

International Advisory Board Rotterdam

Dutch Experts Content/executive



Those present:

Carolien Gehrels	European Director Big Urban Clients at ARCADIS, former Amsterdam councillor for Economic affairs, Art and Culture
Friso Wijnen	Head Communications Dutch EU Presidency 2016, MT member of the board for Communication at the Ministry of Finance
Jan Oosterman	Consultant on leisure economy and spatial development for governments and the market

Robert Marijnissen	Member of RRKC (Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur, the Rotterdam Council for Arts and Culture), City Ambassador at the City Embassy Berlin (a city embassy being the hub where the exchange of knowledge about the city in transition takes place), formerly Research and Design of Creative Industries Policies at the University of Amsterdam
Roelof Bleker	Chair of the Waterschap Rivierenland water board, former councillor for Urban Development and Culture for the city of Enschede
Sander de Jongh	Senior strategist of Rotterdam Partners, IABx project leader
Willem Sulsters	Chairman of the day, member of RRKC, Managing director WSA Urban Revelopment
Rento Zoutman	RRKC Director/secretary
Reinier Gerritsen	Policy adviser to RRKC, report

1. General picture of Rotterdam in 2017

The picture of the city can be characterized as having a number of distinct features. In the first place, there are many knowledge institutes, the medical cluster in the centre of town being the most conspicuous. The economic clusters (for example those involving food, medical science and the port and industrial complex) define the city. Thanks to the presence of these sectors, there is innovation in numerous fields.

Secondly, one experiences a huge amount of physical and mental freedom and space in Rotterdam. The river and the docks contribute to this. The city is never 'finished' as it were, as it is in a permanent state of flux and (individual) ideas can be developed and implemented here. This adds to the attractiveness of the city.

Thirdly, the city has the image of a rough city, partly because of the presence of the port. To a large extent, this is because of the residents and their character. Moreover, the composition of the population has for years been remarkably international and diverse.

This has to do with the fourth characteristic of the city: 'struggle'. Rotterdam is a city of extremes, where on the one hand a sizeable percentage of people (one fifth) live below the poverty line, where deficient language skills are a major problem and a significant number of children go to school without having had breakfast. On the other hand, Rotterdam is the city of the huge investments and construction projects, for example the Markthal (Market Hall) and the De Rotterdam. The redevelopment of the city centre has led to a greater number of high quality catering establishments. Many developments in the city are managed top-down, even though in the past few years, residents have seemed to be getting a bigger say. The cultural offerings of established institutions do not reach large parts of the population; so arguably there is a *cultural* struggle as well. These contrasts may explain why people experience Rotterdam as 'fragmented'. However, the city is also called inclusive: various social groups, people from all ranks and stations are part of the mix.

2. Picture of the Rotterdam culture sector in 2017

All disciplines of art are represented in the cultural sector in Rotterdam; there is a good orchestra, an internationally renowned film festival and big exhibitions can be organized in the Kunsthall and in museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. The establishment of Theater Rotterdam is interesting, because many creators with an international network are connected to it. Following the example of other developments in the city, cultural institutions have mostly been imposed by the city authorities or from the top down (for example during the post-war reconstruction period and in the 1980s). However, the image of Rotterdam as a city of culture has been shaped by individuals and artists. These days too, the real *buzz* is found at another level, at a grass roots level: the city is coloured by the many initiatives arising from below, which often get off the ground without any subsidies. That makes the city vibrant and attractive. The city has acquired a rich cultural climate by now. The visitor numbers for the museums show that Rotterdam is not doing too bad, for a city of its size. Yet, the architecture of the city is presumably the most important reason for people to visit.

3. Rotterdam's potential

The physical and mental space in Rotterdam can be used to even more advantage. In this respect, the city can get more out of the river and its banks and the docks. The fragmented character can be offset by energizing the banks and programming events on them. The creative use of public space is still hampered by regulation too much. The local authorities could facilitate that better than they do now. There are also opportunities in the development of Rotterdam as a knowledge city and in combination with art and culture. The age group that merits most attention here is the group of 18- to 28-year-olds, as Rotterdam is a young city, particularly South Rotterdam. These are the (potential) residents of the city, the entrepreneurs of the future and potential culture public to boot. Aiming at this group is likely to be successful, as is aiming at elderly people, although the peak of the ageing trend has already heaved into view.

In the wider context of big cities in and around the Randstad conurbation, much more is possible on a strategic level in relation to attracting international visitors; for example, through a joint strategy for the museums. The infrastructure is already in place and travel connections between the various big cities are getting better and faster. The polycentric unit of bigger cities with diverse profiles provides opportunities for Rotterdam as a cultural destination. This extends to areas such as the (knowledge) economy, the creative industry etc.

4. Rotterdam's cultural potential

Blockbuster exhibitions only attract limited numbers of international visitors percentage wise, although they are important for the visitor stream from the region and the rest of the Netherlands. The Rotterdam strategy for culture must be based on better profiling with the other big cities, as part of a greater unit, albeit with its own appealing characteristics. Here too, the use of the river and its banks looks promising: a cultural programme can also be incorporated in the plans for Feyenoord City. With respect to the further profiling of Rotterdam art and culture, the specific Rotterdam urban culture (the multicultural profile) should be given pride of place: the creators and the production of culture make the city and also the cultural offerings authentic.

5. Recommendations for the process, intended for the sounding board

group

To prepare for the advice from the International Advisory Board, the Dutch Expert group presents the following matters that require attention to the sounding board group:

1. Firstly, the question put to the IAB needs to be defined with more precision. It is not very clear now what is meant by 'put more firmly on the map'. The mandate concerns itself with the image of the city, the appeal to various target groups (visitors, residents, companies) and strengthening the cultural climate. However, the results may be very different for the various target groups. More focus is needed, also to get the members of the IAB *in the right mode*.
2. If the IAB is going to look at the city's appeal to international visitors, then the experiences of that visitor must be considered first and foremost. As yet, there are no or insufficient data available about that. The data that are available are obsolete. Therefore, in the short term there needs to be an investment in updating the visitor data.
3. Use new (social) media in this update round. They have not been included in the preparatory document, the analysis by Wim Pijbes. Social media are the tool par excellence for people to communicate and share their experiences. Involving social media in an investigation into the experiences of visitors will yield a great deal of quantitative information.
4. From now on, try to connect with a younger public and the NOW. When the IAB was set up, the age group of under 30s was ignored. It is exactly this group that can be valuable for advice based on *experiences* and about the attractiveness of a city or of the cultural offerings for young people. Therefore appoint a younger member to the IAB, who knows new media and is about 25 years old; for example a student.
5. Try and make sure that the IAB advice for the next four years is embedded properly from an administrative point of view. The new Municipal Executive must commit itself to the recommendations in the advice. The trajectory should be aimed at that already now. In this way, the broader added value of art and culture will be central. If that added value can be demonstrated, the Municipal Executive can use this to formulate a strategy with clear objectives and investments.

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