



A brand new UNESCO World Heritage

Whoever walks in here travels back in time, to the end of the eighteenth century. Narrow corridors with creaking floorboards, small rooms, the smell of wooden beams. Almost everything in this house is as it was at that time. Only the ceiling looks very different than you would expect. About 250 years ago, the Frisian wool comber Eise Eisinga lived here, who, during his lifetime, became internationally known as the builder of a special 'celestial plane'.

Thirteenth World Heritage Site of the Netherlands

The sun hangs in the middle, surrounded by the planets known at that time: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The distances between the planets are a thousand billion times smaller than in reality, but they rotate at their actual speed around the sun – and the moon moves around the earth in 27.32 days. All thanks to a cleverly crafted system of handmade gears, powered by a single pendulum clock.

The Eise Eisinga Planetarium attracts around sixty thousand visitors annually. That number could double in the near future, according to director Adrie Warmenhoven. Under his leadership, the planetarium received the title 'Royal' and the story of Eisinga was included in the Canon of the Netherlands. After two major expansions in 2008 and 2016, he has one more wish: to inscribe the planetarium on the UNESCO World Heritage List. And that wish has now come true. On September 19, 2023, the Eise Eisinga Planetarium was designated as the thirteenth World Heritage Site in the Netherlands.

How did the Eise Eisinga Planetarium become a World Heritage Site?

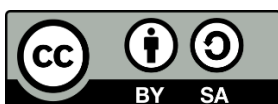
The idea for the nomination arose during a board meeting in 2003, in which Jenny Schoute-Dirkx wondered aloud whether the status would be suitable for the planetarium. No one knew what the application entailed. Soon, it became clear that the procedure was quite complex. The Dutch government no longer wrote the applications for World Heritage status itself, as was previously the case. Instead, municipalities and provinces could make proposals. Hundreds of locations showed interest, and dozens actually applied. Among them was the Eise Eisinga Planetarium.

In 2010, the government presented a preliminary list of nine candidate heritage sites. 'The planetarium is exceptional on a global scale because of the way this phenomenon illustrates the egalitarian streak in Dutch society: an amateur scientist creating a fantastic scientific construct that withstands the centuries,' the report stated.

Heaven and earth move

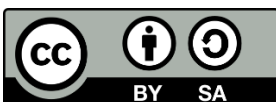
However, the application did not yet clearly explain why Eisinga's celestial plane met the criteria for World Heritage. Furthermore, the time in which Eisinga lived and the relevance of his work were insufficiently elaborated. 'The report confirmed a suspicion that had long existed with us: that considerably more research was needed,' says Warmenhoven. (You can read more about this research in National Geographic Magazine 09-2023.)

The final dossier for the planetarium's application consists of over 550 pages and is titled: Heaven and Earth Move. That is what Eise Eisinga did in his planetarium, and it is also an apt description of what has happened in Franeker over the past twenty years. Would Warmenhoven have started the procedure in 2003 if he knew then what it meant to apply for World Heritage status? He hesitates: 'It was an enormous amount of work. On the other hand, look at what it has brought us.' And the brand-new World Heritage status is a crowning achievement of their hard work.



DISCLAIMER - This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.





DISCLAIMER - This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

