.

33 Wiegand, ‘Libraries and the Invention of Information’, pp. 535-536.

34 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 187.

book crisis in the Netherlands.³⁵ The Dutch book trade responded to this by putting more emphasis on marketing: more advertising and more book-promotion activities. Still, the Dutch book trade collapsed during the Second World War. Firstly, the international book trade stagnated completely. Secondly, the country struggled with a paper shortage. However, the biggest problem was censorship, which demanded publishers to only publish “safe” titles, and skip the popular, forbidden ones. During this period, the Dutch population was still able to visit and use the public libraries. These continued to loan books to the members. However, due to the circumstances, there was not much progress within the Dutch public library system during those years. The management of the Dutch public library did not progress, and few new materials were included to the library collections. After the Second World War, when the international book trade advanced, and the paper shortage was over, the Dutch book trade experienced a boom. Therefore, a real change within the Dutch public library system only took place during the cultural revolution and the period of secularization of the sixties. Firstly, Dutch public reading rooms and libraries dropped the censorship.³⁶ Closed lending systems became open, which offered the members the opportunity to choose the books themselves. The recreational function of the public reading rooms and libraries – the pleasure of reading – became more important. Dutch public libraries still aimed for the elevation of the people, but the way in which this was accomplished changed during the sixties. Elevation was no longer realized by just providing the members with useful knowledge, but likewise by letting the members experience the pleasure of reading – even when they only wanted to read novels. Secondly, the strict division of public reading rooms and libraries on the basis of political and religious beliefs ceased to exist: there was a need for a general public library. This library had to have a collection which represented the ideas of all different religions and social groups in the Netherlands. Because of these processes, it can be stated that the Dutch public library matured in the sixties. The outcome was a rise in the number of Dutch library members (fig. 1), and the number of loans (fig. 2).³⁷

Eventually, it can be stated that the mission of Dutch public libraries did not change; it continued to be “the elevation of the people”. However, the way in which the Dutch public library attempted to realize the mission did change. Throughout the years, the view on the mission continued to change, by which the realization of the mission has been changing as well. Let us now look at the present situation of the Dutch public library. How do Dutch public libraries nowadays try to accomplish the mission?

35 Van der Weel, ‘Modernity and Print II’, pp. 360-363.

36 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, pp. 196-199.

37 Bibliotheekmonitor, ‘Trends Bibliotheken’, n. pag.

1.3 The present situation of the Dutch public library

Around the year 2000, the effectiveness and advantages of having multiple library branches in one area, and therefore the administrative organization of the Dutch public library, was questioned.³⁸

This was due to the declines in most areas of the Dutch public library sector. There has been a decrease in the number of members, the number of visits, the number of loans, etc. Clearly, some alterations were necessary to guarantee the relevancy of the Dutch public library. This questioning eventually resulted in the process of *Bibliotheekvernieuwing*.³⁹ The aim of this process was to create a national network of public libraries, with collaborations between the individual public libraries, but likewise with other organizations of interest.⁴⁰ One of the aspects of the *Bibliotheekvernieuwing* was the creation of a system of basic libraries: independent organizations established by merging several small libraries in one or several municipalities.⁴¹ The basic libraries are obliged to offer a library facility with a prescribed number of services of a certain, prescribed quality. The VOB has written some guidelines to declare what those requirements are.⁴² The five guidelines of Dutch basic libraries are as follows:

- The public library as a storehouse of knowledge and information: it is difficult to partake in society when one is secluded from access to sufficient knowledge and information.⁴³ Public libraries need to offer a low-threshold access point to knowledge in order to help members to develop. The public library needs to be accessible, and needs to have a large collection, a clear presentation of that collection, professional staff and wide opening hours.⁴⁴ Information has to be available on a large number of subjects; physically as well as digitally. Activities like workshops, lectures and exhibitions can be organized to promote the transmission of knowledge and information.
- The public library as a center of development and education: public libraries aim to enrich and promote all forms of education by providing library users with access to their collection,

38 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 36.

39 The *Bibliotheekvernieuwing* (Library Renovation) promotes renovation within Dutch public libraries through innovation, a focus on the members, and efficiency.

Bibliotheekvernieuwing, 'Home', <http://www.bibliotheekvernieuwing.nl/> (3 January, 2018).

40 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', *Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken*, December, 2015 http://www.debibliotheken.nl/fileadmin/documenten/branche/2005_richtlijn-voor-basisbibliotheken_vob_vng.pdf (3 January, 2018), p. 10.

41 *Ibidem*, p. 13.

42 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken = The Dutch Public Library Association. The Association is housed in the National Library of the Netherlands.

43 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', p. 102.

44 *Ibidem*, p. 24.

trained staff and extensive network.⁴⁵ Firstly, there has always been a strong connection and collaboration between public libraries and schools. For example, public libraries often advise schools on the organization of their school library and the use of fiction in the classroom.⁴⁶ The library furthermore offers a continuous reading pathway for children between the ages of 0 and 18, and provides children with extra material to support their learning process. Nowadays, much attention goes to lifelong learning, whereby the focus switches to a broader audience, including preschool children and adults. This is accomplished by organizing lectures and courses, sometimes developed by the public library itself.

- The public library as an encyclopedia of arts and culture: the public library has a central position in the cultural life of its members.⁴⁷ Art and literature can be vital for the identity of the local environment. Therefore, the public library must be a place where cultural expressions of people from different cultural backgrounds can be heard. Listening to and examining cultural expressions of people, with a cultural background that differs from our own, can lead to peaceful confrontations and mutual respect and understanding. This can be achieved by organizing cultural activities, like theater performances and exhibitions, but through collaborations with other cultural institutions – like museums and archives – as well. Furthermore, the public library must be an encyclopedia for the local cultural life. The library has the possibility to share information on local, regional and national cultural activities with a large audience.
- The public library as a podium for meeting and debate: public libraries aim to establish contact between individuals and between groups.⁴⁸ The Dutch society has changed because of a radical process of individualism, which calls for places for people to meet and talk or debate.⁴⁹ Public libraries can provide their members with such meeting places; for example by the creation of meeting rooms or reading cafés, but also by the organization of lectures and debates.
- The public library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature: public libraries must focus on the promotion of reading and literary education.⁵⁰ The writing, reading and speaking of the same language will increase the solidarity of a community.⁵¹ Furthermore,

45 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 95.

46 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', p. 27.

47 Ibidem, pp. 32-35.

48 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 114.

49 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', p. 40.

50 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 121.

51 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', p. 36.

being able to partake in the – Dutch – literary reading culture is socially important, since reading is vital for dealing with information. That is why the public library supports the promotion of reading and literary education by organizing literary lectures, presentations, reading groups, and meetings with authors.

Eventually, the VOB decided to adopt these guidelines as the five core values for Dutch public libraries in general.⁵²

On 1 January 2015, a new public library act (Wsob) was implemented: a library act that made the three levels of government – municipal, provincial and national government – jointly responsible for the Dutch public library sector.⁵³ This was crucial, since the old library act was formed before the advent of the Internet.⁵⁴ Dutch public libraries nowadays have a physical and digital component, and a library act should consider both. Moreover, the old library act failed to provide cohesion within the public library system. These issues were handled via the Wsob. Presently, the Netherlands has one public library system with a cooperation between the local public libraries, the provincial support institutions, and the National Library of the Netherlands. The municipality is responsible for the local public libraries, the province for the support of the municipalities, and the National Library of the Netherlands for the overall public library system and the national digital library.

The National Library of the Netherlands is most in control of the Dutch public library system and carries responsibility for:

- the overall public library system;
- the infrastructure of the national digital library, and the finance of e-content;
- the creation of services for library members with reading restrictions.⁵⁵

Every Dutch citizen, regardless of being a library member, should have access to the national digital library.⁵⁶ The national digital library consists of free objects, but likewise of objects under copyright. The free content is available to all, but one has to be a registered member to consult the copyrighted material. All public libraries are connected through the national digital library. Through this, they can make e-books and other digital content available to all library users. Other

52 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 95.

53 The Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen (Law system for public library facilities) was implemented in 2015 to make the three levels of government jointly responsible for the library sector. Anon., 'Gezamenlijke innovatieagenda netwerk openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen', *Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, 2016 https://www.kb.nl/sites/default/files/docs/gezamenlijke_innovatieagenda_2016-2018_def_0.pdf (14 January, 2018), pp. 5-9.

54 VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk. Een handreiking voor gemeenten', VNG, April, 2015 https://vng.nl/files/vng/201501_handreiking_lokaal_bibliotheekbeleid_2015.pdf (1 March, 2018), pp. 7-8.

55 Ibidem, p. 15.

56 Ibidem, pp. 16-18.

components of the national digital library consist of the National Library Catalog – a platform through which the collections of all Dutch public libraries can be accessed – and the Datawarehouse – wherein the data of all Dutch public libraries are stored. The data from the Datawarehouse – on the number of members, the objects in the collections, the transactions, etc. – are used for the website of the Bibliotheekmonitor.

The provincial support institutions (PSO's) support the municipalities with innovations and interlibrary traffic.⁵⁷ There are nine PSO's in the Netherlands; three PSO's for two provinces. They develop and support innovations within the public libraries. These innovations are always focused on the development and supplementation of the five core values of Dutch public libraries. Furthermore, the PSO's support interlibrary traffic through the organization of the transportation of objects between public libraries.

Lastly, the Dutch public library system consists of the individual public library branches. According to the Wsob, all Dutch public libraries have to strive to fulfill all five core values.⁵⁸ To a great extent, municipalities are free to organize the activities within their public libraries. Though, it is the responsibility of the municipality to correctly execute the Wsob. Furthermore, there are some requirements the individual library branches have to consider. All Dutch public libraries have to provide access to:

- the National Library Catalog;
- interlibrary traffic;
- a communal collection scheme;
- a communal digital infrastructure;
- a uniform member administration;
- educational support.

Besides these points, the Dutch public libraries are free to make their own choices. However, these requirements have to be met if the public library wants to be included in the national public library system.

1.4 Conclusion

The Dutch public library continues to aim for the elevation of the people, but should attempt to change the way in which this aim is realized. A recent initiative to realize this aim is the implementation of the Wsob. Through the Wsob, cohesion is created between the library branches and organizations. Through this, the Dutch public library sector wants to reverse the effect of the

⁵⁷ VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk', p. 20.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, pp. 8-14.

decreasing figures (fig. 1 and fig. 2). However, we should wonder if the Wsob, and the new system of cohesion and cooperation, is truly effective. Dutch public libraries still struggle to remain relevant.⁵⁹ This is mostly due to decreasing reading activities and an increasing use of digital devices. On the one hand, Dutch citizens are reading less traditional print media. On the other hand, there is the Internet with its enormous amount of available information. Dutch public libraries experience these changes by a decreasing number of adult library members, library visits, items in the collection, loans and library branches.⁶⁰ Furthermore, many municipalities continually experience budgetary pressure. The budget for financing public libraries is constantly decreasing.⁶¹ Eventually, this resulted in cuts on the library building, staff, the collection, and other important costs. Does this mean that all recent news about Dutch public libraries is negative? In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of objects available via the public library website Bibliotheek.nl.⁶² Since 2014, more and more library members have an e-book-account (160.000 in 2015), and an increasing number of e-books are read via the public library (800.000 in 2015). This phenomenon should not be ignored by Dutch public libraries.

