

Castle Heritage: Where Static and Dynamic Practices Meet

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Introduction

Last spring historian Susan Legene provided an introductory talk titled ‘Kasteeltijd’ (‘Castletime’) at the annual KNHG (Koninklijk Nederlands Historisch Genootschap) conference. One of the meanings she attributes to this concept is “a stationary image of ‘the past’ placed in a museum.”¹ The link between castles and stationary images of ‘the past’ is not surprising, as these immovable monuments appear to have remained stationary while the world has changed around them. However, this link has also been made by various other scholars in regards to castle heritage practices. Some have for example pointed out that especially in the case of ‘built’ or ‘monumental’ heritage, its protection and preservation is generally favored over and above its utility and adaptive value.² In this so-called ‘curatorial approach’, the ultimate goal is the conservation of the heritage site which in practice for example translates to ‘don’t touch’ sighs at these sites.³ This is why built heritage has according to certain scholars, tended to become static and isolated or even ‘fossilized’ as if it were placed in a museum.⁴

However, the heritage sector itself has not been stationary. On the contrary, since about 1980 it has been subject to a variety of changes, which some have referred to as the ‘heritage boom’, while others speak of the rise of a true ‘heritage cult’.⁵ In his book *The Heritage Crusade* (1996), David Lowenthal notices how “All at once heritage is everywhere – in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace – in everything from galaxies to genes [...] One can barely move without bumping into a heritage site.”⁶ The explosive growth of museums up until the late 1990s is only one example of this heritage trend, as this growth of the heritage sector also brought along new approaches to heritage. There has for example been a movement towards an approach in which the visitor experience is central. Some have argued this experience-focused approach could provide new means of sustainability for struggling heritage sites in times of less public funding.⁷ Others consider it a strategy to attract a larger or more diverse demographic.⁸

A possible effect of these developments in the heritage sector on castle heritage practices can be noticed in an increase in the events taking place in and around castles. This is a notable development considering the supposed static nature of built heritage. Therefore this development will be further explored in this paper. The question why these events are organized is central. Additionally the experience and opinion of the visitors of these events is examined. The first chapter will further explore the overall changes in the heritage sector and provides a description of different approaches and practices. Chapter two will focus on

¹ Susan Legene, “kasteeltijd”, (paper presented at the annual KNHG conference, Arnhem, April 2018).

² Mike Robinson and Helaine Silverman, *Encounters with Popular Pasts: Cultural Heritage and Popular Culture*, (Cham: 2015), 3.

³ B. Garrod and A. Fyall, “Managing Heritage Tourism”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27, no. 3: 682-708, 684.

⁴ See for example Robinson and Silverman, “Encounters”, 3.

⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷ Garrod and Fyall, “Managing Heritage Tourism”, 684.

⁸ Debra Leighton, ““Step Back in Time and Live the Legend’: Experiential Marketing and the Heritage Sector”, *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12, no. 2. 2007: 117-125, 117.

heritage managers' opinions and practices in castle heritage. This will include an overview of general research results from a study into events organized in and around castles in the Netherlands, as this has not been extensively researched before. Subsequently motivations of heritage managers will be discussed. The final chapter will explore the visitors' expectations and opinions on these events, in order to get a better understanding of how these events contribute to their experience of castle heritage.

Finally, the terminology used in this paper needs to be addressed. One could write a book about castle terminology, as there are many different ideas about what constitutes a castle. A common definition is to regard it as a building that has to be defensible, in addition to having a residential function. However, this line is often blurry. It was therefore chosen to approach this issue from a slightly different angle and focus on buildings that defined themselves as a 'castle', while taking the common definition into account.

Chapter 1: Approaches To Heritage

Built Heritage: the Curatorial Approach

In their book *Encounters With Popular Pasts, Cultural Heritage and Popular Culture* Mike Robinson and Helaine Silverman point out that especially in the case of built or monumental heritage, what is commonly identified and acknowledged as being heritage ‘is largely distinguished by age and certain aesthetic qualities.’⁹ As previously mentioned, they state that the protection and preservation of these features are generally favored over and above their utility and adaptive value. This is what Brian Garrod and Alan Fyall refer to as the so-called “curatorial approach”, which they argue still widely pervaded in the heritage sector in 2000.¹⁰ In this approach to heritage, the mission is primarily one of ‘caring for the property and maintaining it in as pristine a state as possible with issues such as financial solvency and public access entering into the decision-making process only as secondary considerations.’¹¹ Simply put, the main goal of the heritage site is conservation, while other aspects like public access are secondary. Garrod and Fyall came to their conclusions through a panel study of heritage managers’ opinions on the fundamental mission of a heritage attraction. They identified different elements that were found of importance in the heritage mission, for example conservation, accessibility, relevance and the importance of the local community. Out of these different elements, conservation was ranked highest. This means that ‘the importance of the heritage asset as an endowment for future generations is generally considered to outweigh its significance as an asset for contemporary use.’¹² This is reflected by the panel in the widespread consensus on the importance of conserving heritage assets for the benefits of future generations.¹³

The curatorial, or traditional approach to heritage translates at the sites into what some have dubbed the ‘traditional historical presentation’.¹⁴ In this traditional presentation the focus is on the historical site itself, which could for example be a castle, historic house or a monument. The visitors are informed about the history of the site and its collection through text (signs), leaflets and occasionally a guided tour. In this type of presentation all the attention is directed towards the original building and an effort is made to give an authentic (re)presentation of history. Some visitors might enjoy this type of presentation, however there is possibility that this will only interest a specific demographic. There is only one approach for all visitors in which they are supposed to be passive observers and don’t touch or interact with the site. This type of presentation is therefore quite static. According to Eerelman this form of presentation was present in most of the historical heritage sites in the Netherlands in 1996, which reflects Garrod and Fyall’s statement about the pervasiveness of the curatorial

⁹ Robinson and Silverman, “Encounters”, 3.

¹⁰ Garrod and Fyall, “Managing Heritage Tourism”, 684.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 692.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Martine Eerelman, “‘Heritage in Holland’: een onderzoek naar de presentatie van het verleden in vijf Utrechtse kastelen” (Doctoraalscriptie, Universiteit Utrecht, 1996), 17.

approach.¹⁵ However, whether this statement is still true for the situation today is questionable due to certain changes in the heritage sector in the last 25 to 30 years.

Heritage Trends: the Experiential Approach

The explosive growth of the heritage sector has brought along new approaches to heritage. There has for example been a movement away from the 'traditional' curatorial approach towards an approach in which providing the public with a certain 'experience' is central. While some early examples of an experience focused approach can be identified in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, it was the United States who took the lead in developing large-scale experience focused heritage parks like Colonial Williamsburg. Their success did not go unnoticed and inspired heritage managers in the United Kingdom to create their own heritage parks and large-scale historical events and implement certain elements throughout the heritage sector from around the 1980s onwards.

The trend towards providing a heritage 'experience' did not restrict itself to the United States and United Kingdom. Although Eerelman states that in 1996 the experience-focused approach was not yet widely implemented in the Netherlands, especially not in the case of castle heritage, a certain trend could be noticed.¹⁶ In 1997 a report commissioned by the Dutch government about changes in the cultural-historical interest of the Dutch public since the late 70s was published. In the report it was noted that there had been a rise in cultural heritage events taking place. These consisted for example of festivals mostly directed at a younger public, exhibitions and arts fairs aimed at the culturally interested and (seasonal) markets for a broader public.¹⁷ The author states that even though different age groups attended different events, they all seemed to take part in the same '*Erlebniskultur*'.¹⁸

Societal changes like visitor expectations and economic fluctuations contributed to new trends in heritage as well. According to Debra Leighton the 21st century consumer now 'demands a value-for-money "edutaining" and worthwhile experience, but expects at the same time to be "entertained, stimulated, emotionally and creatively challenged".'¹⁹ Since the experience-focused approach might answer to visitor demands, it could be a solution for (financially) struggling heritage sites, in times when less and less public funding has been made available. This is why according to Leighton the experiential approach could be identified as a long-term survival strategy and she proposes an adoption of an approach 'whereby consumer interest is not restricted to purely functional benefits but to the consumption of a total experience.'²⁰ Leighton continues by pointing out that based on recent indications, this move away from a traditional approach towards an experiential approach has delivered results. For example succeeding in maintaining or even increasing, visitor numbers 'in the face of adverse market conditions.'²¹

¹⁵ Eerelman, "Heritage in Holland", 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Jos de Haan, *Het gedeelde erfgoed: een onderzoek naar veranderingen in de cultuurhistorische belangstelling sinds het einde van de jaren zeventig* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1997), 22.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Leighton, "Step Back in Time and Live the Legend", 119.

