

The road to creating this digital audio archive was rewarding, but not easy. We think it's important to share this learning process with you and pass on the knowledge to like-minded organisations, initiatives and people interested in creating similar online archives. We hope it comes in handy someday. Enjoy.

A deep dive into our archive process

1. We started out with a few questions. What is relevant for us to archive? What do we actually want to archive?
2. Due to our well-known no-photo policy, we had very little visual material. So we decided to take a different direction, and not lean on visual materials at all. We turned to De School's own server, which contained hundreds of recordings, representing almost all of our club nights. These had never been published. And what's more, they perfectly captured the memories we wanted to cherish.
3. From there, we started drafting a concept for this archive. What form would it take? Our idea: create a new, digital website built specifically for these recordings. A platform where people can wander around in the digital world, where they can relive memories from the DS dancefloor. And where they can experience nights that they could not be part of.
4. We also started seeking funding. The project, as we had it in mind, would be extremely costly. The process is long and intensive; it requires months and months of work on all ends. Costs included staff, website development, design, archiving and editing, publicity, etc. It took time and research to find the right partners, who saw, like we did, the enormous value in archiving club culture. And we found them!
5. We set up conversations with a few partners, and secured the generous support of Amsterdam's Stadsarchief and Podiumkunst.net. Both institutions value the importance of archiving – it is actually the core value of what they do. We are extremely grateful for their help and interest in our project along the way. This first round of funding was the official green light to start our project.
6. We hired an interactive web developer (Joel Galvez), alongside a design studio (Atelier Brenda), who translated De School's existing visual identity into a digital and more playful, interactive design. Besides this, we appointed one person to be responsible for the full recording archive. An in-house team member led the project and was responsible for the concept and (art) direction of this archive. It was important for us that the identity of De School was honored, while making room for new ideas and expressions. An archive should be a living, changing space, not an homage.
7. The interactive web developer first created a technical framework for the website, focusing on user navigation and how we wanted people to move through the website. We wanted to replicate the feeling of wandering around De School, while maintaining clarity to prevent the archive from becoming overwhelming.
8. Music licensing presented a challenge. Initially, we planned to host the sets ourselves, which would require handling the music licensing and uploading all mp3's onto our server. However, we concluded that this was too complicated and costly. We don't have that experience, nor did we want to reinvent the wheel. After conversations with potential audio partners, we decided to collaborate with MixCloud, who offered to handle all music licensing for us and host their player on our website through a pop-up widget.

9. Meanwhile, we were sifting through our server, which was full of raw recordings. Most of those were most times 9-14 hours long. We created a Google Sheet with tabs for each year, detailing all the artist recordings with extensive metadata. This metadata included: Year, Month, Day, Day of the week, Artist, Room, Set-time, Event, Live-set/b2b/All Night, Contact, and Notes.
10. Once the above was complete, we began collecting contact details from artists to seek permission to upload their sets. This was a crucial step. We created a separate email address to collect this data so we could reach out and receive emails in a dedicated inbox. Then, we sent a collective email explaining the concept and attached a Google Form for artists to provide their permission, or of course, decline. In this email artists could fill in:
 - Their email (so we can reach out personally in the future)
 - Their artist name
 - A special memory of their sets (preferably per night, but most artists did a general quote)
 - Permission for their set(s)
 - Permission for a specific sets only (they could name which ones)
 - No permission for their set(s)
11. We then handed over the website framework to the design studio. After briefing them thoroughly, we held a follow-up call with all team members to ensure everyone was on the same page and to discuss timelines.
12. When artists replied to our Google Form, we marked them as “approved” in our sheets. This approach ensured we knew which sets to cut.
13. Meanwhile, our interactive web developer prepared our back-end/database (CMS) for us to start adding the approved sets. This was an ongoing process until the end of May. One person led this process, but towards the end of the project, more people started helping out due to the enormous workload.
14. We asked two people for help with cutting the raw full-length recordings, and our project lead took on some extra work as we didn’t have the resources to onboard extra people. We divided the years among three people, established a workflow, and began the process. It took us nearly four months; we had heavily underestimated the pressure and difficulty of this because:
 - We had to manually listen and figure out where sets began and ended.
 - There was inconsistent archiving of timetables over the years due to different people being involved in the processes, leading to missing or incorrect information. This makes sense, because structures and other things change a lot over years, and with De School existing for 8 years, these things are only normal. Luckily, we were able to trace a lot of data from Facebook, Resident Advisor and artist Instagram accounts, and sometimes we asked artists themselves to help us out with their set times.