Issues like decreasing reading activities and an increasing use of digital devices ensure that the Dutch public library should consider a new or adjusted realization of the mission.⁶³ Public libraries still want to stimulate and support the Dutch citizens in their struggle to successfully navigate through and contribute to the modern information society. To accomplish this, Dutch public libraries should consider the new societal developments. More on the decreasing reading activities and increasing use of the Internet and digital media will be discussed in the following chapter. Digital media and digital devices have penetrated the world of the book, and Dutch public libraries should consider and use that fact for a new or adjusted realization of the mission.

59 VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk', pp. 24-25.

60 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

61 VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk', p. 24.

62 Ibidem, p. 25.

63 Ibidem, p. 28.

Chapter 2: The digital reading culture

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter discussed the history of the Dutch public library and its corresponding mission, but much has changed since the establishment of the first Dutch public libraries. Especially the increasing use of the Internet, and digital media, necessitates a reconsideration of the realization of the mission of Dutch public libraries. The mission is to elevate the people; to help the Dutch citizens navigate through and contribute to today's modern information society.⁶⁴ However, since the rise of the Internet, most Dutch citizens now have access to information, and cultural activities and events without leaving their homes. Because of this, it is getting harder for Dutch public libraries to realize their mission. They thus have to find other ways to support the Dutch citizens in their development. These new methods ought to take into account the recent digital and societal changes.

Before the realization of the mission can be further discussed, more knowledge on the recent digital and societal trends is necessary. What is the current situation of these trends and phenomena in the Netherlands? How do Dutch citizens deal with the new digital technology? And how should the Dutch public library respond to these developments? Because of these current developments, a so-called digital reading culture emerged; in the Netherlands as well. This digital reading culture offers more or, at least, different experiences than the original print reading culture: online social communities for sharing books and reading experiences, or subscription services for e-books, newspapers or magazines, for instance. Firstly, this chapter will discuss the concept "digital reading culture". What does the concept entail, and how does it influence the role of the Dutch public library in society?

Secondly, it will be demonstrated that there is indeed an increasing use of digital media, and therefore a growing digital reading culture, in the Netherlands. The facts and figures on the use of digital media in the Netherlands will reveal more details on the leisure time, and the changing reading habits of the Dutch population.⁶⁵ It will become obvious that digital media and digital devices have penetrated the world of the book, for example by the advent of e-books and e-readers.

Lastly, the effects of the increasing use of digital media, and the growing digital reading culture, will be discussed. These effects should be considered by Dutch public libraries, and possibly used for new initiatives. The effects indicate how the Dutch reading culture has changed,

⁶⁴ VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk', p. 28.

⁶⁵ Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', <http://www.bibliotheekmonitor.nl/trends-media-informatie/item5> (8 January, 2018).

and what characterizes it. How does the present-day Dutch population read, which reading devices do they use, or where do they prefer to read? These facts are crucial for devising a new or adjusted realization of the mission of Dutch public libraries.

2.2 *The digital reading culture*

Within a digital reading culture, most of the reading practices happen online. In the Netherlands, most reading practices occur while browsing on the Internet, while using social media, while swiping on telephones, etc.⁶⁶ Reading is done less and less via traditional print media. Furthermore, a large part of the present-day lives of the Dutch population is spent online. From an overall analogue world, the Dutch society has become an overall digital and networked world.⁶⁷ The facts that will be discussed in paragraph 2.3 will also point that out. Thus, the Dutch reading culture can be described as a digital reading culture, but what exactly defines such reading culture?

Van der Weel calls Western culture a mediated culture.⁶⁸ In Western culture, media define people's world picture. For a very long time, our culture lived according to the Order of the Book, but new media are pervading our society at high speed. A few important effects of these societal changes are the increasing amount of information, and the formation of online social communities. The Internet has had a positive effect on the speed, quantity and accessibility of information.⁶⁹ Nowadays, analogue sources – books, manuscripts, documents – are all converged to digital formats, and published on the Internet. This resulted in an ever-growing amount of available information. Van der Weel speaks of an information overload, created by the 'almost threshold-free publishing opportunities offered by the Internet'.⁷⁰ This information overload has three major consequences. Firstly, it is getting harder for the user to orient himself in the digital landscape.⁷¹ New websites and blogs are created every day, and all of them publish articles daily. Because of this, the user can easily lose himself in the enormous digital landscape, making it more difficult to know where to start in the search for information. Secondly, the enormous amount of available information on the Internet makes it more difficult to determine which information is relevant, and which is not. Huysmans and Hillebrink point to the almost impossible task of selecting information,

66 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

67 J. Palfrey, *BiblioTech: why libraries matter more than ever in the age of Google* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 23.

68 A. van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds: Towards a Digital Order of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 68.

69 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 66.

70 Van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds*, p. 171.

71 R. Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), p. 21.

since the quality of the information on the Internet is questionable.⁷² Using Google often forces the user to wade through oceans of junk before some relevant information can be found.⁷³ Yet, people often – wrongly – believe that recent information that is published on the Internet is more reliable than information found in an old book.⁷⁴ The main problem is that everyone is allowed to publish on the Internet: a professor, but also the still-learning student. Often, it is difficult to determine what the source of the information on a website is. Huysmans and Hillebrink therefore acknowledge the information found in paper books or encyclopaedia's of the public library as more reliable and complete, but they likewise notice that most people are reluctant to spend time and effort on those analogue sources.⁷⁵ Which is the third consequence of the information overload: more and more people do not bother to pick up a paper-based book in their search for information; they rather use what they can find on the websites of the Internet.⁷⁶ This is partly due to the fact that information on the Internet can be found in smaller, manageable pieces. Nowadays, Dutch citizens are always in a hurry. They therefore often prefer to avoid reading an entire book. The Internet, presenting information in smaller, manageable pieces, is a better fit for our present-day society. Unfortunately, many Dutch citizens do not acknowledge the questionable quality of information on the Internet.

Another result of the digital reading culture is the forming of online communities. The Internet has made it much easier to connect to people with the some interests; Web 2.0 applications make new ways of interaction possible. Van der Weel describes the Web as a platform on which everyone can publish their own knowledge and opinions.⁷⁷ The focus of the Web therefore lies on participation and interaction. Hereby, the division between the public and the private domain is disappearing, since more and more people share the most intimate details of their lives on the Internet. This growing interest in online social communities has had major effects on our reading experiences. Van der Weel remarks that reading used to be an isolated, private activity; an interaction between the book and the reader only.⁷⁸ Now, most reading practices happen online, within social communities. In these communities, the readers can suggest new characters or plot twists, and provide the community with their personal opinions on the books they read.⁷⁹

72 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 66.

73 M. Johnson, *This Book is Overdue! How librarians and cybrarians can save us all* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2010), pp. 20-22.

74 J. Samuel, 'The library in Crisis, 2002', <http://www.julianjsamuel.com/films/the-library-in-crisis-2002/> (8 January, 2018).

75 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 66.

76 Samuel, 'The library in Crisis, 2002', n. pag.

77 Van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds*, p. 175.

78 Ibid., p. 2.

79 T. Peters, 'The Future of Read', *Library Journal* (1 November, 2009), p. 21.

For Dutch readers, the website of Hebban is a good example. Hebban is an online community for readers in the Netherlands and Flanders.⁸⁰ Users can create their own account, and then create and arrange their own bookshelves. There are separate shelves for the books the user is reading, books that have already been read, and books that still have to be read. Furthermore, users can write reviews and publish them on the website, so that other users can consult them. This way, discussions can be started. Moreover, Hebban offers the possibility to create an online reading club. Reading clubs consist of several community members, who choose a book together, read it and discuss it online. Since the board of Hebban also publishes news items and articles on the website, Hebban is one of the best sources for Dutch readers. Hebban now has 145.918 members (17 April, 2018) and continues to grow. Hebban combines a passion for reading with digital technology and a social community. It therefore adheres to recent trends, making it a very popular community in the Netherlands. In particular, the possibility to digitally meet each other, and discuss books, draws the Dutch population to Hebban.

The above-mentioned phenomena are definitely noticeable in the present-day Dutch society, turning it more and more into a digital reading culture. Most everyday reading in the Netherlands occurs online, via websites, blogs, and other social media.⁸¹ But also through the use of digital reading devices, like telephones, iPads, and e-readers. It is by now clear what a digital reading culture entails, but how does this culture present itself in the Dutch society? Paragraph 2.3 will discuss the current use of digital media in the Netherlands. These facts will prove that there is indeed a growing digital reading culture in the Netherlands.

2.3 The use of digital media in the Netherlands

Figures from the CBS and the SCP display the current situation of the use of digital media in the Netherlands.⁸² These figures show that the way the Dutch population is spending their leisure time is changing. The figures can also be used to demonstrate how often books are read and under which circumstances – where, how long, and on what sort of reading device? Moreover, the figures prove that the Dutch reading culture has altered, turning more and more into a digital reading culture. It is vital to gain more insight on the current use of digital media by the Dutch population. Dutch public

80 Hebban, 'Home', <https://www.hebban.nl/> (17 April, 2018).

81 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

82 CBS (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek) stands for Statistics Netherlands. This organization enables people to have debates on social issues on the basis of reliable statistical information.

SCP (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) stands for Social and Cultural Planning Office. This organization follows, declares and explores the social and cultural welfare of the Dutch citizens.

Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 'About us', <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/about-us/organisation> (7 March, 2018).

SCP, 'Wat is het SCP?', https://www.scp.nl/Organisatie/Wat_is_het_SCP (7 March, 2018).

libraries should be aware of the changes that are currently taking place, and which trends they have to consider for the realization of their mission.

The figures, gathered by the CBS and SCP, prove that the time spent on the computer and the Internet has been increasing, while the reading of traditional print media – paper books, magazines and newspapers – is decreasing (fig. 3-5).⁸³ The print book faces competition from other media, and especially from the Internet.⁸⁴ It was measured in 2011 that the Dutch population spent an average of one hour per day on the Internet.⁸⁵ In 2013, more than 75% of the Dutch population possessed technology which allowed them online access everywhere and anytime. Figure 3 shows that the percentage of Dutch citizens having access to the Internet has been increasing between the years 2012 and 2015; mainly among the elderly (fig. 3).⁸⁶ There has not been much change among the Dutch youth. Essentially all children and young adults had access to the Internet in 2012, and that was still the case in 2015. Figure 4 outlines the increasing use of social media in the Netherlands (fig. 4).⁸⁷ Besides an increasing use of social media, there has likewise been an increase in the number of various social media channels that are used by the Dutch population. These developments have a serious implication: whenever Dutch citizens are using the computer and/or the Internet, they do not spend time on traditional print media.

Then, what is the current situation of the use of traditional print media in the Netherlands? The decreasing time spent on print media is biggest among young adults (age 12-19); they spend the least time on reading paper books, magazines, and newspapers.⁸⁸ This age group makes the most use of the Internet, leaving them little time to spend on print media (fig. 3).⁸⁹ When it comes to age, it seems that each new generation starts on a lower level of reading frequency and reading time than older generations.⁹⁰ The first chart of figure 5 outlines the time spent on reading traditional print media and reading online.⁹¹ In particular, the reading of paper books is decreasing, especially when compared to the figures of 1955. Moreover, the number of read printed magazines is severely

83 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

The mentioned figures can be found in the appendix.

84 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 115.

85 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

86 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 'Acht procent van de Nederlanders nooit op internet', <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/22/acht-procent-van-de-nederlanders-nooit-op-internet> (4 January, 2018).

87 Marketing Online, 'Nationale Social Media Onderzoek 2017', https://www.marketingonline.nl/sites/default/files/Newcom__Nationale_Social_Media_Onderzoek_2017.pdf (4 January, 2018).

88 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

89 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 'Acht procent van de Nederlanders nooit op internet', n. pag.

90 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 112.