²⁰ Ibid., 117.

²¹ Ibid.

However, implementing an experiential, consumption-based approach to heritage might not be easy for a sector of which conservation is said to be the highest regarded mission statement. Innate tensions exist throughout the sector between visitor access and curatorial goals, between scholarship and entertainment, and between social inclusion (access for all) and income generation through access fees. As Leighton states ‘the cachet of the heritage product itself is linked to its exclusivity: by marketing it to a wider public and by facilitating engagement with the consumption experience, we may destroy the very heart of its appeal.’²² This leads us to explore how this experiential approach actually translates to practice.

Experiential approach in practice: Events & Interpretation

There are different elements to this experiential approach. One of the characteristics has been previously identified as increase in the organization of events, like festivals, exhibitions, fairs and markets all taking part in the same *erlebniskultur*. An overarching requirement of this approach however, is to ensure an exceptional visitor experience as a whole.²³ Providing a dynamic visitor experience through interaction with the public is central. Interpretation is, according to Leighton, the key in providing an exceptional experience, as it is ‘the vehicle that bridges the gap between the site or artefact and the visitor.’²⁴ This means instead of just communicating factual information, as is the case in the traditional approach, the aim is to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, illustrative media and first-hand experience. This could be achieved by state-of-the-art technology, which could for example allow the public to experience smells, sounds and sights of certain time period. Another method might be using interactive multi-media, for example engaging in recreations of certain historical events on computers, providing electronic audio guides, and more recently creating interactive apps (with personalized content). Finally, a practice that has emerged as a key method in recent years is live interpretation, whereby actors perform to- or interact with visitors to interpret objects and ‘history’ by providing a human context.²⁵ This can range for example from historic re-enactment, through to theater, storytelling, living history and other forms of role-play.

With the growing popularity of live interpretation also came a growing interest from scholars. Re-enactment studies has been on the rise since the 1990s. However, there have yet to be generally accepted definitions of terms like ‘re-enactment’ and ‘living history’. Many scholars have their own definitions, and include or exclude certain practices based on the different shapes live interpretation can take. Some for example draw a line between live interpretation in the first person and live interpretation in the third person. In live interpretation in the first person, a costumed figure plays a historical character, which could be either a well-known historical figure or just a servant. The actor plays a role and will actively use its historical surroundings, for example a black smith at work in his smithy, or someone working on other crafts. The costumed figure will not break its role, and would answer questions as if it were an actual person from their performed time period. This is

²² Leighton, ““Step Back in Time and Live the Legend””, 121.

²³ Ibid., 120.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

where live interpretation in the third person differs, as the ‘actors’ do break character. They inform the public about ‘their’ time-period and what someone ‘like them’ would do for crafts. They do not necessarily take on the role of one person, but reflect on broader historical trends to inform the public. In this sense, one could consider them to be more of a costumed (tour) guide than an actor.²⁶ Another popular form of live interpretation is the re-enactment of large-scale historical battles, often at the location of the historical battle itself. Finally a form that some scholars consider to fall under living history is a historical event where the visitors themselves are offered the opportunity to take part in the re-enacting. Leighton for example is of the opinion that living history is something in which the visitors take part, and actually live and experience history rather than simply pay a visit.²⁷ Visitors are for example provided with costumes and have the option to stay overnight in historical buildings or situations.

Some authors consider all these examples to be either ‘living history’, or ‘re-enactment’ or both. However, others hold stricter views on the practice. As pointed out by Jacqueline Tivers, Robertshaw takes a very special and narrow view of living history, ‘including only first person interpretation (where the ‘actor’ takes a special historical role and speaks ‘in character’), and excluding drama, theatre in education, guiding, craft demonstrations, third person interpretation, and battle re-enactments.’²⁸ Similarly Elizabeth Carnegie and Scott McCabe differentiate between ‘re-enactment’ and ‘living history’. They consider there to be a difference between permanent ‘living history’ displays located within a museum context and ‘re-enactment’ which according to them focuses on annual or specific celebrations of a culture’s heritage within a particular physical space.²⁹ Tivers applies a broader definition to living history as she considers it to include ‘all instances where live ‘actors’ participate in the telling of a story of the past.’³⁰ I will follow this definition to account for the many different forms of live interpretation I have encountered in my research.

Similar to the wide variety of definitions, live interpretation has also been attributed different purposes and meanings. Carnegie and McCabe for example offer a conception of re-enactment wherein the aim revolves around the celebration and reaffirmation of certain aspects of a culture’s history and sense of place in the world.³¹ Jerome De Groot however emphasizes that re-enactment crucially has a performative educational purpose.³² Leighton is of a similar opinion, stating that living history ‘is normally considered to have, or even require, a strong educational element [...]’.³³ This educational purpose has been a major topic of discussion and echoes critiques on the experiential approach as a whole.

²⁶ Eerelman, “‘Heritage in Holland’”, 32.

²⁷ Leighton, “‘Step Back in Time and Live the Legend’”, 120.

²⁸ Jacqueline Tivers, "Performing Heritage: the Use of Live 'actors' in Heritage Presentations", *Leisure Studies*. 21, no. 3/4, 2002.: 187-200, 191.

²⁹ Elizabeth Carnegie and Scott McCabe, "Re-Enactment Events and Tourism: Meaning, Authenticity and Identity", *Current Issues in Tourism*. 11, no. 4, 2008: 349-368, 351.

³⁰ Tivers, "Performing Heritage", 191.

³¹ Carnegie and McCabe, "Re-Enactment Events and Tourism", 352.

³² Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 112.

³³ Leighton, “‘Step Back in Time and Live the Legend’”, 198.

Some scholars consider implementing an experiential approach to be a possible survival strategy or way of attracting a more diverse public. However, various concerns and critiques have been expressed in opposition of the experiential approach. It has been argued that heritage managers have only turned to this approach in order to transform a heritage site into a tourist attraction for profit. The development of the experiential approach has therefore been linked to a commodification of heritage wherein spectacle is made central, aided by events that barely have any connection to the historical significance or context of the site. There has been a concern that authenticity has been sacrificed in order to provide the public with an exceptional experience. Even in cases where a combination of education and entertainment is attempted, some argue that the emphasis is put on entertainment.³⁴

Similar critiques have been expressed about (live) interpretations at heritage sites, arguing that they have become sanitized, entertaining and inauthentic in order to appeal to popular tastes.³⁵ Especially since participants in live interpretation do not necessarily have an academic background in history or heritage, the authenticity and historical accuracy of the performed is further questioned. However, based on her research Tivers states that ‘The one element which most strongly binds together the participants in ‘living history’ is historical scholarship, research and a desire for “authenticity”.’³⁶ In addition, the participants in live interpretation have, according to Tivers, no interest in ‘selling heritage’ to anyone. This means the participants themselves do not necessarily contribute to a commodification of heritage, although their performance could of course still be used to commercial advantage by heritage and tourism managers.³⁷

The desire of the participants of live interpretation for authenticity might be considered to be more of an idealistic, rather than a realistic goal. This problem is not restricted to live interpretation only, since all history writing is an interpretation, a construction and based on the perspective of the researcher. Yet in the case of live interpretation this construction might be incomplete, as there are some historical aspects that simply cannot be recreated like actual diseases and deaths. Additionally much is simply not known about languages and cultures of past times. Therefore the question arises if live interpretation can only ever be partial, what value does it have as an educational device?

Tivers offers one opinion, as according to her ‘the benefit of “performed heritage” does not lie so much in the totally accurate representation of the past as in the ability to *question* the past, to get inside the skin of women, and servants, and people of colour from a previous era, and so understand better the problems of gender, class and race in modern society.’³⁸ Another often mentioned benefit of live interpretation is that it makes the past ‘tangible’.³⁹ It brings history ‘to life’ and allows for a dynamic interaction between public and

³⁴ A.T.E. Cruysheer, E. Ennen, H. Ronnes, van de, L. Werk, J.M.M. Wielinga, and M.H.J.M. Kocken, *Kansen door kennis: ontsluiting van kastelen en borgterreinen in een hedendaags cultuurlandschap*. (ADC Heritage, 2006), 13.

³⁵ See Leighton, ““Step Back in Time and Live the Legend””, 121, for examples.

