Linking Het Amsterdams Stadsjournaal: A Case Study in Emerging Linked Open Data (LOD) Approaches to Audio-Visual Heritage

Meg Weijers (UvA/Eye Filmmuseum) & Christian Olesen (UvA)

Introduction

Focusing on the example of *Het Amsterdams Stadsjournaal* this paper aims to advance discussions around emerging Linked Open Data (LOD) approaches to AV heritage, drawing on research initiated in the context of the first author's MA thesis project, and further developed in the context of the CLARIAH Media Suite Learn initiative. *Het Amsterdams Stadsjournaal*, henceforth *ASJ*, was a political film collective that produced critical documentary productions about the misconducts and malpractices in capitalist society between 1974 and 1984.[1] The archiving of the *ASJ* materials, and their associated datasets, raises several challenges and questions concerning archival access to AV heritage and standardisation because the materials are located at three different institutions with diverging missions, user groups and definitions of film works; respectively Eye Filmmuseum (Eye), the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (NISV), and the Stadsarchief Amsterdam (SAA). Addressing this challenge, and contributing to the DH Benelux 2024 Conference theme "Breaking Silos, Connecting Data", the paper discusses the research done on evaluating the potential of Linked Open Data as a way to connect and enhance data on *ASJ* in order to make it more widely accessible. Moreover, the paper discusses and critically evaluates the access currently given to a part of *ASJ*'s films in the CLARIAH Media Suite and the environment's recently developed LOD and Wikidata features, focusing on how these functionalities may accommodate for the user requirements identified at the institutions.

The Shared Custodianship of ASJ *and the Archiving of Non-theatrical Films*

The archiving of the ASJ collection is complicated by two specific challenges, of which the first will be the paper's main focus. Currently, the films are preserved and documented by three different institutions, each operating with a distinct perspective and definition of the films, namely as respectively art (Eye), historical artefact (NISV), and as part of a specific urban history (SAA). As a consequence of this shared custodianship, the records have been provided with different information and metadata that lack standardisation. As interest in unlocking the materials is growing, an alternative way has had to be found to enable access to them as a whole, while being preserved at three different institutions. The research presented in this paper first approached this challenge conceptually and practically, while experimenting with potential solutions, focusing on the following main question:

---

[1] Jan Heijs, *10 Jaar Amsterdams Stadsjournaal: 1974-1984* (Uitgeverij NADA: Amsterdam, 1984): 11-24.

What are the potential affordances of metadata and Linked Open Data (LOD) in overcoming the challenge of shared custodianship and cataloguing contextual information in the archiving of the Amsterdams Stadsjournaal?

LOD as a potential solution

Why take a look at LOD as one of the potential solutions for the challenge of shared custodianship of *ASJ*? In recent years, LOD-based technologies have sparked increased interest among film and AV archives looking for ways to make collections accessible online and to enrich metadata within existing systems. For example, workshops have been organised to discuss the usage and tasks of LOD in film archives, where this is still a very new approach.[2] However, despite this growing interest, the promise of standardisation and interoperability between different systems has not been fulfilled yet, just as film archival data presents challenges that are mostly only sparsely covered in existing literature on LOD. As Seth van Hoogland and Ruben Verborgh argue: "[a]gain and again, projects have demonstrated that even if people and institutions are using the same tools and standards, they implement them in different ways to accommodate the specific nature of their collection."[3] In other words, linked data is an interesting technology but still needs good-quality, standardised metadata to be used efficiently in film and AV archives. This research can therefore be seen as an experiment with this technology, how it interacts with metadata in catalogues dealing with film metadata, and to examine its potential and pitfalls within film archival practices, thus advancing discussions around LOD in connection to film and AV heritage, which still tend to be underrepresented.

In the research for this paper, primarily Wikibase and Wikidata were examined. In taking this focus, the paper lies in continuation of current research around film heritage and LOD, while also building on current efforts by considering non-theatrical films, a type of films that has not yet been a main focal point for LOD in film and AV archives. As a basis for the paper's examination we take the cue from Heftberger and Duchesne's article "Cataloguing Practices in the Age of Linked Open Data", which argues that "[b]y linking similar properties back to Wikidata we can have the best of both worlds, allowing for a higher level of specification on our platform, while also allowing the ability to push and pull data between other knowledge bases where desirable".[4] Based on this starting point, we consider a personal Wikibase (theoretically) desirable because of conflicts between Wikidata's

[2] "Linked Open Data for Film Archives," FIAF, March 23rd, 2019,
https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/LoD-Task-Force-Workshop-2019.html.