91 Leesmonitor, 'Leestijd', <https://www.leesmonitor.nu/leestijd> (4 January, 2018).

declining. However, online reading activities have been increasing in recent years. The second graph of figure 5 shows the overall number of read books per year in the Netherlands, in print or digitally.⁹² The graph displays a decrease in the number of read books. The percentage of Dutch citizens reading 0 books per year is increasing. Furthermore, the percentage of Dutch citizens reading 1 to 5 books per year is increasing. Moreover, a decrease in avid readers is occurring: the percentage of Dutch citizens reading 6 or more books per year is clearly declining. Thus, the way the Dutch population spent its leisure time is clearly changing; with an increase of time spent on the Internet, and a decrease in the reading of paper books. Public libraries should consider these changes, and react to them.

One way for public libraries to respond to new digital trends is by offering e-books. In recent years, Dutch readers are increasingly making use of e-books and e-readers (fig. 6).⁹³ It can therefore be stated that e-books are definitely on the rise in the Netherlands. Since 21 January 2014, it is possible for Dutch library members to borrow e-books via their public library.⁹⁴ The collection of e-books takes place nationally, meaning that every Dutch public library can provide access to it. The collection also includes e-books that are free from copyrights, which are assembled by the Literary Museum in The Hague and the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren*.⁹⁵ Dutch public libraries do not have a special status when it comes to e-books; they have to obtain permission from the copyright-owner to lend the e-books to the library members. Some of the e-books of the public library need to be downloaded before reading can take place; others are available through streaming.⁹⁶ However, when it comes to acquiring e-books, most Dutch readers admit they prefer the – online – bookstore over the public library, since the public library cannot – yet – offer the same online options.⁹⁷ Borrowing e-books for the e-reader via the public library requires many steps, and the downloading of several programs, while bought e-books can be read instantly after the purchase.⁹⁸ Most Dutch library members admit that they would borrow more e-books when the library collection would offer more – recent – titles, or when e-readers become less

92 Leesmonitor, 'Leestijd', n. pag.

93 R. Snijders, 'Boeken en ebooks in Nederland: de KVB Boekwerk marktcijfers van 2016', <https://rsnijders.info/vakblog/2017/06/02/kvb-boekwerk-marktcijfers-2016/> (8 January, 2018).

94 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

95 The Digital Library for Dutch Literature is a collection of primary and secondary information on Dutch language and literature in its historical, societal and cultural context.

DBNL, 'Over DBNL', <http://www.dbnl.org/overdbnl/index.php> (7 March, 2018).

96 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

97 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

98 De bibliotheek, 'E-books lenen en lezen op je tablet of smartphone', https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-1NnVz_-n07_VUIrLz97_a3g3u9SEyqT (8 January, 2018).

expensive.⁹⁹ The willingness to borrow e-books via the library is definitely present, which means that progress on this area can be truly beneficial for Dutch public libraries.

The existing reading culture in the Netherlands is turning more and more into a digital reading culture. The Dutch public library should keep a close watch on this thriving digital reading culture. They could do this, for example, by considering recent trends, and their corresponding effects. But what are the effects of the increasing use of digital media, and the growing digital reading culture? And how does it affect our reading habits?

2.4 The effects of the digital reading culture on our reading habits

The way we read is under constant change because of technological innovations, devices and platforms.¹⁰⁰ New technological innovations will eventually always change our reading modes, habits and experiences. What, then, are the differences between paper books and digital reading devices, and how are our reading modes, habits and experiences affected by them?

Jabr mentions various empirical studies on these differences.¹⁰¹ According to these studies, digital texts and technologies teach us new and mobile ways of reading. This sounds positive and promising, but the negative effects of reading on screens are mentioned more frequently. The same empirical studies proved that people reading on screens are reading slower, less accurately and less comprehensively than when reading on paper. However, Jabr also explains that when people are reading texts on digital devices, they tend to adopt a less serious attitude anyway. The differences between reading on paper and reading on screens are therefore caused by the digital devices themselves, but by the attitude of the readers towards digital reading technology as well. Jabr describes that reading from screens requires more from our mental resources, but that people never really put much effort into the reading of digital texts to begin with. Digital texts are considered less significant than paper books or articles. Mangen explains that readers tend to scan digital texts, instead of really focusing on them.¹⁰² Hillesund adds that, whenever a text or an article is considered important, it will most likely be printed out and then read on paper.¹⁰³

99 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

100 A. Mangen, 'Hypertext fiction reading: haptics and immersion', *Journal of research in reading*, 31:4 (2008), p. 404.

101 F. Jabr, 'The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens', *Scientific American*, 11 April, 2013 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/> (6 March, 2018), n. pag.

102 Mangen, 'Hypertext fiction reading', p. 409.

103 T. Hillesund, 'Digital reading spaces: How expert readers handle books, the Web and electronic paper', *First Monday*, 15:4 (2010), <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/184281/Digital%20readinds%20spaces.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (6 March, 2018).

Jabr states that the slower and shallower way of reading is also due to the impossibility to navigate through digital texts.¹⁰⁴ Paper books and articles are better navigable, which makes them better suited for the absorption and comprehension of long texts. Jabr explains that, as people read a text, they create a representation of that text; some sort of mental map of the structure of the text. Hereby, the reader is able to remember where to look when certain information from that text is required. It is more difficult, and sometimes impossible, to create a mental map for a digital text, since these texts often lack pagination, titles or headers, and usually consist of a “seamless stream of words”.¹⁰⁵ Hillesund agrees and adds that, when reading a text on the computer, the reader can easily lose oversight.¹⁰⁶ It is sometimes essential to see certain passages of the text simultaneously in order to make connections between them. This can easily be done with paper books or articles, since they allow flicking through the pages, making use of the tangibility and physical shape of the book and the paper. The intangibility and the volatility of digital texts make it almost impossible to make such connections.

Thus, texts on paper are tangible while texts on screens are not, and these tactile experiences matter. Hillesund notices that the physical aspects of reading are mostly taken for granted, and that there is almost no attention for the tactility of reading.¹⁰⁷ He acknowledges that the way we read depends on the technologies we use, their implement design, and the text composition. The same text, read via different mechanisms of representation, can be experienced in an entirely different manner. Digital texts do not have that tactile materiality of printed texts; they are discontinuous. One of the biggest effects of that intangibility of digital texts is that we read more shallow and tend to scan the text.¹⁰⁸ This often results in being more vulnerable to distractions, especially when those distractions are easily accessible.

The matter of attention is of considerable significance in the comparison between reading on screen and reading on paper. Mangen points out that psychologists have proven that people are prone to look for other activities when the current activity is no longer considered interesting.¹⁰⁹ Printed books and articles do not grant the reader with any possible distractions; the book contains only the text and nothing more. It is static and fixed, and does not provide the reader with any options for attentional switching. When the book cannot grasp the attention of the reader any longer, the act of reading is abandoned entirely. The situation changes when distractions are options openly

104 Jabr, ‘The Reading Brain in the Digital Age’, n. pag.

105 Ibid., n. pag.

106 Hillesund, ‘Digital reading spaces’, n. pag.

107 Ibid., n. pag.

108 Mangen, ‘Hypertext fiction reading’, pp. 407-409.

109 Ibid., pp. 409-413.

available to the reader. According to Mangen, when distractions are easily available, we are psychobiologically and phenomenologically inclined to resort to them. With the reading of digital texts – on a computer or tablet – it is much easier to give in to distractions since these are instantly available; all it takes is one click. Attending to digital texts is therefore irreconcilable with the deep, immersive state of reading fiction on paper.

Thus, the differences of reading on paper and reading on screens can be found in the attitude of the readers towards the reading device, the possibility to navigate through the text, the tangibility or intangibility of the text and the reading device, and the presence of distractions, and the option to yield to them. Besides the enormous differences with the reading of a paper book, reading digital texts might however be what the modern reader wants. Since reading is done increasingly on e-readers and tablets (fig. 6), this intangible, fragmented, innavigable, and technical way of reading might become the essence of today's reading practices. Despite the aforementioned negative effects of reading on screens, reading on e-readers and tablets can also enhance our reading experiences. Peters argues that the biggest advantage of the e-reader is that it makes content instantly available.¹¹⁰ He states that it is not the design or the technology of the device that makes it revolutionary, but the fact that it makes the instant downloading of millions of titles possible. Huysmans and Hillebrink likewise believe that the e-reader will become more popular in the foreseeable future.¹¹¹ Especially when the devices will eventually come with “an easily readable screen” and with “an attractive, easily accessible range of e-books”. Jabr goes even further in wondering why digital reading devices should resemble paper books at all.¹¹² Screens are able to offer experiences that paper cannot, and could therefore turn into something else entirely. He concludes that paper books and articles are still preferred for the intensive reading of long pieces of text, but that using a text is not the only way to read. That is where the digital reading devices are coming in.

2.5 Conclusion

The mission of Dutch public libraries is to elevate the people by providing them with low-threshold access to information, and the culture of reading.¹¹³ However, Dutch citizens nowadays have access to information, and cultural activities and events without leaving their homes. Because of this, the need to put much new effort in the physical collection of public libraries will slowly wane.¹¹⁴ That is why both the physical and digital component of the collection of the Dutch public library need to be

110 Peters, 'The Future of Read', p. 20.

111 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 68.

112 Jabr, 'The Reading Brain in the Digital Age', n. pag.

113 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 25.

114 VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk', p. 28.

considered. These two components of the library collection complement and reinforce each other. Therefore, the local, physical collection must be connected to the online, digital collection. In this way, the Dutch public library can adhere to new, technological developments, while, simultaneously, the physical collection can remain relevant.

Recent trends include a decrease in the reading of traditional print media and an increase in the reading via the Internet and digital devices.¹¹⁵ To respond to these phenomena, Dutch public libraries should focus more on their digital services, like providing library members access to e-books. However, it was already mentioned that the e-book lending system is lacking.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the Dutch public library could benefit from an updated, better-working e-book lending system. One that also includes more recent titles. Another recent trend is the growing appreciation for online social communities.¹¹⁷ In the Netherlands, Hebban is a good example. Many Dutch citizens are drawn to the book-discussing website.¹¹⁸ Dutch public libraries could attempt to likewise start an online social community for the library members. An online community where the members can discuss the books they read, and where they can post reviews for others to contemplate. These are some options for public libraries to respond to the increasing digital reading culture. Actual solutions will be discussed in the last chapter.

It is by now obvious that the Dutch reading culture is increasingly turning into a digital reading culture. This eventually resulted in some serious effects. In paragraph 2.4, the differences between reading on paper and reading on screens was discussed. It should however be questioned if these differences – and their corresponding effects – are all negative. The reading practices, that correspond with reading on screens, might just be what the modern Dutch reader wants. Dutch public libraries deal with reading practices, and the figures discussed in paragraph 2.3 show that our reading practices are changing. Dutch public libraries can respond to these changes by implementing the new reading practices in their activities, services, and in the realization of the mission. If the Dutch population rather reads texts digitally, the public library could invest more effort in their website, the library database, and their e-book collection. If readers today have lesser attention than they used to have, the public library could include more shorter pieces of text on the website and in the library database. If the library user does not know where to find relevant information, or how to orient oneself in the digital landscape, the librarian could help that user in the search for information. Hereby, the Dutch public library can respond to the new reading practices, and remain relevant in our present-day digital society. New public library services and

115 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

116 De bibliotheek, 'E-books lenen en lezen op je tablet of smartphone', n. pag.

117 Van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds*, p. 68.

118 Hebban, 'Home', n. pag.

activities – that are better-suited for our present-day society – will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Old and new library services

3.1 Introduction

In Uganda, the Kabubbu Community Library – located in rural Uganda, 25 km north of the Kampala, in the Wakiso district – was created to elevate the people of that community, and to promote the use of public libraries.¹¹⁹ To help the locals in their development, the library provides services that are relevant for the interests and needs of the community. Besides the traditional collection of books, the library also offers demonstration gardens and sports facilities, because of the need of the people to improve agricultural practices, and the desire to engage in sports. Furthermore, library events are planned alongside important community events, to strengthen the community even more. Moreover, people living in rural areas do not need to come all the way to the library itself; a library bike brings books to those who live outside the village. The Kabubbu Community Library is a member of the Ugandan Library Association, and receives support from several western organizations.¹²⁰

The story of the Kabubbu Community Library interested me, since it gives an example of initiatives undertaken by other countries – in this case Uganda – to realize the mission of their public libraries. These initiatives differ from those of the Dutch public library, but, despite the differences, the Dutch public library can learn some valuable lessons from examining the activities of the Kabubbu Community Library. Their approach is very personal, and truly focused on the local community. Certainly, there must be more foreign initiatives for the Dutch public library to learn from. This will be discussed in this chapter.