³⁶ Tivers, "Performing Heritage", 198.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Tivers, "Performing Heritage", 198.

³⁹ Eerelman, ““Heritage in Holland””, 30, Cruysheer et. al, *Kansen door Kennis*, 13.

‘history’, whereas traditional text signs offer only a static one-way interpretation. Contrary to text signs or leaflets, live interpretation offers the visitor the option to ask the interpreter questions about topics they want to know more about or don’t understand. In addition, visitors might pay more attention to moving and talking sources, as these often stand out more and are possibly able to hold their attention longer.⁴⁰ Besides, not all visitors learn in a similar manner, meaning that some visitors might actually be able to learn better or more through visual sources than written text. That a static presentation of history or heritage is considered by some to be ‘boring’ and ‘dusty’ has been known and accepted.⁴¹

Finally, this relates to what the visitor of a heritage site is actually looking for when visiting a site. Even when a heritage site puts their focus on education over entertainment, one could question whether visitors are actually looking to be educated. Some research suggests for example that visitors are generally chasing a leisure experience, rather than knowledge gathering.⁴² According to Garrod and Fyall there is therefore a danger ‘that the heritage mission may overemphasize education at the expense of the more mundane role played by the heritage attraction in providing an opportunity for popular entertainment and recreation.’⁴³

To conclude, there have been certain changes in the heritage sector. Some consider these to be positive and useful, while others question new practices that have arisen. The main tensions exist between conservation of the heritage site and opening it up for the public to experience. In the latter case there are additional tension between the role of education and entertainment. It has been pointed out that especially in the case of built or monumental heritage, a curatorial approach focused on conservation has been favored. It could be questioned whether that is still the case today. This will be explored in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ Eerelman, “‘Heritage in Holland’”, 35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Garrod and Fyall, “Managing Heritage Tourism”, 693.

⁴³ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Practices and Approaches in Castle Heritage

The experiential approach was not yet widely implemented in Netherlands in 1996, especially not in the case of castle heritage, stated Eerelman in 1996.⁴⁴ Instead in the castle heritage sector a traditional curatorial approach was common. However, it had been noted that certain changes were taking place, like for example an increase in the number of events. How has this development affected castle heritage practices in the Netherlands? Furthermore, what motivations lie behind these heritage practices in the Netherlands? This chapter will try to offer some answers on the basis of an investigation into events organized in and around castles in the Netherlands.

Research Methods and General Results

There does not exist specific data about events organized in and around castles in the Netherlands. Therefore these events had to be mapped first. There are websites that offer general overviews of upcoming events in certain regions, however these lists are often incomplete. In order to map the events as precise as possible, a list of Dutch castles was consulted to check whether the castle had a website and if their website listed any events they might host. Some websites had the option to view past events, though many only showed upcoming events in the near future, or in some cases the whole year. This dependency on what is listed on castle website means that it is very difficult to come to specific numbers about for example the amount of events taking place yearly. However, the events that were mapped during the period of February 2018 till April 2018 do offer certain insights into roughly how many castles participate in organizing events and what types of events are for example organized. Based on the initial search results, a few castles were chosen to investigate more closely. To find out what motivations lie behind the organization of these events I spoke and corresponded with some of the managers of these sites. In addition to these sources, some newspaper articles and interviews provided further information and context. Finally, two previous small-scale studies provided a possibility for comparison.

For this research, events were mapped that took place either inside the castle or on its grounds. Based on information available online, about 65 castles in the Netherlands took part in the organization of some type of event in the last year (February 2017-2018). Many more castles were hosting weddings or similar celebrations, however these were not counted, as these are private events. Although there were some exceptions, most of the encountered events could be categorized as a specific type of event. This categorization consists of: exhibitions and expositions, concerts (various genres, but mostly classical), theatre, markets and fairs, lectures and live interpretation events (re-enactment, living history, storytelling). Other less common events consisted of music festivals or festivals and days celebrating a local historical event or folklore. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of castles hosting events per province and the popularity of certain categories of events. These numbers are visualized in Table 2.

⁴⁴ Eerelman, “Heritage in Holland”, 16.

Table 1

Province	Castle total	Exhibitions	Concerts	Lectures	Theatre	Markets & Fairs	Live Interpretation
Groningen	4	3	2	1		3	2
Friesland	2	1	2	2	1	1	1
Overijssel	3	1	1			1	
Gelderland	16	3	5	6	5	7	8
Utrecht	14	4	7	3	1	5	4
Noord-Holland	3	2	3	1	2		1
Zuid-Holland	8		3	1		2	1
Noord-Brabant	6	2	5		1	2	1
Limburg	7	2	1		1	1	2
Zeeland	2						
Overall combined	65	18	29	14	11	22	20

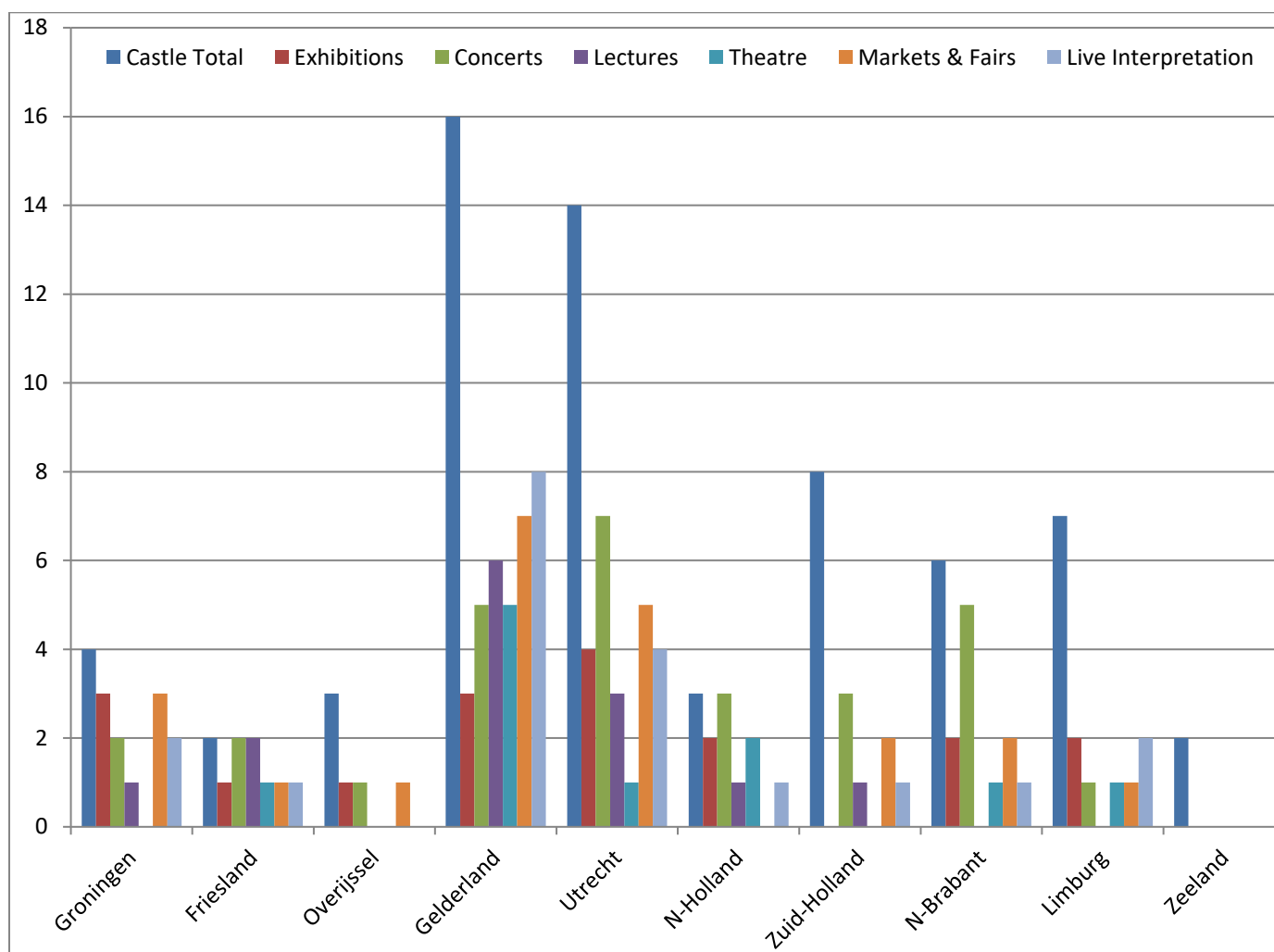
Table 2

Table 1 and 2 reflect the number of castles per province organizing certain categories of events.⁴⁵ For example in the province of Utrecht concerts are the most popular, with seven out of fourteen castles hosting that category. In Gelderland however, live interpretation appears to be the most common since eight of the sixteen castles that take part in organizing events, host live interpretation events. The reasons behind the popularity of certain types of events in specific provinces are a topic for further research. However, one possible explanation might be the relation between the imagery attached to these types of events, the image of the castle and of the province or region. In Gelderland a medieval theme or image is much more prevalent among castles, and as such live interpretation events like a medieval encampment or tournament can be an extension of this image. The provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland are known for the Dutch ‘Golden Age’ and additional ‘burger’ culture, for this reason castles in these provinces might adjust their presentation, including their events, to suit this image. Motivations of castle managers for hosting these events are discussed further below.