[3] Seth van Hoogland and Ruben Verborgh, *Linked Data for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, (London: Facet Publishing, 2014), 14.

[4] Adelheid Heftberger and Paul Duchesne, "Cataloguing Practices in the Age of Linked Open Data," FIAF, June 2020,
https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-resources/Cataloguing-Practices-Linked-Open-Data.html.

machine-readability and human-readability, and the specificity of filmographic information that complicates the mapping of information on Wikidata, while arguing that the shared custodianship of the *ASJ* materials suggest that Wikidata and Wikibase need to be revisited and tailored to the specifics of this collection.

Methodology

The methodology of this research was divided into three consecutive parts. The first part covered an inventory of the paper documents available about three ASJ films: *Werkloosheid* (1975, no. 4,), *Surinamers in Nederland: De Terugkeer van het Zwarte Goud* (1976, no. 8), and *Gebroken Tijd* (1982, no. 30).[5] The inventory consisted of paper documents available at the three institutes and the online (news)paper archive Delpher. This helped to define potentially relevant information to be catalogued as contextualising metadata and prepare for the second part of this research, namely the user requirement study. The user requirement study, consisting of interviews with employees of the three institutes, was set up to assess which insights gained from the archival research were vital to catalogue the records of ASJ as respectively a form of art, historical artefact, and urban history. The answers and insights derived from the user requirement study were used to analyse the affordances of Wikidata and Wikibase to determine if these were potential ways of linking the records with each other and other records in the three archives. Finally, focusing on ongoing research, we discuss and compare these results to a selection of *ASJ*-films currently made available in the CLARIAH Media Suite infrastructure in relation to the infrastructure's LOD and Wikidata features, taking into account how they may (or may not) accommodate for the user requirements identified.

Conclusion

The user requirement study showed which contextual information was relevant specifically for understanding *ASJ* as a film collective and for understanding *ASJ* as a form of art, a historical artefact, and part of urban history. Moreover, the findings suggested a need for providing this information on a meta-level, noting down only distinctive events, developments, or concepts without further elaboration. However, this could be problematic for users who don't have this required knowledge. To solve this problem, the interviewees suggested a need for an external place to further explain this kind of information.

The findings from the affordances analysis implied that metadata and LOD-based technologies such as Wikidata and Wikibase can be used to capture contextual information of the individual ASJ film to adequately catalogue the collection to such an extent that all

---

[5] The films were chosen based on their reflection of the different production phases ASJ went through and the diverse societal topics they touched upon.

users can understand it regardless of their background. Hence, their potential to open up the collection for a broad group of users. Concerning the challenges of the *ASJ* collection, metadata should be used to capture the information relevant to all three institutes whereas Wikidata and Wikibase can be used to store more specific information and to understand the collection as a whole. Additionally, it can offer users starting points for further research by providing links to other web pages containing contextual information. Therefore, LOD has two potential roles: to connect the films and offer users tools to investigate topics, concepts, and persons further if wanted (the latter currently facilitated in the CLARIAH Media Suite). Here, the results show the biggest potential of using LOD in audiovisual archives in light of current practices: as a way to contextualise political films without having to change an entire database.

Bibliography

FIAF. "Linked Open Data for Film Archives." March 23rd, 2019.
    https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/LoD-Task-Force-Workshop-2019.html.

Heftberger, Adelheid, and Paul Duchesne. "Cataloguing Practices in the Age of Linked Open Data." FIAF. June 2020.
    https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-resources/Cataloguing-Practices-Linked-Open-Data.html.

Heijs, Jan. *10 Jaar Amsterdams Stadsjournaal: 1974-1984*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij NADA, 1984.

Hoogland, Seth van, and Ruben Verborgh. *Linked Data for Libraries, Archives and Museums*. London: Facet Publishing, 2014.