However, it will first be examined which new initiatives are operated today by the Dutch public library in order to realize the mission. These initiatives will be analyzed and used to suggest how one can work from there. Within this investigation, the five core values of the Dutch public library will be central. The five core values are fundamental for all Dutch public libraries; each branch tries to pursue the values as successfully as possible. At the basis of each value, it will be examined what the Dutch public library is currently doing to realize its mission. Hereby, examples from practice will be used: projects and activities by progressive Dutch public libraries.

Thereafter, practices and initiatives of foreign public libraries and library organizations will be examined and discussed. Such investigation is useful, since foreign public libraries might have adopted practices that can be successful for the Dutch public library as well. Eventually, the

119 R. Doiron and M. Asselin, 'Promoting a Culture for Reading in a Diverse World', *IFLA Journal*, 37:2 (2011), p. 112.

120 Ibidem.

ongoing projects of Dutch public libraries, and the practices of foreign public libraries, will be compared and analyzed, and used in order to conceive ideas and suggestions on how the Dutch public library can realize its mission.

3.2 Dutch initiatives

The new library act of 2015 made the three levels of government – municipal, provincial and national – jointly responsible for the Dutch library sector.¹²¹ Thus, all Dutch public libraries started working together towards innovation, and therefore towards a good realization of the mission. Hereby, the five core values always remain central. The individual library branches all operate in their own specific way – the situation is different on every location – but some initiatives can become sources of inspiration for other branches.¹²² Therefore, it is important to know what has been done, and what is going on, in the Dutch public library sector in order to realize the mission. This will be done on the basis of the five core values. For clarity, the five values will be repeated here once more:

- The public library as a storehouse of knowledge and information.¹²³
- The public library as a center of development and education.¹²⁴
- The public library as an encyclopedia of arts and culture.¹²⁵
- The public library as a podium for meeting and debate.¹²⁶
- The public library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature.¹²⁷

I have tried to find Dutch initiatives for each value, but did not quite manage to do so. A good initiative for the last core value – the public library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature – has not been found, which shows that the Dutch public library could pay more attention to this value. Perhaps, the initiatives of foreign public libraries might provide some inspiration for this value. Fortunately, good initiatives by Dutch public libraries have been found for the other four core values.

121 The Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen (Law system for public library facilities) was implemented in 2015 to make the three levels of government jointly responsible for the library sector. Anon., 'Gezamenlijke innovatieagenda', pp. 5-9.

122 A. Heideman, 'Denken, durven, doorpakken', *Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken*, September, 2015 http://www.debibliotheken.nl/fileadmin/documenten/vereniging/2015_denken-durven-doorpakken_over-de-praktijk-van-maatschappelijk-ondernemen-bij-bibliotheken_brochure_de-bibliotheek-onderneemt.pdf (14 January, 2018), p. 23.

123 Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken, 'Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken', p. 102.

124 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 95.

125 Ibidem, pp. 32-35.

126 Ibidem, p. 114.

127 Ibidem, p. 121.

Firstly, the Dutch public library wants to provide their users with access to knowledge and information.¹²⁸ This value is pursued by the transformation and broadening of the traditional Dutch public library.¹²⁹ The lending of books remains to be a core activity, but the library has more ways to provide their users with knowledge and information. Via digital information services, for example. Therefore, Dutch public libraries attempt to use both the physical and digital collection, and thus provide their members with all available knowledge and information. This value is accomplished via collaborations with cultural and educational partners as well. In several libraries in the Dutch province Noord-Brabant, they recognize knowledge, and the sharing of knowledge, as the most important value.¹³⁰ They therefore established the program *KennisMakers*, wherein they encourage people to share their knowledge with the other library users via lectures and talks.¹³¹ Moreover, during those lectures, a connection with the physical collection is made; recommending the attendees books on the discussed topic.

The second value aims at public libraries being centers of development and education. The Dutch public library aims to promote lifelong learning. This is realized by providing a stimulating learning environment: by libraries being platforms where people can meet, share knowledge, acquire specific skills and develop new capacities. Moreover, the Dutch public library is offering a wide collection for all target groups. In practice, collaborations with schools and educational organizations are often established to organize activities and projects. A fitting initiative can be found at the library in Delft: DOK. The library board of DOK focuses on the development and education of young children – as young as possible – to reach them as soon as possible.¹³² They started a cooperation and integration with the Center for the Arts in Delft, connecting education and culture in one building. Through this integration, they can offer children more and richer opportunities for their development, via a wide cultural spectrum.

The third core value – Dutch public libraries being encyclopedia's of arts and culture – is realized by organizing cultural activities, like theater performances and exhibitions, but through collaborations with other cultural institutions as well.¹³³ Dutch public libraries often work together with other cultural organizations, and they sometimes even operate within the same

128 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 102.

129 Anon., 'Gezamenlijke innovatieagenda', p. 8.

130 Heideman, 'Gedeeld gebouw als begin', p. 17.

131 KennisMakers (KnowledgeMakers) is a program, established by Dutch public libraries in Noord-Brabant, wherein people give talks and lectures, and therefore share their knowledge with the library visitors.

132 A. Heideman, 'Gedeeld gebouw als begin', *Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken*, September, 2015 http://www.debibliotheken.nl/fileadmin/documenten/vereniging/2015_gedeeld-gebouw-als-begin_over-de-weerbarstige-maar-kansrijke-praktijk-in-multifunctionele-gebouwen_brochure_de-bibliotheek-onderneemt.pdf (14 January, 2018), p. 21.

133 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 110.

accommodation, to truly create a center for arts and culture.¹³⁴ Such fusion does not have to endanger the identity of the public library, but will surely enrich the cultural experience of the visitors. A good example is the Kulturhus in Borne, a cultural center consisting of a public library, a conservatory, and a foundation for welfare and culture. The Kulturhus has some shared spaces – like a café and foyer – and has a collective agenda. Nowadays, visitors do not say that they are going to visit the public library, but that they are going to visit the Kulturhus. This joint cultural organization offers extra staff and activities, and therefore attracts more visitors.

According to the fourth core value, the Dutch public library aims to be a podium for meeting and debate, which can stimulate participation and individual development.¹³⁵ Public libraries intent to establish contact between individuals and between groups by organizing activities like lectures and debates. The public library in Venlo demonstrates this in their recent renovation of the library building.¹³⁶ The library board wanted to focus on the outside world. They accomplished this by firstly examining what was going on among the citizens of Venlo, so that they could focus on social engagement. Secondly, they renovated the library building to create more openness. Walls were torn down to create more open spaces, and new facilities were established inside the building, like a reading café. The idea was to give the users the feeling that the library was really theirs, and that they were included in the whole process. The library in Venlo has therefore sincerely become a part of the community.

These are some examples of practices and activities executed by Dutch public libraries in order to “elevate the people”. Despite these often well-thought-off and successful innovations, Bibliotheekmonitor still shows a continuous decline in most areas of the Dutch public library.¹³⁷ This could be due to the fact that other Dutch public libraries have not – yet – adopted the successful initiatives of their colleagues, and therefore still offer an insufficient level of innovation. However, it could likewise be the case that the described initiatives just cannot realize the intended success. Other activities and initiatives might prove to be more successful. Foreign public libraries can possibly provide inspiration for such initiatives. Therefore, an examination of practices and innovations within foreign public libraries – like the activities in Uganda – might be beneficial. Foreign public libraries often deal with the same societal changes, and with the same declines in their public library sector. It is therefore advantageous to examine what foreign public libraries do to deal with these factors.

134 Heideman, ‘Gedeeld gebouw als begin’, p. 1.

135 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 114.

136 Heideman, ‘Gedeeld gebouw als begin’, p. 17.

137 Bibliotheekmonitor, ‘Trends Bibliotheken’, n. pag.

3.3 Initiatives abroad

How do the activities of the Dutch public library relate to the activities partaken by public libraries in other countries? In 2015, there were 70 million visitors of Dutch public libraries.¹³⁸ That is a decent score, compared to other European countries. However, the public libraries in Scandinavian countries are visited the most. In the south and east of Europe, the lowest percentages can be found. It is remarkable to notice that library use is declining in almost all European countries, except in Scandinavia. The biggest fall in lending has taken place in the United Kingdom. This can be partly explained by the deep spending cuts in the British Library Sector since 1980. It is however difficult to truly compare library trends in various countries, since every country is subject to national developments, and has its own library system.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, there are trends that transcend the national borders, like the rise of the Internet and the increasing individualization. It is therefore essential to examine practices and trends of foreign public libraries, since they are dealing with some of the same changes as Dutch public libraries do. I have found some good foreign initiatives for, especially, the fourth and fifth core value. In particular, the last two projects that will be mentioned are vital, since these befit the fifth value. In the previous paragraph, it was stated that Dutch public libraries might learn from foreign initiatives, as regards to this value. Therefore, these initiatives of foreign public libraries could be sources of inspiration for Dutch public libraries.

The first foreign initiative that covers the fourth core value – the public library as a podium for meeting and debate – is the main focus of a project initiated by the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA is the oldest and largest library association in the world.¹⁴⁰ The ALA supported the University of Syracuse in a project that realized a virtual program for public libraries, wherein knowledge is disseminated through online conversations.¹⁴¹ Scholars of the University of Syracuse, like R. D. Lankes, argue that knowledge is created through conversation, and that public libraries – which are concerned with knowledge – are therefore also concerned with conversation. Through this digital program, librarians facilitate online conversations, and involve citizens in topical discussions. The librarian is considered the respected and credible voice that is needed to

138 Public Libraries 2020, ‘Country Factsheets’, <http://www.publiclibraries2020.eu/content/country-factsheets> (14 January, 2018).

139 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 126.

140 The mission of the ALA is “to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all”.

American Library Association, ‘About ALA’, <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/> (14 January, 2018).

141 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 129.

lead the conversation.¹⁴² If this is done correctly, public libraries and their librarians can promote the dissemination of knowledge, but also encourage public debate.

It was stated in paragraph 2.2 that the popularity of online social communities is on the rise. Another foreign example of the promotion of meeting and debate – but through an online community – can be found in the *WorldReaders* project, a Canadian initiative. WorldReaders is ‘an online social network site for exploring students’ independent reading interests, while providing them with an opportunity for communicating with readers in other countries’.¹⁴³ This online social network was realized to virtually connect young readers around the world, with similar or diverse reading interests, to engage in debate. Instead of holding on to traditional reading goals, and ignoring new digital technology, the creators of the WorldReaders project decided to embrace new technologies, and use them. The online network therefore employs a combination of text, music, images, and videos via interactive tools. Furthermore, the project offers polls for reading interests and discussions on specific authors or books. Users can make a profile with their personal data, and data on the books they read. Users are allowed to add content to the site or create discussion groups on certain themes or interests. The WorldReaders project shows many similarities with the Dutch Hebban.¹⁴⁴ Both projects adhere to the popularity of online social communities. The similarities between the WorldReaders project and Hebban will be further discussed in paragraph 3.4.