A relation can be noticed between the number of events per province and the number of castles per province, which for example explains the higher number of events in Gelderland and Utrecht. In this sense Limburg stands out considering their relatively few events in relation to the number of castles. Especially since five of seven castles only host one type of event or an event taking place only once a year. The majority of castles (37 of the 65) host different types of events throughout the year, of which the distribution per category can be seen in Table 1 and 2. The others (28 of 65) host only one type of event, which usually consisted of a series of (classical) concerts. A part of this latter group consists of castles that only host an event once a year, like for example a music festival, or took part in the once yearly Day of the Castle.⁴⁶ In the province of Zuid-Holland for example out of the eight castles that hosted events, five took part in Day of the Castle only.

Out of these different categories, concerts are the most popular (see Table 3 below for the overall distribution of categories of events). At some castles this type of event was of an incidental nature, while at other castles it was part of a series, for example every Sunday. Another popular category, markets and fairs are commonly organized around specific holidays or seasons, like Christmas, Spring and Autumn. Many of these markets and fairs sell all kinds of regional artisanal products. Their popularity might possibly have been influenced by recent trends in locally grown foods and artisanal products and inspired by other farmer’s markets. Antiques or ‘brocante’ fairs are popular as well. In certain cases this category was part of a larger seasonal festival ‘day’, in which the market or fair was just one of the organized activities. Likewise live interpretation is sometimes employed as an addition to another event like a festival or fair. However, in other cases they are hosted as the main event, like for example a medieval feast, a knights tournament, Living History Days and WWII battle re-enactments. These large-scale live interpretation events often last a whole weekend. In this sense they differ slightly from other types of events, as those usually last a day at the maximum. An exception would be exhibitions, since they are hosted for a longer time period. Finally the least popular category, theatre, is usually an incidental occurrence. In addition this

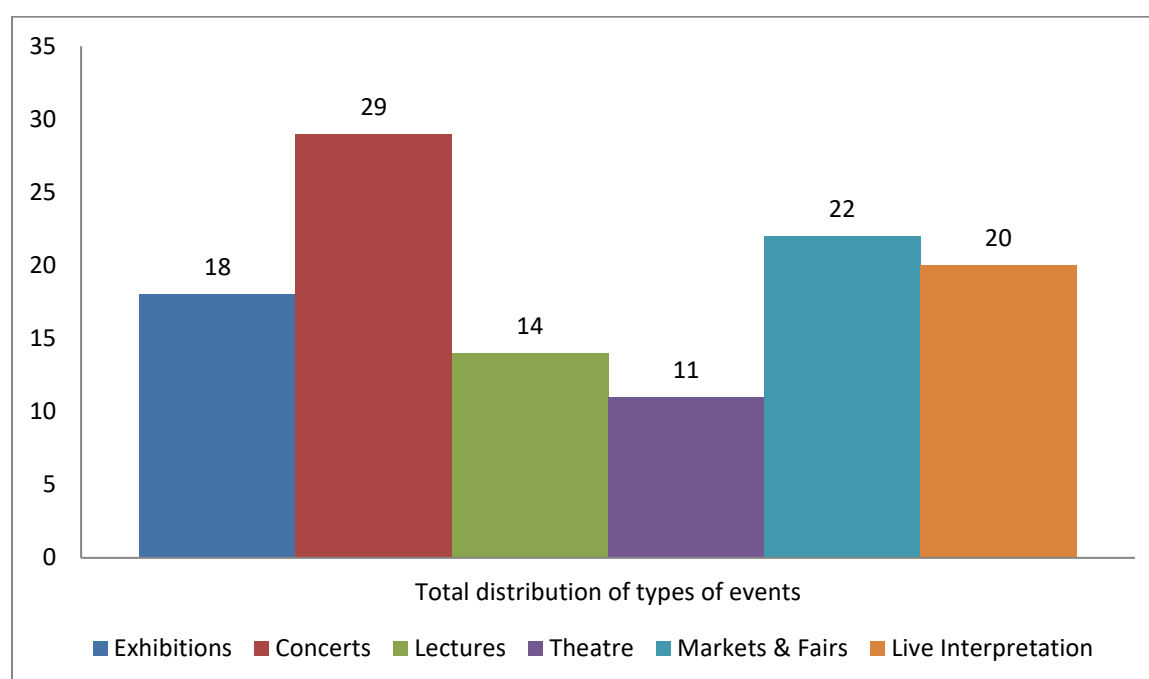
⁴⁵ It should be noted that since some castles only list their events for a certain time period, these numbers could differ slightly if these events were mapped for a longer time period, for example a whole year.

⁴⁶ The Day of the Castle is a yearly event where castles and estates open their doors to the public.

category comes in different forms, varying from children's plays to modern theatre performances.

Some events are hosted on a yearly basis. These recurring events do not consist of one specify type, but of varying types. Yearly seasonal markets and antiques fairs are common, just like other celebrations related to certain seasons or holidays. Certain live interpretation events have also become a yearly event, or have become part of yearly events celebrating regional history and identity. The large majority of these yearly events have been a recent development and emerged somewhere in the last 6 – 2 years. There are a few exceptions however, like for example the arts-fair 'Freylema Rondon' which took place for the 38th time in 2018, or the 'Historical Days' at Borg Verhilderstum that have been taking place since 2004.

Table 3



When we compare the situation of today with the situation of 1996 we can see some similarities, but also some major differences. A full comparison cannot be made, since there is no information available about how many castles organized events in that time. However, a 1996 study concerning five castles in the Province of Utrecht does offer some insights. For example, of the castles that were studied all organized some type of events.⁴⁷ These were mostly exhibitions, of which the topic almost always had a link with the building or its (former) residents. Concerts and lectures were popular as well. Other types of events seemed to have been more of an incidental nature. Huis Doorn for example hosted a Country Fair focused on craft products. Slot Zuylen hosted concerts and lectures, an 'art' weekend and a fencing demonstration. Castle Amerongen hosted concerts, a Christmas market and something called the 'bearfestival'. Castle-museum Sypesteyn hosted small concerts, lectures, a

⁴⁷ Eerelman, "Heritage in Holland", 55.

Christmas market and ‘open garden’ days. Castle De Haar hosted concerts, lectures, a Christmas market, a falconry demonstration and archery championships. Similar to the situation today, these events mostly took place outside of the castles, in their gardens, cellars, or outer buildings.⁴⁸

What stands out is that none of the castles organized any live interpretation events. None of the studied castles partook in living history, re-enactment or costumed storytelling events. This was not only a difference from the situation today, but also a difference from the British situation at that time, where these types of events were already popular.⁴⁹ Although there were different opinions among the five castles about the presentation of their castle, none of them were planning on changing their presentation or adopting a new approach.⁵⁰ Yet today at least twenty castles hosted a live interpretation event as can be seen in Table 3. These events varied from large-scale knight’s encampments, to smaller scale ‘meet the former inhabitants’ events. Sometimes live interpretation was used in addition to an event or in combination, like a medieval market. Most of these live interpretation events related to the middle ages in theme, but this was not always the case. World War I or II re-enactment events were for example hosted as well. It is likely however, that not too long after 1996 live interpretation events started being hosted at castles in the Netherlands.⁵¹ See for example the case of Slot Loevestein below. In addition, although concerts have stayed a popular event type, exhibitions and especially lectures are less popular than markets and fairs and live interpretation events. This appears to be different from the situation in 1996 where these three types were a staple at every castle.