- Some recordings were saved in WAV format, which made the process very difficult as it required us to manually edit and bind together different pieces of the (set) puzzle.
15. Another team member uploaded all the cut and approved sets to our private MixCloud page. This person also managed the main harddrive containing all the approved sets, and oversaw the project.
 16. We finished the design process by the end of February 2024, then started building the website. The website was ready by the end of April after many rounds of feedback between the archive team lead, design and development. Then we worked on finalizing: double-checking and triple-testing all data.
 17. Reminding all artists over these past months to fill in the Google Form before the deadlines took a lot of time. We used bulk emails to keep those who responded updated about our launch.
 18. From late April to mid-May, we wrote press releases and this manual, finalized the marketing and communications plan, created social media assets, and more.
 19. For the offline poster campaign, we asked CenterCom and Flyerman to put up posters around Amsterdam during the teaser and launch phase of the campaign. This was our way of giving a sneak peek of the project.
 20. Before launching in mid-May, we checked all our materials (website, press kit, manual, etc.) to ensure everything was uploaded and visible correctly. We had check-ins with our partners during these processes so everyone was aligned.
 21. Two weeks before the launch, we also asked a test group that was not directly involved in the project to go through the website and give us feedback . We asked them a number of pre-set questions so we could have a clear and organized overview of the user, technical and design experience. Once that was collected, we adjusted the final flaws.
 22. A day before the launch, we sent our press kit to our partners and important press contacts. They were already informed and had coordinated their marketing plans with ours.
 23. On launch day, we used social media and our press contacts to announce Het Archief. We also asked all participating artists and partners to share individual flyers. In the city we set up another offline campaign (both outdoors and inside cultural locations) through CenterCom and Flyerman.
 24. During the three weeks after the launch, we showcased parts of Het Archief on social media to reflect the span of the archive. We also kept an eye on incoming emails from artists in case there were errors in the recordings that we cut and uploaded. We were prepared for those, but also noted beforehand to artists to try to be flexible with small mistakes as these simply cost us too much time to change.
 25. After a month, we set up an automatic reply on our archive email stating that Het Archief now operates independently. Though we mentioned the email would be checked occasionally for tracking.
 26. One last tip: be sure to take into account that your hosting costs of the website will be continuous as long as the website stays online.

Time spent on all processes

- Funding research and finalization: 3 months
- Archival overview creation: 2 months
- Artist permissions: 5 months
- Raw full-length sets cutting: 4 months
- Web development: 4 months
- Design: 2-3 months
- Uploading to MixCloud: 2 full weeks

We worked on Het Archief from September 2023 until the end of May 2024. Most hours and funding were spent on staff, followed by the design and website.

Concurrent tasks

- Weekly check-in meetings. In between, there was ongoing contact between the staff members.
- Regular updates and involvement with all external partners.
- Regular updates to artists so they are up-to-date on the timeline.
- Regular design and website meetings. Most of the time online, sometimes in person.

Code of the website (open to use)

To help you out on a technical level, we would like to open up our code. It's free to use, and you can find it below and make it your own. Instructions:

1. Install Process Wire: <https://processwire.com/>
2. Go to: <https://processwire.com/modules/process-export-profile/>
3. Import the archive
4. Delete our data (the export includes all our data), start from scratch and include your own

When using this code, make sure that your website also works with a back-end for the database of your content. We have used Process Wire as mentioned above, which you can read more about [here](#). There are different types of CMS software, mostly depending on the developer you work with, or the needs your project has. [Craft](#) is, for example, another CMS used by many other organisations.

Another important note is to keep in mind that when running a website, there are always structural costs that will be used for the server your website is running on. For us, that's a couple of euros a month as the website is technically not very "heavy" (we don't have a lot of large files such as audio hosted on the server as these are hosted externally by MixCloud). Also make sure to buy your domain name in time if you are planning to launch a project. Our website uses a sub domain (hetarchieff.deschoolamsterdam.nl), as it's part of the official website domain (deschoolamsterdam.nl).

During the launch we had Cloudflare running as a protection for the big traffic we were expecting. More can be read about Cloudflare [here](#).

[\[DOWNLOAD CODE\]](#)

Final tips for creating your own archive

- Ask yourself why you archive and what you want to archive. It's important to know the material you have, so you also are aware of what to focus on.
- Seek funding. In The Netherlands and beyond, there is plenty of funding available for archiving projects. Research what is necessary for your project and find funding based on this. This can be private funding, but also public or commercial funding based on your concept.
- Create a realistic timeline based on your current archives and the difficulties you expect to run into, and create enough buffer time to be able to extend the timeline where necessary. Don't underestimate archiving!
- If you have the possibility to do so, start archiving from the beginning of your project and find a structure in it that everyone is aware of. Create workflows and servers (or use programs as Dropbox) to keep track of your archive. This will allow you to have a smoother process if you plan to make your archive open to the public and interactive, as we have done:
 - Keep track of contact details of artists and partners you've worked with.
 - Keep track of timetables.
 - keep track of nights that changed timetables or had technical problems.
 - Keep track of all the artwork that is used.
- Establish a universal standard for the metadata involved, and brief each person who joins the team on this standard so all your data is cohesive.
- Make sure to focus on getting an overview of your archive as soon as possible, so you know better how much staff to employ. We underestimated this because of the lack of available information at the start of the project.