When it comes to the fifth core value – the public library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature – Scandinavian public libraries offer good examples. It was mentioned above that Scandinavian public libraries have the best score of all European public libraries. In an investigation carried out by the Agency of Culture and Palaces in Denmark, more than 88% of the library users remarked how satisfied they were with the public library and its services.¹⁴⁵ This can partly be explained by the focus on the promotion of literature by Danish public libraries.¹⁴⁶ In Danish libraries, there are fewer books on the shelves, but the promotion of literature remains a priority. The nature of the promotion is therefore different than in other European countries. For example, festivals, literary exhibitions, and performances are organized; collaborations with universities and authors are sought to promote the role of literature. The Danish call it “the

142 R. D. Lankes, ‘The Ethics of Participatory Librarianship’, *Journal of Library Administration*, 47:3-4 (2008), p. 237.

143 R. Doiron, ‘WorldReaders: Young readers reading the world. Teacher-librarians using social networking to promote reading interests’, *Preparing Pupils and Students for the Future: School Libraries in the Picture* (2009), n. pag.

144 Hebban, ‘Home’, n. pag.

145 K. E. Kristensen, ‘The Danes love their library!’, *Scandinavian Library Quarterly*, 49:4 (2016) <http://slq.nu/?article=volume-49-no-4-2016-8> (14 January, 2018).

146 A. Himmelstrup, ‘The libraries are filling up with literature in new ways’, *Scandinavian Library Quarterly*, 49:4 (2016) <http://slq.nu/?article=volume-49-no-4-2016-13> (14 January, 2018).

communication of literature”. This initiative was started with an intense process of weeding; Danish public libraries now have more titles than previous years, but fewer copies of those titles. Literary communicators, especially appointed for this process, have the responsibility to choose those titles. Thus, the focus lies on literature, and not so much on the number of present books. Furthermore, the promotion goes beyond the physical features of the books. For example, the public libraries in Albertslund and Frederiksberg started the project *The Literary Exhibition House*: a project which presented exhibitions on the three literary classics *Ulysses*, *Hamlet* and *Utopia*.¹⁴⁷ The actual books were absent in the exhibitions; the focus was purely on the content of the books. The exhibitions consisted of spatial devices and installations. According to the Danish library staff, the public library must get rid of their classic and passive nature, and instead focus on being more active. Libraries can actively promote literature through communication. And apparently, when examining the investigation performed by the Agency of Culture and Palaces, it works.

Another example of the innovativeness of Scandinavian public libraries can be found in the Pocket Library app (*Taskukirjasto*) of the Vantaa City Library in Finland.¹⁴⁸ This app actively promotes reading and literacy among its users. For instance, it uses recommendations by suggesting titles every time someone browses through the library catalog via the app. Furthermore, the app has the ability to pass on one’s loan to another user: the Friend Loan. Hereby, library materials can be passed on to the next reader without visiting the library. Therefore, friends can make recommendations to each other, and can instantly pass along the suggested book. The implementation of the app resulted in users browsing more frequently through the recommendations, and making reservations more often.¹⁴⁹

These are just a few, but relevant examples of initiatives organized by foreign public libraries. Like aforementioned, when examining these initiatives, one has to consider the different situations of the countries; every country is subject to national developments, and has its own library system. Yet, Dutch public libraries can learn much from these foreign practices and activities. Successful initiatives for public libraries in Scandinavia, Canada, or even Uganda, might be successful in the Netherlands as well, and should be considered.

3.4 *The initiatives analyzed*

What can the overall Dutch public library system learn from the discussed initiatives in paragraph 3.2 and 3.3? The suggested initiatives and activities are new, innovative and informative, but can

147 Himmelstrup, ‘The libraries are filling up’, n. pag.

148 M. Vainio, ‘Building addiction’, *Scandinavian Library Quarterly*, 49:4 (2016) <http://slq.nu/?article=volume-49-no-4-2016-17> (14 January, 2018).

149 Ibid., n. pag.

they truly be used for an improved realization of the mission of public libraries? Furthermore, which foreign initiatives can actually be fruitful for the Dutch public library as well? In this paragraph, on the basis of comparisons and analysis, the initiatives will be further discussed, to determine which can be used in order to conceive ideas and suggestions for the realization of the mission of Dutch public libraries.

While discussing the first core value – access to knowledge and information – it was said that the Dutch public library attempts to connect the physical and digital collection.¹⁵⁰ Through this, the public library can offer more ways to provide their users with access to knowledge and information. However, there are more reasons for the Dutch public library to connect the physical and digital. The figures in the second chapter showed that the Dutch population is spending an increasingly amount of time on the computer and the Internet, and a decreasing amount of time on traditional print media (fig. 3-5).¹⁵¹ Moreover, the existing reading culture of the Netherlands is changing more and more into a digital reading culture. When it comes to acquiring knowledge and information, the Dutch population largely prefers information that can be found on the Internet.¹⁵² This is due to the fact that information on the Internet can be found in smaller, manageable pieces (paragraph 2.2). Nowadays, most Dutch citizens prefer to avoid reading an entire paper book. Therefore, if most library users prefer to read information online, the Dutch public library can respond to this by presenting information on their website, or in the library database, in small, manageable pieces. In this way, public libraries can embrace the recent, digital reading trends. Nowadays, all Dutch public libraries provide access to at least the national digital library and the National Library Catalog.¹⁵³ Access to the Internet is likewise available at all Dutch public libraries.¹⁵⁴ In comparison, 75% of the French public libraries, and only 22% of the German public libraries, offer Internet access (2015). Thus, Dutch public libraries are doing well on that area.

However, even Dutch public libraries can learn more from other digital initiatives. It was already stated in the second chapter that the popularity of online social communities is on the rise. The second chapter likewise mentioned the Dutch online reader community of Hebban. This online community is very successful with its 145.918 members (17 April, 2018).¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, some foreign initiatives also underline the success of online communities, like the project of the ALA and the WorldReaders project in Canada.¹⁵⁶ Dutch public libraries can learn from such initiatives, and

150 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 102.

151 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

152 Samuel, 'The library in Crisis, 2002', n. pag.

153 VNG, 'Lokaal bibliotheekwerk'.

154 Public Libraries 2020, 'Country Factsheets', n. pag.

155 Hebban, 'Home', n. pag.

156 Doiron, 'WorldReaders', n. pag.

could focus on online social communities as well. For example, they could device an online social community on a smaller scale. An online place where library members can judge and recommend books to each other. Library members would then likewise be able to participate in an online reader community. Another good example is the Pocket Library app of the Vantaa City Library.¹⁵⁷ This app also adheres to the trend of online communities, but on a smaller scale.

Besides focusing on online social communities, Dutch public libraries can simultaneously focus on the actual, local community, and strengthen that community. Venlo demonstrates this in their recent renovation of the library building.¹⁵⁸ By making the library building more open, and by involving the citizens of Venlo in the process, the public library has truly become part of the local community. Likewise, the Kabubbu Community Library in Uganda focuses on the local community; they provide services that are relevant for the interests and needs of the community.¹⁵⁹ But why is the local community so important for public libraries? Nowadays, the Dutch population is experiencing an increasing individualization; the idea of a real community is fading.¹⁶⁰ While the increasing personal freedom of choice can be considered a good thing, the same freedom can lead to a loss of social cohesion. This process of individualization in the Netherlands originated from the decreasing value of traditional institutions, like marriage and the Church. In former times, identity was greatly determined by one's religion and/or political conviction. This changed during the period of secularization in the sixties. Dutch citizens increasingly consider themselves to be unique and independent.¹⁶¹ However, it cannot be concluded that social and societal participation has been decreasing. Though, it must be noted that most social contact in the Netherlands nowadays takes place via the Internet and digital devices. Between 2012 and 2017, the amount of Dutch citizens communicating via the Internet increased from 57% to 84%. It thus seems that there has not been a decrease in social contact in recent years, but it should be questioned if this is the case for every Dutch citizen. A small group of – older – Dutch citizens cannot keep up with the digital developments, and therefore easily find themselves in social isolation. This group misses real, personal contact, and public libraries are able to give them that. Aabo likewise points to the weakened state of local community identity, and the role of public libraries to reinforce that state.¹⁶² According to Aabo, the public library sector can reinforce its success by focusing on the local community of which the library is a part. Public libraries can play important roles for the local

157 Vainio, 'Building addiction', n. pag.

158 Heideman, 'Gedeeld gebouw als begin', p. 17.

159 Doiron and Asselin, 'Promoting a Culture for Reading', p. 112.

160 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 'Worden we individualistischer?', <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2017/52/worden-we-individualistischer-> (21 March, 2018).

161 Ibidem, n. pag.

162 Aabo, 'The role and value of public libraries', pp. 205-206.

community by making specific choices based on the cultural, educational, and democratic values of their local community. By doing this, public libraries can increase participation and involvement by providing a social and physical meeting place.

To strengthen the local community even more, Dutch public libraries often choose to cooperate with other – cultural – organizations. They sometimes even operate within the same accommodation. Examples are DOK in Delft and the Kulturhus in Borne.¹⁶³ Boards of such accommodations often look beyond the borders of the individual, residing organizations to create one organization with a shared vision. They furthermore usually construct shared spaces, like the café and foyer in the Kulturhus. Dutch public libraries often experiment with the library building itself; creating new spaces like reading cafés, reading rooms, study areas, cultural event spaces, etc. For the last decades, librarians have especially been focusing on the digital library, but the focus is now returning to the physical library building.¹⁶⁴ Library boards now attempt to design buildings that are both physically beautiful and functional, especially for the local community. Every community is in need of public spaces, where each member of that community feels welcome. These are the places where people with different backgrounds and different views can meet each other. Public libraries attempt to provide the local community with such places; they attempt to be a Third Space for the library users. According to Elmborg, the Third Space is open, symbolic, playful, and generative.¹⁶⁵ It is a space where contact between different cultures and people is realized. Public libraries can be Third Spaces for the local community. For example, Dutch public libraries often organize workshops, courses, and lectures. These activities provide the library visitors with the possibility to come in contact with other people, and therefore with other ideas. The program *KennisMakers* is a good example of an initiative wherein people with different backgrounds can talk and learn from each other.¹⁶⁶ Being a Third Space, providing the local community with different views in an open and public place, can strengthen that community. Working with other – cultural – organizations – or operating within the same building can furthermore strengthen the idea of being a Third Space.

3.5 Conclusion

Why is it that one initiative proves to be successful while others fail? If one examines the initiatives, a certain phenomenon can be noticed. On the one hand, there are initiatives like the Kulturhus in

163 Heideman, 'Gedeeld gebouw als begin', p. 1.

164 S. Demas and J. A. Scherer, 'Esprit de Place', *American Libraries*, 33:4 (2002), p. 65.

165 J. Elmborg, 'Libraries As the Spaces Between Us: Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space', *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 50:4 (2011), pp. 340-345.