Finally a quick analysis of the language used in the advertisement of these events might, like the overall increase of (type of) events, indicate a certain change in approach. In general, but especially in the case of live interpretation events, a specific language was used to advertise these events. It becomes clear through analyzing key words and phrases that offering some sort of experience has become central in many promotional texts. These for example include phrases such as ‘emerge yourself in’, ‘crawl into the world of..’, ‘experience up close ..’, ‘a monumental experience for everyone’, ‘come and experience for yourself’.⁵² These experiences would then allow the visitor to ‘discover how they lived in the middle ages’, go ‘two days back in time’ and ‘come face to face with..’, ‘history in real life’ and ‘meet lifelike knights and ladies’..⁵³ Not only will the visitor have an exceptional experience, they will actually be able to travel back in time, according to these phrases. While words such as ‘discover’ and ‘crawl into’ show attempts at visitor engagement.

⁴⁸ Eerelman, “Heritage in Holland”, 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁵¹ Email correspondence Fred Vogelzang. He himself took part in organizing live interpretation events at certain castles in the Netherlands in 1999.

⁵² ‘Middelleeuws Ammersoyen’, <http://middelleeuwsammersoyen.nl/>, accessed 20-05-2018, and ‘Slot Loevestein’, <https://www.slotloevestein.nl/#>, accessed 20-05-2018.

⁵³ Ibid, ‘Muiderslot’, accessed 20-05-2018, <https://www.muiderslot.nl/> and ‘Living History Huis Doorn’, <http://www.huisdoorn.nl/nl/nieuws/living-history/> accessed 20-05-2018.

In their 2000 article Garrod and Fyall state that 'indeed, many heritage managers do not even consider themselves to be in the "tourism business" preferring to view their role more as guardians of the national heritage than as providers of public access to it.'⁵⁴ This seems to somewhat reflect the mid-ninety's situation in the Dutch castle heritage sector, where the traditional approach was widely implemented.⁵⁵ However, they did occasionally host certain types of events like concerts. Why did they host these? And why were some types of events left out?

According to Eerelman, the motivation behind the organization of these events was to promote the castle and its name and brand among the public, to draw more visitors, and mainly to make money, which of course all relate to each other.⁵⁶ In the case of Castle Amerongen their objective was mainly to gain more income as according to their manager: 'these activities are mainly held for their earnings and not so much to draw in new visitors. That ideal goal is no longer present in the museum sector.'⁵⁷ However, the manager of castle-museum Sypsteyn does emphasize the importance of these events for drawing in a more diverse public.⁵⁸ Live interpretation events might have been able to succeed at the above-mentioned objectives and was already popular outside of the Netherlands. According to Eerelman the main reason why these were not yet hosted in the Netherlands is that there existed some sort of aversion against non-traditional approaches, especially in the case of castle heritage.⁵⁹ In general live interpretation was not taken seriously, or considered to be something that might be useful or fun at other heritage sites, but not appropriate for their own castle. The manager at Castle Amerongen for example stated 'We don't host any historical activities. Not that I am against responsible historical re-enactment events, but we just don't initiate them ourselves. [...] It has to suit the location, it has to have a function and a use.'⁶⁰ Castle Amerongen was contacted to collaborate on hosting an event with people in costume (klederdracht) in their garden. However in their own words: 'this was seriously considered, but we decided not to do this because it does not suit the castle enough. The castle does not have any connection to people in costumes.'⁶¹

Some benefits of live interpretation were recognized, like its ability to visualize certain aspects of life and its ability to make the past 'more lively, tangible and fun for a large group of people.'⁶² However, in order for these castles to consider hosting such events they stated some conditions. It should not affect the image of the castle in a negative way and the live interpretation itself had to be of a serious nature. It should not be just 'a play'.⁶³ The manager of Slot Zuylen was of a similar opinion, as they stated that such activities have to suit the

⁵⁴ Garrod and Fyall, "Managing Heritage Tourism", 684.

⁵⁵ Eerelman, "'Heritage in Holland'", 62.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁷ Quote in Eerelman, "'Heritage in Holland'", 56.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁶¹ Ibid., 57.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

castle: ‘It shouldn’t become a spectacle, so for example no public executions in the courtyard. Even though this would draw a large crowd... It should suit the castle, draw in public and provide publicity.’⁶⁴ Another condition was that such an event had to be affordable. Slot Zuylen considered live interpretation to be too expensive at that time, and did not have the money for it. Finally Huis Doorn considered living history to be an enjoyable practice, but not something they would want to implement in their castle. They were of the opinion that these alternative presentations did not suit the castle and expressed curatorial concerns: ‘We also don’t have the space and the furniture is too fragile to be able to let people walk among it.’⁶⁵

Even though Eerleman states in 1996 that she considers a non-traditional approach still to be dead in the Netherlands and does not expect change anytime soon, some castles were considering to implement certain aspects of an experiential approach incidentally and under the right conditions.⁶⁶ This shows the first steps towards the situation today.

Heritage Managers’ Motivation and Practice Today

In order to find out the motivation of castle managers for organizing different events, a few castles were selected for further research. The selection consisted of castles that hosted multiple types of events and castles that only hosted one or two types of events. However, attempts to reach out to the latter have not succeeded and are therefore absent.

When we compare the 1996 opinions and practices with the current state of affairs, we can notice some changes. Huis Doorn for example was very clear about not wanting to host any living history events, yet nowadays hosts the Living History Days for the sixth time in 2018. While one of their three key concepts is still ‘preservation’, the other concepts are directed more towards the visitor, namely ‘understanding’ and ‘experience’. As stated on their website, they want the visitor to experience the old monarchic Europe and to develop an understanding of the formation of modern Europe.⁶⁷ Together with the yearly Living History Days, the change in approach is obvious.

For a closer look at such changes in approach, Slot Loevestein proves a good case. Slot Loevestein is one of the Netherlands most well known castles and had around 136.000 visitors in 2017. A 2008 study about changes that occurred in the management of the castle in the period 1995 – 2007, describes which new initiatives were taken after 1995.⁶⁸ According to this study, in the period after 1995, Loevestein picked up on the growing interest in cultural historical tourism by presenting itself as a museum for ‘living history.’⁶⁹ Loevestein started developing different activities that brought a variety of historical themes, connected to the history of the castle, ‘to life’ for a broad demographic.⁷⁰ These activities included for example ‘Loevestein Bewoond’ (Loevestein Inhabited) and ‘Napoleontische Winterbivak & Veldslag’

⁶⁴ Quote in Eerelman, “‘Heritage in Holland’”, 58.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁷ ‘Huis Doorn Organisatie’, <http://www.huisdoorn.nl/nl/organisatie/stichting-beheer/> accessed 20-05-2018.

⁶⁸ Irene Diependaal-Meijer, “Veranderende Vrijtijdsbesteding en Cultuurhistorisch erfgoed; museum Slot Loevestein, veranderende representaties van het verleden, 1985-2007”, (Afstudeerscriptie, Open Universiteit, 2008), 83.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 89, (in Dutch: levende geschiedenis).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

(Napoleonic Winterbivouac and & battle). These events employed relevant re-enactment groups and additional activities like for example historic children's games. Live interpretation also took place on a smaller scale, for example in the small soldiers houses in which Napoleonic soldiers were placed.⁷¹ Besides these re-enactment events Loevestein hosted in this period, they hosted other types of events as well. The study for example mentions that there were falconry shows and classical concerts somewhat regularly, theatre performances throughout the year and incidental activities like a French 'picnic' and a historic hunting weekend. The study states that overtime 'the experience of Slot Loevestein has been made an important part of its policy.'⁷²

This policy appears to have pulled through. Slot Loevestein hosts many different events today. What stands out however, is that many of these are live interpretation. For example a Napoleonic weaponry exercise, portrayed by 'soldiers' of the Napoleontische Associatie der Nederlanden (Napoleonic Association of the Netherlands). Throughout the year there are multiple medieval knights encampments and tournaments, re-enacted by different re-enactment groups and displaying jousting, fighting demonstrations and workshops. Another event is centered more on horses and their training, but includes jousting and knights once again. And finally, as part of a regional heritage festival and event was hosted called 'Grenzeloos Loevestein' (Boundless Loevestein), which is described on the website as 'discover how Slot Loevestein dealt with different borders during the times of three – for Slot Loevestein – important times: The Middle Ages, the Eighty years war and the Napoleonic era. With real knights and soldiers, workshops and of course stories about prisoners.'⁷³ Most of these events are free of charge, and take place on the castle and fortress grounds, although usual ticket fees apply to the castle. Many of these events also include workshops, which means that the visitor is actively involved in the event. The visitor in this case is not only a passive observer, but also an active participant.

