

---

# Archives and volunteers, a burden or a chance?!

Peer Boselie\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>City and region archive Sittard-Geleen – Netherlands

## Abstract

*In the 21th century the archives have been really opened tot he public. The internet was not only a beautiful tool to scan en save many millions of documents, but also ‘democratized’ historic sources. An enormeous amount of historic documents were more and more available, ánd became more and more context. An dit were not only professional researchers who did the research. More and more ‘amateurs’ began to interact, and with more and more success. History is now very popular, in litterature, on television, in every part of society. And many non-professional historians have done great work in the historic field, all thanks to digitization!*

*In 2009 a huge project started in the city of Sittard in the Netherlands: AEZEL (Archives for heritage of properties and communities in the South of the Netherlands) or Limburg TimeMachine. In this project the archives and volunteers started working together with ons goal: to make áll cadastral and genealogical data accessible and connected to eachother. The information is visualized in an accessible and authentic way and made available to a large audience. Every historical fact is tracable to the original (scan of the) document*

*By making use of a ‘collective’ of participants (mainly archives and historical societies) and by using ‘community-sourcing’ facilitated by the archives rather than using crowdsourcing some 200 volunteers are connected in a durable way.*

*They invested in the last 13 years well over 200.000 hours of work: scanning, transcribing, vectorizing, connecting etcetera. What started in one city: Sittard, has now spread over more than 70 cities and villages in the province of Limburg.*

*In 2017, a genealogical database of all the Limburgers from 1560 tot ca 1950 was coupled tot he already available cadastral data. A foundation LGGI (Limburg Genealogical and Historical Institution) takes care of the connected website, that is online since october 2020: AEZEL.EU, almost completely in four languages: English, French, German and Dutch. Almost everything again done by volunteers...*

*The volunteers are very varied. Scientists, housewives, retired people, but also many people with a great distance to the job market, due to e.g. healthproblems, long term unemployment, autism or other reasons. More than once, volunteers get a new job after having worked with us for some time, but if not; they found new perspectives ánd helped a beautiful project! Is it always ‘Hosannah’? No, volunteers, can also be demanding, do not cost much money, but cost time and communication. Sometimes they can be ‘difficult’, but is the academic world always easy?*

---

\*Speaker

*In the (powerpoint or live on screen)lecture drs Peer Boselie, city-archivist of Sittard-Geleen and co-initiator of AEZEL, will give some insight in how the project began and expanded to what it is now, a fast-responding interactive website with millions and millions of facts, alltogether giving a nice view in Limburgs interesting history.*

**Keywords:** volunteers, historical 'big, data', community, sourcing, democratization of research