166 Heideman, 'Gedeeld gebouw als begin', p. 17.

Borne, DOK in Delft, and the openness of the public library building in Venlo. On the other hand, there are initiatives like the virtual knowledge program of the ALA and the University of Syracuse, the WorldReaders project in Canada, Hebban, and the Pocket Library app in Finland. Eventually, all these initiatives rely on two pillars: using the space of the library building to create an attractive and comfortable place for the local community, and using digital technology to adhere to digital trends. Library visitors often still wish to have a public space where they can physically meet and talk, but, at the same time, make use of new digital technology.

Both pillars can be used to realize the five core values of the Dutch public library. For example, the first value – the public library as a storehouse of knowledge and information – can be realized in different ways. It can be realized in a digital way; by making use of the library database. Library databases can provide relevant information at any time, on many subjects, and will help the users to work more efficient, accurate and concise.¹⁶⁷ The first value can likewise be realized by asking for help from the library staff, and especially from the librarian. The Internet does not always succeed in the elevation of its users, since it also offers a lot of information junk.¹⁶⁸ Librarians can help the users by guiding them to relevant and meaningful information. Johnson talks lovingly about the value of librarians: “The librarian is the organizer, the animating spirit behind the library, and the navigator. Her job is to create order out of the confusion of the past, even as she enables us to blast into the future”.¹⁶⁹ The value of a deep and personal conversation with a good-informed librarian can therefore not be underestimated, not even in these digital times. The presence of librarians – or the overall public library staff – ensures that the Dutch public library remains relevant for finding information, even in the age of Google.

Likewise, different methods can be used for the fifth value: the public library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature. On the one hand, this can be done by offering comfortable and cozy reading nooks or rooms, and by organizing literary lectures, presentations, reading groups, and meetings with authors.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, Dutch public libraries could embrace the use of digital media for the promotion of reading. These different methods are likewise reflected in the initiative of Danish public libraries. They use the library space to promote literature in several ways: via literary performances, but also via blogs, installations, and digital literature.¹⁷¹ That is why Scandinavian public libraries are so successful; they take advantage of both aspects. They offer their

167 Darnton, *The Case for Books*, p. 21.

168 Johnson, *This Book is Overdue!*, pp. 20-22.

169 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

170 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 121.

171 Himmelstrup, ‘The libraries are filling up’, n. pag.

visitors an attractive and comfortable learning and meeting space, and, likewise, many digital possibilities, like the installations of Danish public libraries, and the Pocket Library App in Finland.

This dichotomy – creating a Third Space for the local community, and adhering to the use of digital technology – will be further discussed in the forthcoming conclusion. Hereby, the observations of all three chapters will be used to conclude on what the Dutch public library can do to realize its mission.

Conclusion

This investigation started with the original definition of the mission of the Dutch public library: “the elevation of the people” by providing them with access to information and the culture of reading.¹⁷² This definition was formed by a group of affluent Dutch citizens. They established the first Dutch public libraries, since they believed that a great part of the Dutch population lived in ignorance, poverty and immorality, and that the reading of the right books – containing useful knowledge – could elevate them.¹⁷³ This mission and its realization would remain unchanged for many years. Aabo supplemented “the elevation of the people” by stating that the mission of public libraries today is to “further democracy, equality and social justice, increase access to information, disseminate culture and knowledge, contribute to a meaningful and informative leisure time, and act as a communal institution and a social meeting place”.¹⁷⁴ In this definition, both the original mission and the five core values – created by the VOB – can be found. Aabo likewise stated that – even when the mission is still relevant today – the way public libraries attempt to realize it needs to be changed.¹⁷⁵

New ideas for the realization of the mission are necessary, since the present-day Dutch society is changing more and more into a digital society. The Dutch population is increasingly making use of digital media, and less time is spent on traditional print media.¹⁷⁶ This eventually resulted in the development of a digital reading culture. Dutch public libraries should respond to those changes by adhering to new digital trends. For example, since 2014, it is possible to download and lend e-books from the library e-book collection.¹⁷⁷ However, the lending system for e-books needs further improvement, through which the downloading of e-books can become much easier and faster. Furthermore, the e-book collection can become more appealing by including more, recent titles. Additionally, public libraries could rent e-readers to relief their members from the costs of buying one themselves. By such small adjustments, the lending of e-books can become much easier and more attractive for the library members. Secondly, the Dutch public library could benefit from adhering to the rising trend of online communities, like Hebban.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps, Dutch public libraries themselves could create an online social community for the library members. This might be an online place where library members can judge and recommend books to each other. Library

172 Huysmans and Hillebrink, *The future of the Dutch public library*, p. 25.

173 Schneiders, *Lezen voor iedereen*, p. 28.

174 Aabo, ‘The role and value of public libraries’, p. 210.

175 Ibid.

176 Bibliotheekmonitor, ‘Trends Media & Informatie’, n. pag.

177 Bibliotheekmonitor, ‘Trends Bibliotheken’, n. pag.

178 Hebban, ‘Home’, n. pag.

members would then likewise be able to participate in an online reader community. Lastly, paragraph 2.4 pointed out that the way the modern reader reads is changing. More and more texts are read digitally.¹⁷⁹ There are many differences between reading texts on paper and reading texts digitally – digital texts are read with a less serious attitude, they are intangible, and they provide the possibility to easily yield to distractions – although these differences do not necessarily have to be considered negative. This way of reading might just be what the modern reader wants. Dutch public libraries could experiment with this new way of reading. For example, by offering e-readers and more e-books, as was mentioned before. But likewise through the use of smaller pieces of text on the library website and in the library database, or through the use of hypertexts with links the library user can click on. If it is true that the modern reader tends to lose its attention more easily while reading digital texts, public libraries should respond to that fact.¹⁸⁰

Aabo likewise stated that, to realize the mission, public libraries should take the challenges of the present-day digital society into account.¹⁸¹ The role of the public library in the Dutch society has been affected especially by the increasing access to the Internet. More and more people have access to information, without leaving their homes. How can the public library then still contribute to the education and elevation of their users? Palfrey remarks that public libraries should provide free access to digital services on networked devices, but that that is not their most important function.¹⁸² Public libraries can offer so much more, for example through the presence of librarians. The amount of information on the Internet is infinite; we can speak of an information overload.¹⁸³ However, browsing on the Internet forces the user to wade through oceans of junk before some relevant information can be found.¹⁸⁴ Librarians can be the solution to this problem.

While wading through that vast ocean of information, librarians can guide the user to relevant and meaningful information. Unfortunately, not everyone considers librarians to be this valuable anymore. While searching for information, it often turns out that people start their search by consulting Google, or ask others for help, before they consider asking librarians for help.¹⁸⁵ Even public libraries themselves do not always appreciate their librarians as they should, since there often is no room in the budget for the appropriate training of the librarians.¹⁸⁶ The library budget does not allow it, or the library board does not acknowledge the value of the training. Therefore, the function

179 Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Media & Informatie', n. pag.

180 Mangen, 'Hypertext fiction reading', pp. 409-413.

181 Aabo, 'The role and value of public libraries', p. 210.

182 Palfrey, *BiblioTech*, p. 60.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

184 Johnson, *This Book is Overdue!*, pp. 20-22.

185 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

186 Palfrey, *BiblioTech*, p. 138.

of the librarian is nowadays often considered obsolete. Despite the lack of good training, and the undervalued image of present-day librarians, they are still here. Moreover, it is expected of them to constantly learn new skills to serve the library users effectively. And they truly want to serve. To quote Johnson on this: “Librarians’ values are as sound as Girls Scouts’: truth, free speech, and universal literacy. And, they want to help”.¹⁸⁷ They likewise want to help when it comes to handling new technologies. Dutch public libraries usually offer computer workshops – for beginners, but also for the more experienced library user who wants to learn how to program – and the librarians often give the workshops.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, new technologies create new formats.¹⁸⁹ Library users do not just deal with Word-documents anymore, but also with videos, blogs, interactive websites, iPads, e-readers, etc. Librarians can teach the library users what the different digital formats can offer, and how they can be used. Having an increasing digital society, and an increasing digital reading culture can be beneficial for so many reasons, but the people of that society or culture do need to know how to deal with it, and librarians can show them.

Besides the good service of librarians, the public library has another solution for the information overload, and the enormous amount of information junk on the Internet: the library database. Library databases can provide relevant information at any time, on many subjects, and will help the users to work more efficient, accurate and concise.¹⁹⁰ These extra services – librarians and library databases – ensure that the Dutch public library remains relevant for finding information. The librarians and the library database can guide the library users in their search for information, in a way that the Internet and Google cannot: a personal and more efficient way. These extra services will likewise help turning the public library into a Third Space.

The concept of the Third Space was already discussed in the third chapter. Elmborg calls the Third Space “open, symbolic, playful, and generative”.¹⁹¹ It is a space where contact between different cultures and people is realized. This can be accomplished by encouraging people to visit the public library through the creation of an attractive, comfortable, and familiar place. The idea is, by Elmborg’s words, “to market library space to attract visitors”.¹⁹² With other words, Dutch public libraries should attempt to become a Third Space for their visitors. But how can the Dutch public library become a Third Space? Firstly, thus, by using the library building to attract more visitors, so that more people with different backgrounds can meet each other. Furthermore, debates and

187 Johnson, *This Book is Overdue!*, p. 8.

188 Ibid., p. 20.

189 Palfrey, *BiblioTech*, pp. 29-30.

190 Darnton, *The Case for Books*, p. 21.

191 Elmborg, ‘Libraries As the Spaces Between Us’, pp. 340-345.

192 Ibid., pp. 338-339.

meetings – and the conversations and discussions that will follow – can possibly strengthen the local community. Attracting more visitors can be accomplished by offering access to the Internet and new digital media, but also by offering traditional library services, like lots of bookcases filled with books. The library space should be a reflection of the modern and the traditional. Furthermore, having a library café may attract more visitors. Especially young people adore coffeehouses, like Starbucks. They love places where they can sit in a comfortable chair, browse the Internet on their laptops – or read a good book – while drinking coffee. Having a library café would therefore attract more young people. Besides the coziness of such a library café, some library users however like to read or study in silence. That is why Dutch public libraries should likewise offer silent study areas. The library user should be able to choose between the cozy, but crowded, library café, and the quietness of a study area. Moreover, Dutch public libraries can become Third Spaces by organizing workshops, courses, and lectures, since they enable the library users to come in contact with other people, and therefore with other cultures and ideas. These activities are often focused on adult library users, but the Dutch public library can be a Third Space for children as well. This can be realized by the organization of special activities for children or families, like story times and family reading times. Such activities are often already realized by Dutch public libraries. These should, however, be considered by all library branches to keep on attracting children and their parents. Lastly, the Third Space is realized by the presence of the library staff. It can be truly satisfactory to ask your question to an actual person; someone who is enthusiastic, and honestly wants to help you. In paragraph 3.4, it was stated that, through the increasing individualization and the increasing use of digital media, a small group of Dutch citizens easily finds itself in social isolation, and misses real, personal contact.¹⁹³ Dutch public libraries can promise them personal contact, and that can make a visit to the library pleasant.

While on the one hand, library users would like to use new digital technology, many users likewise wish to have a public space where they can physically meet and talk. Therefore, it can be stated that, for the realization of the mission, two aspects are most important: the presence of digital technology, but also an attractive and comfortable library building to create a Third Space for the local community. Public libraries should be a reflection of the traditional and the modern. That is why Scandinavian public libraries are visited the most; they make use of both aspects.¹⁹⁴ Public libraries nowadays have to deal with the competition of profit-based commercial companies.¹⁹⁵ Book stores, coffee houses, but also the Internet, are invading the domain of traditional public

193 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, ‘Worden we individualistischer?’, n. pag.