Although the number of live interpretation events stands out, it is not the only type of event taking place at Slot Loevestein. They also host other popular types, like a Brocante Fair, which is organized in co-operation with Heerenlanden Events. Other events are commonly organized around certain holidays, like for example an Easter Brunch, a mother's day High Tea and a fathers day Beer and Burgers. Although not yet listed on the website, it could be expected that there will also be events taking place around autumn and Christmas. Finally this year the event 'Slot Proevestein' will also be taking place for the fourth time. The event is according to the website about 'good food and drink in a historic atmosphere.'⁷⁴ This includes a tasting of a variety of foods provided by well-known restaurants of the area and a regional market with local produce.

The motivation behind the organization of these events is similar to that of previous mentioned castles, namely to 'to attract more visitors and generate income.'⁷⁵ This applies to all types of events. There are certain conditions however. Since the role of the castle is to be the 'pronkstuk' (showpiece) at these events, 'there always has to be a link to the history of

⁷¹ Diependaal-Meijer, "Veranderende Vrijtijdsbesteding en Cultuurhistorisch erfgoed", 90.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 'Grenzenloos Loevestein', <https://www.slotloevestein.nl/activiteiten/grenzeloos-loevestein/> accessed 20-05-2018.

⁷⁴ 'Slot Proevestein', <https://www.slotloevestein.nl/activiteiten/25-juni-slot-proevenstein/>, accessed 20-05-2018.

⁷⁵ Email correspondence with Tim Schrijver, May 31, 2018.

the castle.’⁷⁶ This means the castle is actively involved at these events, although ‘at one event this link is stronger than at the other.’⁷⁷ Additionally there also always has to be an educative component to these events, which they try to achieve through stories told by tour guides and educative workshops. In this way, they seemed to have found a way to handle some of the previously expressed concerns by castle managers about live interpretation. Finally there are some practical restrictions, like a maximum amount of visitors, and emergency exists for the safety of the public.

Although their policy concerning events does not seem to have undergone any drastic changes since the previous study 1995 – 2008, there have recently been some changes concerning the organization of these events. They have noticed that visitors primarily pay a visit for the events and less for the permanent exhibitions. They are therefore of the opinion that there is a strong need to keep innovating concerning the events and their content. This is also the main reason why some events that were hosted in the past, are not hosted anymore today. It is part of their policy to keep innovating and present new events ‘especially when other castles start to copy their events.’⁷⁸ Originality is therefore also important and they come up with these events themselves. Since they do not want to present the castle in one specific way, these events, stories and workshops have diverse themes, like for example medieval knights, prisoners, and (Napoleonic) soldiers.

A castle where the change in approach is more recent and more noticeable is Castle Heeswijk.⁷⁹ According to their website, Castle Heeswijk organizes different activities like ‘guided tours, exhibitions, lectures and concerts’, although in the period of February – April 2018 their online program listed Sunday concerts only. However, there have been at least two live interpretation events in the past. One of these was a knights encampment, with the aim of informing the public ‘about the lives of knights around 1200’ and in this way ‘bringing to life the times in which the castles was founded.’⁸⁰ The other live interpretation event hosted in October last year was focused on a different time period, namely the liberation of Castle Heeswijk in World War II which was re-enacted. Unlike Slot Loevestein, this event was not free, instead they offered an ‘all-in’ ticket price for event and castle with discounts for children.

According to an article published on a local news website, a few years ago Castle Heeswijk was on the brink of bankruptcy and struggling to find a way to make the castle more attractive to visitors.⁸¹ However, in two years’ time things have been turned around, as visitor numbers have increased from 20.000 to 28.000, an increase of 40%.⁸² The article attributes this success to the arrival of a new director who ‘went straight to work’ as he ‘knew things had to change.’⁸³ One of these changes was to open the castle to visitors completely. The castle has been turned into an ‘exploration castle’, since visitors are now allowed to explore

⁷⁶ Email correspondence with Tim Schrijver, May 31, 2018.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Attempts were made to reach out to this castle, but proved unsuccessful.

⁸⁰ Webpage no longer available.

⁸¹ ‘Recordaantal bezoekers voor kasteel Heeswijk’, <https://www.d-tv.nl/recordaantal-bezoekers-voor-kasteel-heeswijk/content/item?1065260>, accessed 17-06-2018.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

every nook and cranny including the castle towers. Another notable change in approach concerns an increase in events. The castle now tries to host an event every Sunday and wishes to expand their events program to other days of the week as well. The eventual goal is to increase the amount of visitors to 50.000 a year. This shows similar motivations for hosting events as other castles, namely increasing visitor numbers and their annual income.

In a way Castle Heeswijk story is similar to that of Castle Cannenburch. After the arrival of a new manager towards the end of 2013 and a change in approach, visitor numbers increased from 29.000 visitors in 2014 to 47.500 in 2015.⁸⁴ This increase of visitors has since continued, just as the increase of events that are hosted. The type of events most common at Castle Cannenburch are fairs (or markets) with different themes and organized in collaboration with a professional company. For example the 'Pure Pinksterfair' (Pentacost fair), which offers a variety of stands and products, 'Een Frans Festijn' (a French Feast) a market put up around a French theme and 'bourgondisch' (Burgundian) food, an Autumn Fair including live music, the local Christmas Market in front of the castle and another 'Trots Lentemarkt' (Spring market). Other events include ballet, theatre, treasure hunts, lectures and expositions, of which the topics do not necessarily have a connection with the castle. Finally they host a large-scale live interpretation event called the 'Middeleeuws Festijn' (Medieval Feast) that consists of an encampment of around 200 'inhabitants' with a medieval market and re-enactments of knights tournaments. Similar to the fairs and other events, they did not organize this event themselves, but in collaboration with a partner who reached out to the castle.⁸⁵ Setting up large-scale events like these themselves is not feasible at the moment, therefore around 90% of these events are organized in collaboration with partners who usually reach out to the castle.⁸⁶

Similar to the other cases, the motivations for hosting these events are both financial and a means to draw more visitors. Although in their own words, 'we are not trying to make a profit, it just that the upkeep of the castle requires a lot of money, and therefore we need visitors and revenue.'⁸⁷ Another goal of these events that has not yet been widely discussed before is to draw in different target audiences: 'in the last year we have focused on families with children. The little ones find the castle very exciting; the 12+ age group is less interested. That's where we will put our attention to now.'⁸⁸ They try to achieve that in different ways, of which the events program is an important part. For example the Medieval Feast, hosted for the fourth time in 2018, targets parents with children of varying ages. At the same time they hope such an event will stimulate repeat visits, since they want people to return to the castle more often. The Pinksterfair on the other hand has a different target audience, namely a more elderly public who enjoy nature, being outside and gardening. The Frans Festijn is then again focused on a vacationing public. These events get further adjusted to specifically appeal to their target audience. For example last year at the Pinksterfair they included small-scale live

⁸⁴ 'Kasteel de Cannenburch is hot', <https://veluweland.nl/lokaal/kasteel-de-cannenburch-hot-119721> accessed 21-06-2018.

⁸⁵ Interview with Rian Haarhuis, May 9, 2018.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Interview with Rian Haarhuis, May 9, 2018.

⁸⁸ 'Kasteel de Cannenburch is hot', <https://veluweland.nl/lokaal/kasteel-de-cannenburch-hot-119721> accessed 21-06-2018.

interpretation in the form of a few ‘knights’. However, they decided against including live interpretation this year because they felt it did not really suit the target audience.

An additional goal of these events that differentiates Cannenburg from previously mentioned cases, as it has not been explicitly mentioned before is the ‘liveliness’ of heritage. The manager at Castle Cannenburg is of the opinion that it is important to bring history to life and tell tales so ‘people go home full of stories.’ An event like the Medieval Feast therefore has added value, since it visualizes history and makes an impression on the audience. Through these events, the castle heritage is ‘kept alive’ which is important because ‘if it does not “bubble”, you can better close the doors.’⁸⁹ Since Cannenburg shares the conclusion of Slot Loevestein that the castle itself is not enough to attract a substantial audience anymore, these events are also a literal means to keep the castle alive.