194 Kristensen, ‘The Danes love their library!’.

195 Elmborg, ‘Libraries As the Spaces Between Us’, pp. 338-339.

library services. Public libraries can compete with these institutions – they can remain relevant – by focusing on their physical space, which should match the modern and the traditional. Library buildings were originally build to protect and provide access to the collection. Now, one has to consider the implementation of digital technologies in the library space. However, this also resulted in a growing fear of the change of the traditional library space. Therefore, Dutch public libraries should definitely offer their visitors access to digital technology, but likewise offer an attractive and comfortable environment with traditional library services.

So, to sum everything up, how can the Dutch public library remain relevant; how can they still realize their mission? Firstly, by realizing a Third Space for the library users to create contact between people with different backgrounds, and therefore strengthen the local community. This can be accomplished by encouraging more people to visit the public library. For example, by offering workshops and lectures, and story times for children. But likewise through personal contact with the library staff. Library visitors want to enjoy a pleasant and attractive space where they can read in silence, but also meet and talk. However, they likewise want to benefit from the presence of digital technology. They want to use the computer, and the newest programs and tools, download e-books, and use a library app. Thus, these two aspects – offering the local community a Third Space, and, simultaneously, the presence of digital technology – will enable the Dutch public library to remain relevant. Dutch public libraries should attempt to find a middle way between the modern and the traditional. This proved to be successful for Scandinavian public libraries; it can be the solution for Dutch public libraries as well. That is how the Dutch public library can realize its mission; that is how they can “elevate the people”.

Appendix: Figures

Aantal bibliotheekleden 1950-2014
jeugd en volwassenen, x 1.000

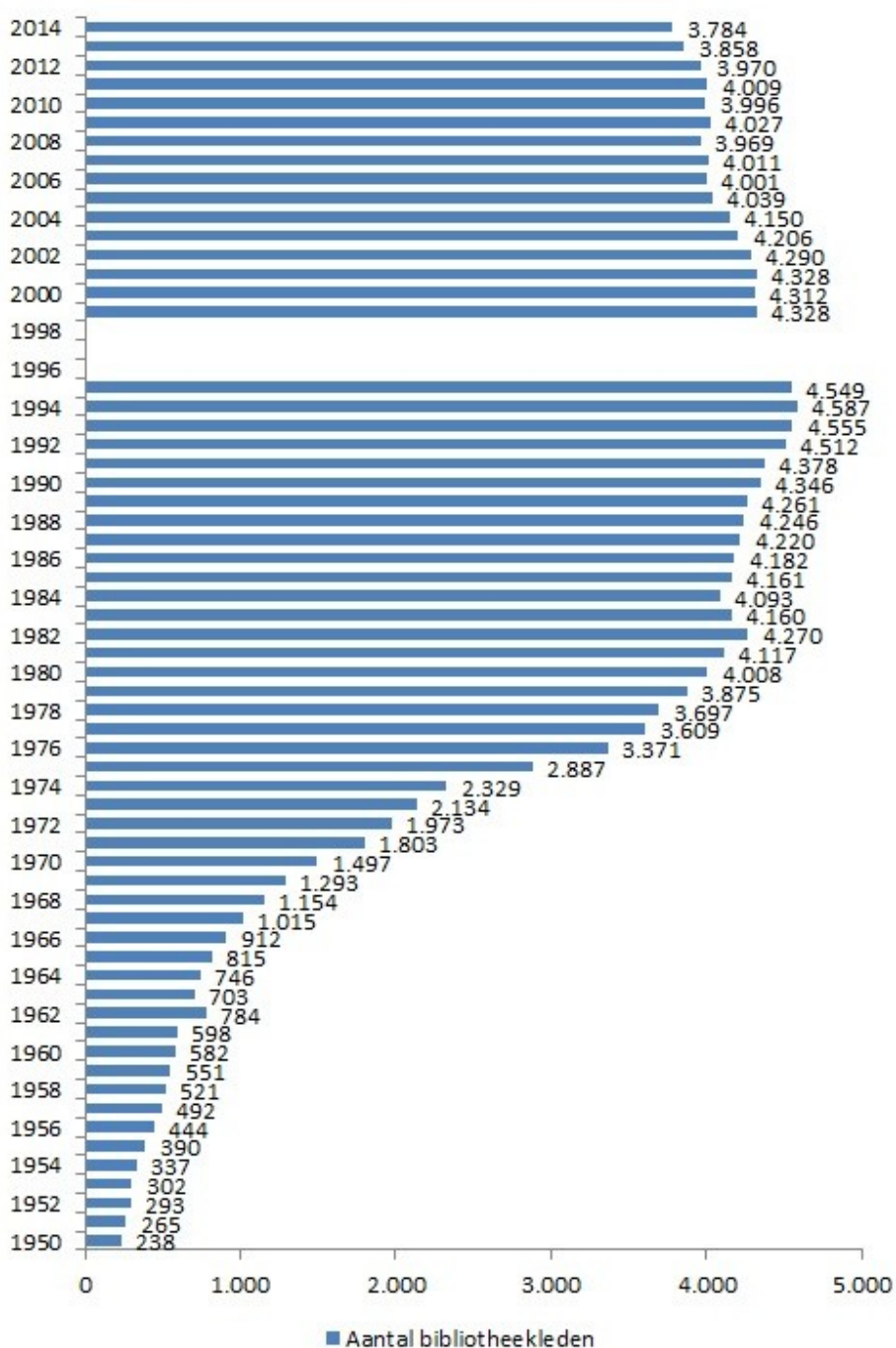


Figure 1: Number of Dutch library members between 1950 and 2014. Source: Bibliotheekmonitor.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

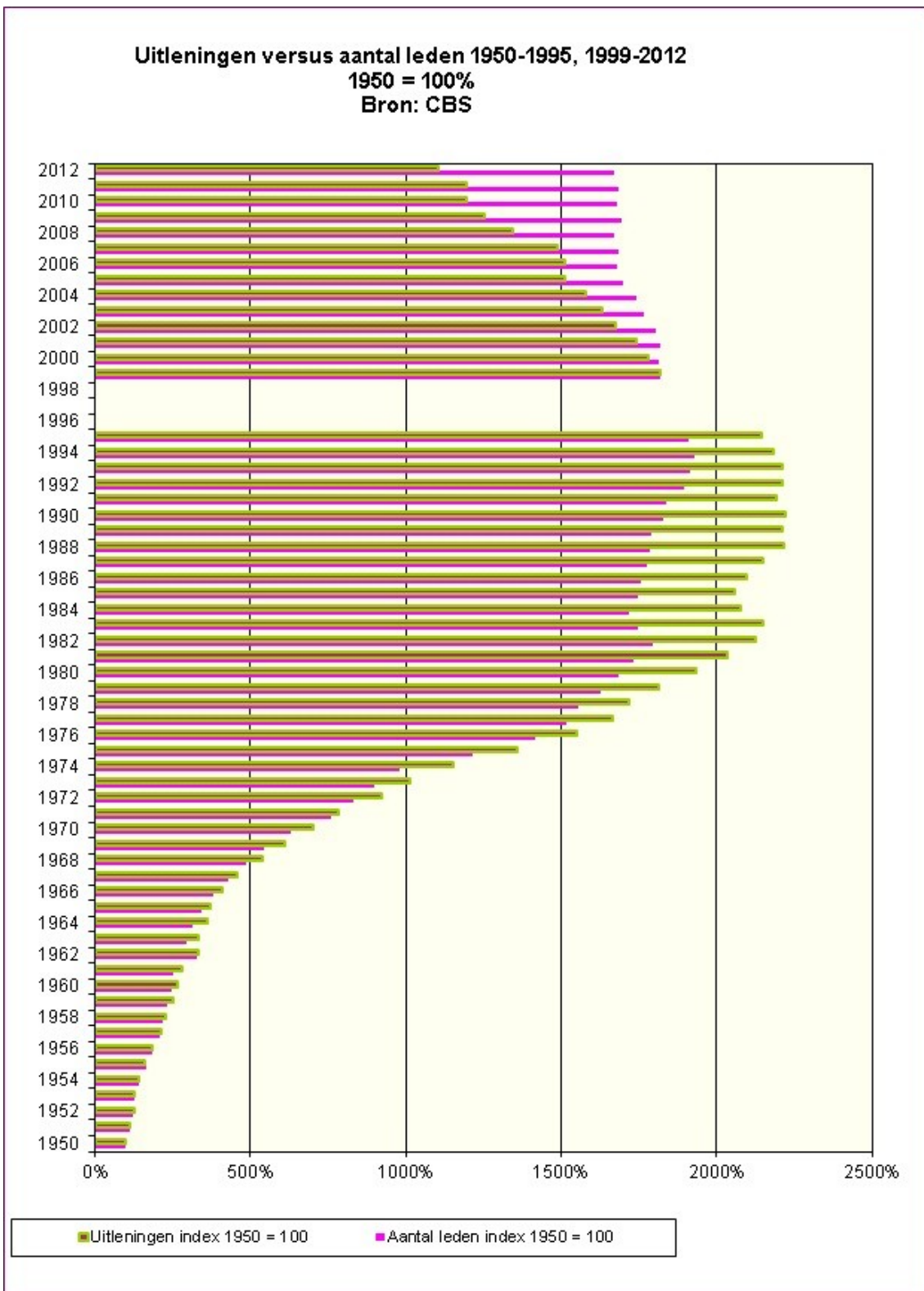
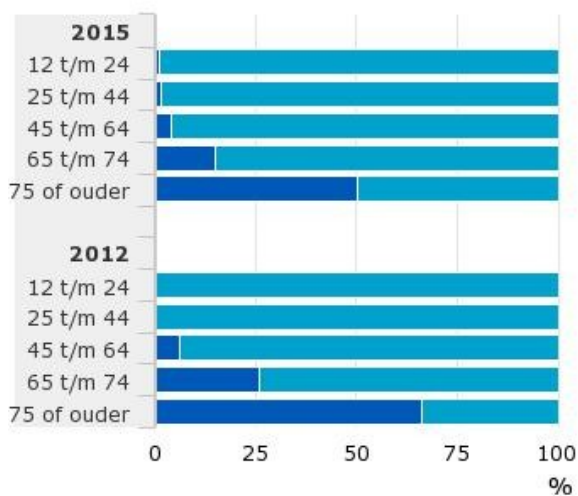


Figure 2: Number of loans versus number of Dutch library members between 1950 and 2012.

Source: Bibliotheekmonitor.¹⁹⁷

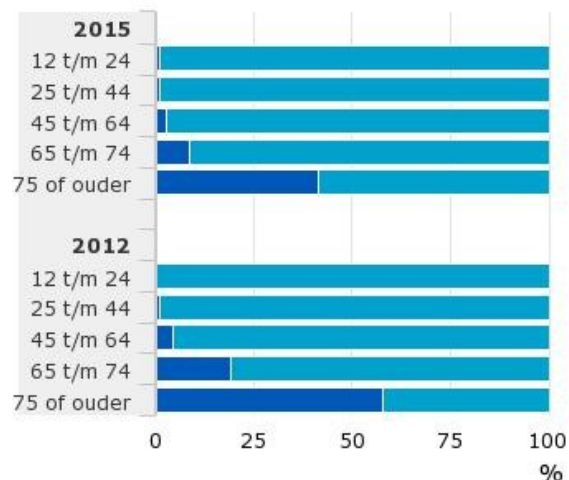
¹⁹⁷ Bibliotheekmonitor, 'Trends Bibliotheken', n. pag.