These two additional goals of keeping heritage alive and drawing in a varying public, might go at the expense of other elements like for example education elements and a clear connection to the castle. They do pay some attention to whether an event suits the castle, like for example the Medieval Feast relating to the castle’s medieval cellars, but they are aware that the role of the castle at these events is sometimes simply to be a nice decor. Other events can be purely promotional, like for example an event that involved parasailers. They wonder if that is a bad thing however, since an event like this ‘might attract a new demographic, who’s interests are subsequently peaked and later return to actually visit the castle.’⁹⁰ Likewise, the educational element has occasionally been central to some events, but not so much at others. At the Pinksterfair for example, they consider education to be less important, because ‘it does not really suit such an event.’⁹¹ Ideally they would want to make education an important element of these events, but they also wonder whether that is what the public actually wants, since they might not always be looking for an educational experience.

Because of these priorities, they do not have many restrictions when it comes to these events. They are always open to new ideas and never outright say no to when a new event approaches them for collaboration. There was one occasion where they decided against something, which was when the Springmarket wanted to become a large fair as well. They were not in favor of this because it would result in too many similar fairs. Beside this there are some practical considerations, which mostly concern conservation. The interior of the castle is very fragile and includes a variety of museum pieces. But more importantly, the interior of the castle is not very spacious, so the castle simply cannot handle the amount of visitors they aim for at events. Finally they are of the opinion that they are moving towards a maximum amount of events. To host two large events a month for example is not feasible, since it would be logistically inconvenient.

Some practical considerations that have not yet been mentioned are legislation and regulations by (local) government. Their influence can be noticed in the case of Castle Assumburg. This case differs slightly from the other cases since the castle itself is exploited as a StayOkay and the grounds surrounding the building belong to the municipality. The municipality decided to make use of these grounds and recreate the original authentic garden. They did not want to manage this garden, therefore the organization of volunteers of the

⁸⁹ Translated from Dutch: ‘bruisen’, interview with Rian Haarhuis, May 9, 2018.

⁹⁰ Interview with Rian Haarhuis, May 9, 2018.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Castle Garden Assumburg was established. This organization hosts events in this garden, which include guided tours through the garden, educational lectures about nature and environment, concerts, an autumn market and a stories festival. This case was chosen for further research, because they might have different motivations for organizing these events than castle managers. However, the goal of these events is similar in that they are hosted mostly to increase the awareness among the local public of this garden and subsequently attract more visitors. Yet in this case there are no financial motivations. What also stood out in this case was the role played by local legislations concerning events. They mentioned how there were many rules they had to adhere, which prevented them from hosting larger events. Instead they wished to keep it small-scale because for larger events all sorts of things have to be taken into consideration, like for example municipality legislations regarding the environment. Besides this, they do not consider these larger events with foods and drinks to have any additional value to the garden. They simply wish to organize fun, free activities that get the garden under the public's attention and educate them about the garden and the environment. The castle itself does not have an important role, but mostly provides nice scenery.⁹²

To conclude, a change can be noticed both in frequency and in type of events that are hosted at castles in the Netherlands. Although exhibitions, concerts and lectures are still part of many castles' programs, the overall increase and popularity of fairs and live interpretation events is striking. For some this increase has been part of a policy change for some time, while others have shifted in approach more recently. The motivations behind hosting these events has stayed somewhat similar, in that this is primarily to draw more visitors and gain income. Additional reasons vary per castle however, as keeping heritage alive has also been mentioned. There are also some varying opinions as to what extent the event has to have a connection to the castle. What might contribute to these differences is the amount of employees involved in the organization of these events. A castle like Slot Loevestein for example employs a team of five people, whereas in the case of Castle Cannenburch only one person is responsible. Finally, as argued by scholars and supported by the cases of Castle Cannenburch and Castle Heeswijk, it seems that a change in approach has been successful in increasing visitor numbers. This brings us to the topic of the final chapter, namely the opinion of the public.

⁹² Interview with Chris Bakker, June 8, 2018.

Chapter 3: The Public and Events

According to a 2007 report by Jos de Haan and Frank Huysmans about the developments of the interest of the Dutch public in cultural heritage, the Dutch consider historical buildings to be of great importance.⁹³ Many are of the opinion that they add value to cities and landscapes, and would therefore like these buildings and their cultural history to be preserved.⁹⁴ The growing number of national monuments reflects this view, of which most (32.000) consist of houses, but also includes around 300 castles, 1100 mills, 3700 churches and 6000 farms in 2007.⁹⁵ Likewise there has been an overall increase in popularity of these monuments reflected by growing visitor numbers. Old city centers and towns were the most popular among the Dutch public in 2003, with one third of the population visiting, but palaces and castles have also seen an increase in popularity going from 21% percent to 25%.⁹⁶ These visitors are among a group of culturally interested who in general also frequent museums, archives and monuments, and have enjoyed a higher education.⁹⁷ According to the report there has however been a striking change in demographic. Over the years there has been a decrease in the age group of 20-34, while the younger age category and elderly age category increased. The age category of 50-64 has increasingly become the leading category. Similarly the 65+ category has increased rapidly as well.⁹⁸

It was not possible at this time to collect any statistical data of the visitors of the events hosted by castles. In order to get a better understanding of these events and their public, I therefore paid a visit to these heritage sites to observe them in context. At the events I visited, I mingled with the other visitors and approached them singly or in small groups to interview them. These interviews were mostly in the form of (informal) conversations, about the reason of their visit, their backgrounds, their opinion on the event and their attitude towards re-enactment. Although the results offer interesting insights on visitor motivations and opinions, they do not necessarily reflect the average visitor.

Visitors At Events

At Slot Loevestein I visited ‘Grenzeloos Loevestein’, a live interpretation event covering three historical periods and including a variety of workshops in which the visitor could take part.⁹⁹ The event took place mostly outside on the castle and fortress grounds, where I spoke with some of the visitors. This included a couple of around 50 years old, who were from the area and had cycled to the castle. They specifically came to visit the castle, because one of them had not visited before. They stated that they were not necessarily ‘avid castle goers’, but they did visit museums quite regularly. In this sense they somewhat reflect the previous

⁹³ Jos de Haan and Frank Huysmans, *Het Bereik van het Verleden: ontwikkelingen in de belangstelling voor cultureel erfgoed* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2007), 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 112, 113.

⁹⁹ See appendix for photographs of events.

mentioned trends and averages. There were exceptions however. For example a group of friends of around 25 – 30 years old, of which two were non-Dutch. Like the couple, they came to visit the castle, as they hadn't known there was an event. Since they had arrived later in the day, they were thinking of returning another time even though they were not from the area. There visitors that came specifically for the event, for example a woman in her early forties. She is from the area and visits the castle and fortress grounds regularly to walk her dog. Whenever Loevestein hosts a special event she likes coming by and checking it out. Around two times a year she specifically visits the castle and she occasionally visits other castles in the area as well. She rarely visits museums and would rather visit old city centers, since there are no entrance fees or certain access restrictions like closing times. Overall she enjoys history and 'old things', but it is important to her that events and destinations are nearby and easily accessible, preferably without entrance fee. Likewise a family with two young children (8 – 11) also paid a visit specifically for the event, though they also visited the castle, as they had not been before. They came to have 'fun day out with the family' and lived about an hour away. As a family they do not often visit museums, but do enjoy visiting 'old buildings' like fortresses, castles and bunkers. It was important to them that there was 'room to run around' and enjoyed partaking in activities like children's games.

Although Loevestein themselves pointed out that most people were primarily visiting for the events and less for the permanent exhibitions, it was interesting to find out that at least some of the visitors came specifically for the castle. In the case of Loevestein a reason might be that according to a Museum Monitor study, Loevestein is more than average well known.¹⁰⁰ Visitors might be attracted by the name and travel a longer distance. This could be a possible difference with castles that are not so well known, like Castle Cannenburch. The event I attended at Castle Cannenburch, the Medieval Feast, was larger in size. It was hosted to the left of the castle, on the castle grounds and required an entrance fee. Like Loevestein, not everyone was aware of the event beforehand. I encountered a couple around 35 years old, who had stumbled upon the castle on their cycling route and decided to stop by. They visited the event, but did not have plans to visit the castle. Of the visitors I spoke to, the majority specifically came to attend the event only, although around one third of the overall visitors of the event also paid a visit to the castle.¹⁰¹ One reason for not visiting the castle that day was that the visitors were mostly from that area. As locals, they had often visited the castle before and would therefore not visit the castle that day. This was for example the case of a mother (55) and daughter (22) from the area, as well as an elderly man (65+) who was visiting with his family.