Internetgebruik



■ Wel ■ Niet

Internettoegang



■ Wel ■ Niet

Figure 3: Internet use in the Netherlands in 2012 and 2015; Internet access in the Netherlands in 2012 and 2015. Source: CBS.¹⁹⁸

198 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 'Acht procent van de Nederlanders nooit op internet', n. pag.

Groei WhatsApp en Facebook zet door in 2017, Twitter blijft licht dalen, Instagram stijgt relatief het meest

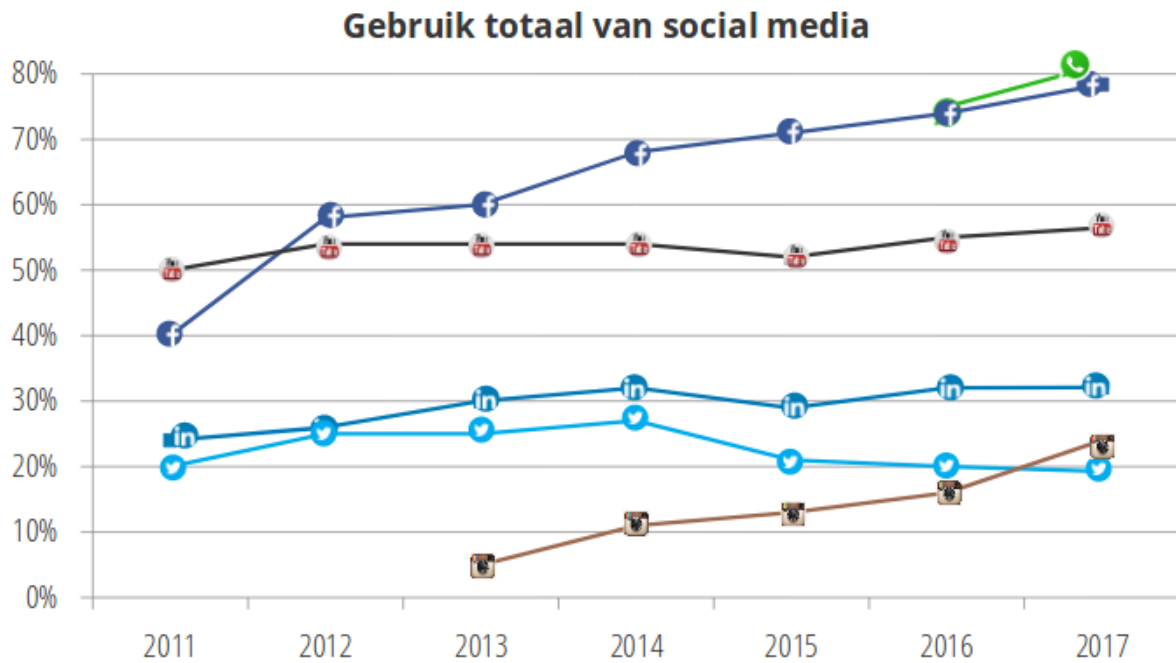
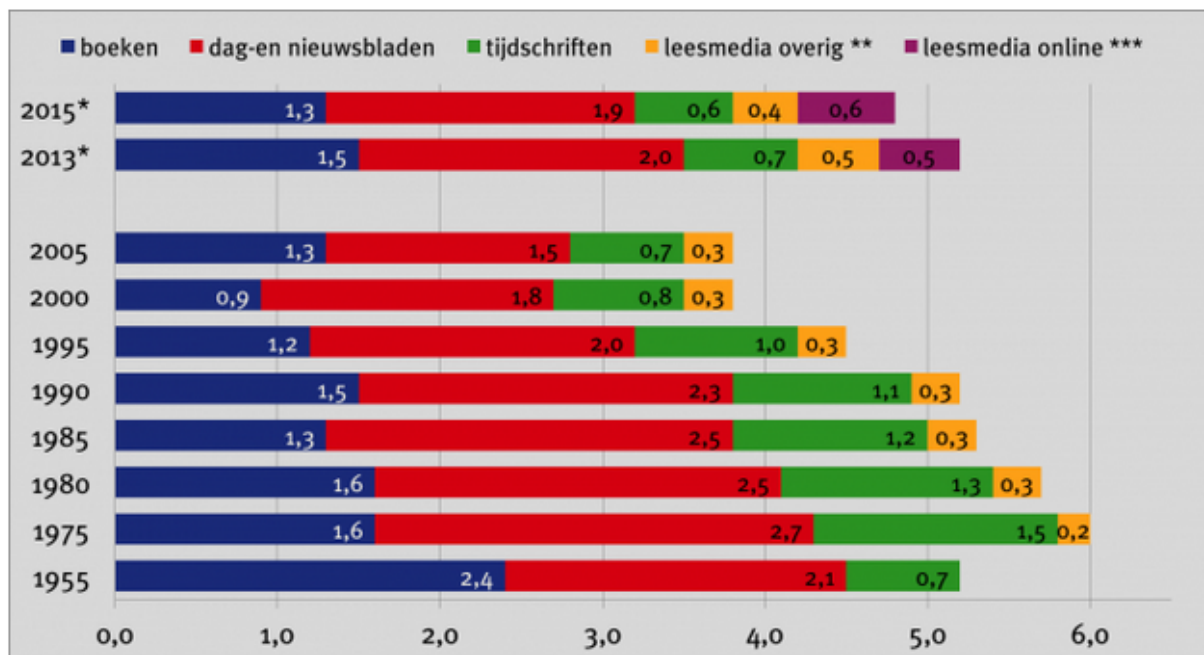


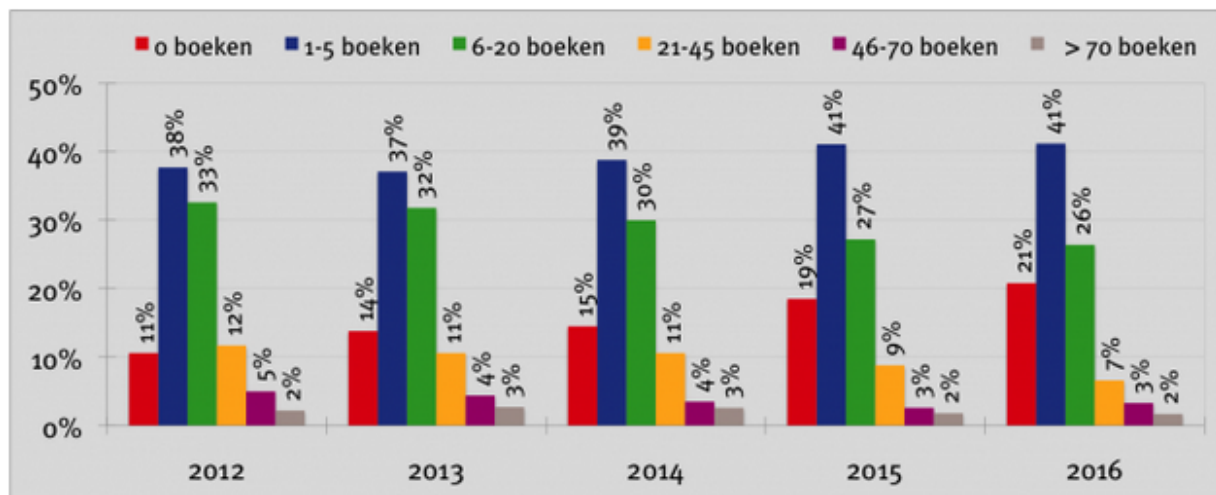
Figure 4: The increasing use of social media in the Netherlands. Source: Marketing Online.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Marketing Online, 'Nationale Social Media Onderzoek 2017', n. pag.

Tijdsbesteding leesmedia In uren per week door de Nederlandse bevolking



Jaarlijks aantal gelezen boeken, gedrukt en digitaal In procenten van de Nederlandse bevolking



* Gemiddelde is berekend op basis van het klassenminimum: voor 1-5 boeken: 1; voor 6-20: 6; voor 21-45: 45; etcetera.

Figure 5: Time spent by Dutch citizens on the reading of traditional print media, and online media; the number of books read by the Dutch population, in percentages. Source: Leesmonitor.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Leesmonitor, 'Leestijd', n. pag.

Ebooks

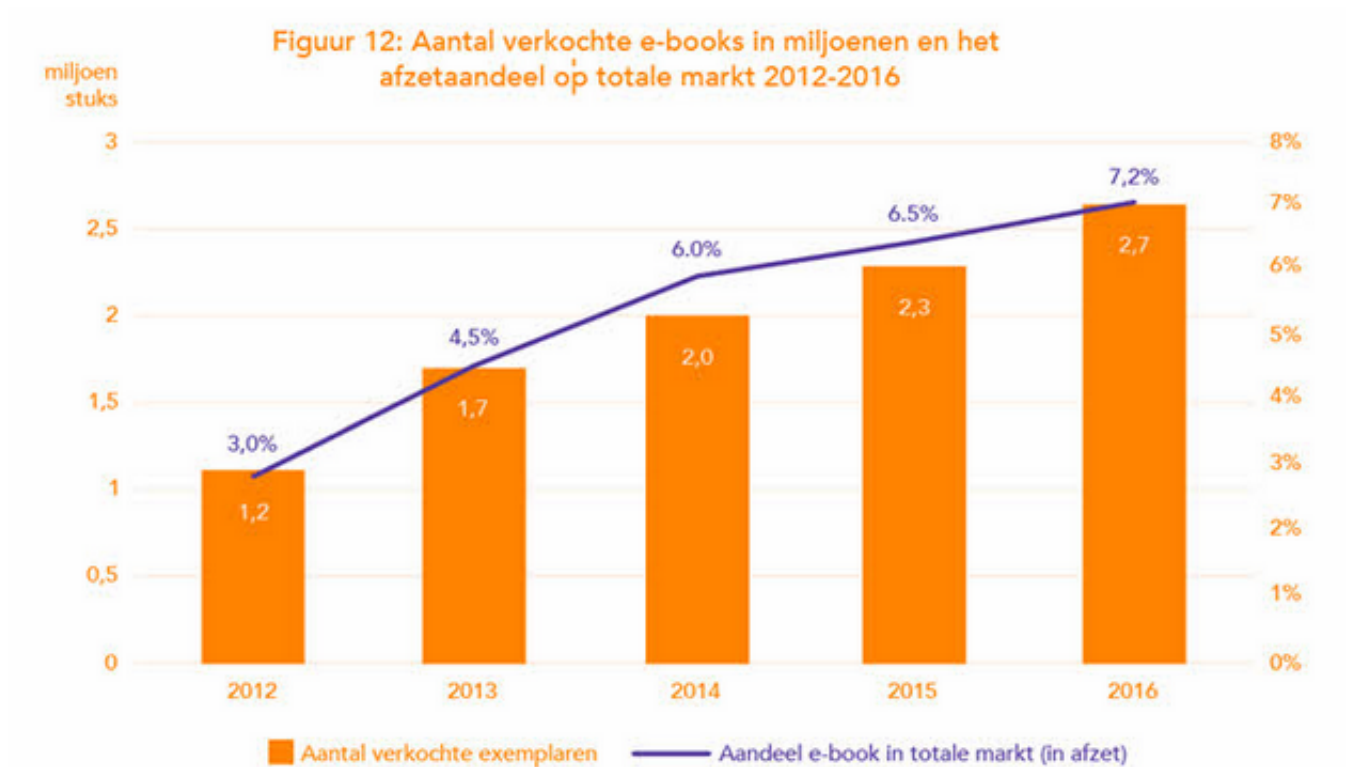


Figure 6: Revenue of sold e-books in millions, and their share on the book market. Source: Vakblog R. Snijders.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Snijders, 'Boeken en ebooks in Nederland', n. pag.

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