Live interpretation and the Public

As mentioned before, a striking change in the last years has been the increase in live interpretation events. This, in combination with the supposed educational elements of live interpretation makes it an interesting event for further investigation. In this case the focus of the investigation lies with the public's opinion on and experience of live interpretation.

¹⁰⁰ Diependaal-Meijer, "Veranderende Vrijtijdsbesteding en Cultuurhistorisch erfgoed", 97.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rian Haarhuis, May 9, 2018.

Of those at Slot Loevestein that came to specifically visit the castle and not the event, all expressed interest in the live interpretation event. The older couple had the intention to further explore the live interpretation, however their time was limited and they had preferred to take their time in the castle. One of them has been to a live interpretation event before (at the fortress Bourtange) by chance and was of the opinion that it was a nice addition to the overall ambiance of a historic location. Their partner expressed less interest in live interpretation and did not specifically care about it. In contrast, the group of friends expressed great interest in the live interpretation event. They were originally not aware that it was a special event, and were planning on exploring the live interpretation more fully on another visit as they had visited the castle first. When they found out that it was not part of the permanent presentation however, they were very disappointed. They were wondering if there would be any similar live interpretation events in the near future and wanted to know where they might find any information about such events. Some of them had been to other events involving live interpretation, though this was often coincidental. What they enjoyed about live interpretation was its ability to make history more 'lively'. Additionally they believed it to be a very good addition to the presentation inside the castle, because in their opinion this presentation lacked some information about everyday life of people. The live interpretation was able to represent this however. Furthermore, they noted the possibility to ask questions or interact with the re-enactors, which they considered to be useful. In this way one would be able to get information about one's own interests, while also including an interactive aspect. Overall they considered live interpretation to be a fun and helpful way to get to know more about history.

Those that specifically paid a visit because of the event provided some interesting insights as well. The woman from the area usually comes by whenever there is an event. She enjoys the live interpretation and likes to just walk by and watch what is going on. However, she does not stay and listen to all the stories they tell, because she 'does not have the patience for that.' Instead, if she wants information, she would rather look it up herself at home. She therefore visits mostly for the historical ambience and not in order to learn anything. Yet she did believe that an event like this could be very informative for children and definitely had educational value. The parents of the family with young children shared this opinion somewhat. They did not attend the event for educational purposes, but they did believe it was a nice way of bringing the children into touch with history. They considered such an event to be a fun day out and especially enjoyed the additional activities in which they could participate.

The visitors of the event at Castle Cannenburch were overall more interested in the entertainment value of live interpretation and less in a possible educational element. This could be seen as an example of a previous point about the public not necessarily looking to be educated. Instead visitors might be looking for a leisure experience rather than knowledge gathering. The mother and daughter were for example mostly interested in the medieval market, and less in fighting demonstrations. A few of the visitors mentioned it was fun to see history brought to life like this, though some questioned its authenticity. The elderly man for example doubted if the knights' demonstrations reflected how a sword fight had actually been in such times. He had visited some other live interpretation events in the past and 'always enjoyed them for their historical atmosphere.' Likewise the cycle couple decided to stop by

the event out of curiosity and because it seemed ‘fun’. However another event that differs somewhat from the previous events, offers another perspective.

The opening of the Day of the Castle, a once yearly event where castles and estates open their doors to the public, took place at the Essenburgh this year. The Essenburgh is normally not open to the public, since it is exploited as a hotel. As part of this opening costumed storyteller Gottfrid van Eck introduced the public to the history of the castle and its first residents. His form of storytelling consisted of playing a historical character that interacted with the public by asking them questions and directly addressing them. Through this storytelling he provided the public with information about the castle, the residents and the historical context. Additionally, throughout the day guided tours through the castle took place. Gottfrid did was not part of this guided tour, but provided an introduction to two of the three tours through the castle (in a similar manner as his performance in the official opening) and one time a short performance afterwards. Besides these tours there were also other activities taking place around the castle, for example a small medieval crafts themed market in front of the castle and a variety of children’s games on the grounds located near the restaurant. Finally an author gave readings of a story that was written for this day.

As part of another study, questionnaires were handed out to the public. Although these were too few to provide any statistical data, the comments left on the open question about the visitor’s experience in addition to (informal) conversations reveal some insights. What stands out is that some visitors described ‘[learning about the] history of this castle’, ‘history of the inhabitants’, ‘the story about the history’ and ‘the information provided’ as their most positive experience. Additionally many referred to the guided tour as their most positive experience. This means there is public interest in information and reveals some educational needs of the public. The storytelling by Gottfrid was popular as well, since many noted ‘storytelling’, ‘the stories’, ‘the storyteller’ and ‘the part of Gottfrid’, as their most positive or ‘fun’ experience. This was also mentioned in conversation. Someone for example was of the opinion that the costumed storyteller made history more ‘lively’ and was able to ‘paint a good picture’ of history. Similarly someone else enjoyed the storytelling, because it made history ‘more accessible’ and the information would ‘linger’ more. Not everyone shared this opinion however. One woman preferred the guided tour through the castle since it provided ‘truthful’ information. She had enjoyed the storyteller, but she favored more ‘factual’ information and considered the stories of the storyteller not to be entirely true. Finally some visitors also enjoyed the ‘people in costume’ and medieval market in front of the castle. They considered it to add to the overall ambience. The importance of a historical ambience was reflected by other comments as well. Some responses to what could be improved explicitly mentioned the music that was played inside. They considered this to be ‘too contemporary’ and in their opinion this did not suit the castle and the general ambience.

At these different events, I encountered mostly positive opinions on live interpretation. Even where ‘more factual’ information was preferred, the live interpretation itself was described as enjoyable. Many are of the opinion that live interpretation is able to bring history to life, or make it livelier. The interactive aspect was pointed out as well, which was furthermore considered to aid its educational value. Live interpretation was also considered to aid in the shaping of a historical ambience, which seems to have been important to visitors as

well. At some events the public seemed to be interested more in entertainment and less in an educational experience, while at the other the information provided was much appreciated.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that especially in the case of built or monumental heritage, a curatorial approach focused on conservation has been favored. However, there have been certain changes in the heritage sector, which have not left castle heritage practices unaffected. Not only has there been an increase in overall events, this change in practice is also reflected by their change in content and overall frequency. Although exhibitions, concerts and lectures are still part of many castles' programs, a striking change has been the growing number of live interpretation events and fairs and markets. These events are no longer of an incidental nature, but have in some cases become annual events and part of many castles' regular program. The research into why these events were hosted revealed income and attracting visitors to be the most common motivations. There were additional goals however, like for example contributing to the liveliness of the castle. This view stands in strong contrast with the curatorial approach in which conservation is the main goal. Conservation was not completely overlooked however, as it was still often considered in regards to practical restrictions of these events.

In some cases the connection between the castle and the theme or type of an event was not considered to be of great importance. In this sense the critique that this new approach has led to a certain commodification, in which authenticity is sacrificed for entertainment can be understood. However this approach has proven successful in attracting visitors and might therefore be a helpful approach for financially struggling sites. Especially for lesser-known castles that depend more on return visits, events might be a useful tool to achieve this, as even in the case of well-known castles visitors are increasingly attracted by events. Furthermore, by aiming for different demographics, a more diverse public is able to come into contact with heritage and history, especially in the case of live interpretation. Although some visitors enjoy the entertainment aspect of live interpretation, many considered it as a useful tool to communicate information. Overall live interpretation was attributed with bringing history to life and aiding in creating a historical ambience. The interactive aspect was also appreciated by some visitors, as were possibilities to participate in events.

Overall recent changes in approaches to castle heritage show this sector is not necessarily as static or fossilized as has been suggested. Although there are still quite some castles where only one type of event is hosted, the successful changes in approach might inspire others to explore different approaches as well. Further research into the motivations of these castles might aid in revealing different and contrasting opinions. In addition the question remains to what extent these changes in approach are influenced by societal changes and trends as a whole. Finally it would be interesting to find out in what other ways castles have implemented an experiential approach, for example by making use of new technological developments. In light of ever changing heritage approaches, even castle heritage might eventually transcend the static label completely.

Appendix: Castle Cannenburch – The Medieval Feast





Slot Loevestein – ‘Grenzeloos Loevestein’







De Essenburgh – ‘Dag van het Kasteel’





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