

# International Advisory Board Rotterdam

## Working Group Mid-Range



### Participants:

TENT, Anke Bangma  
MAAS, Bernadette Stokvis  
Scapino Rotterdam, Erik Pals  
Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, Frits Loomeijer  
WORM, Hajo Doorn

Theater Walhalla, Harry Jan Bus  
DoelenEnsemble, Maarten van Veen  
Music Matters, Marianne van de Velde  
SKAR, Olof van de Wal  
Museum Rotterdam, Paul van de Laar  
Motel Mozaique Festival, Silvie Dees  
Witte de With, Yoeri Meessen

## Introduction

In the text below, the Mid-range workgroup reflects on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of Rotterdam's arts and culture by Wim Pijbes. The workgroup took notice of this analysis and notes that where his analysis does indeed meet the criteria set out in the assignment, his exploration of the cultural field is still quite unilateral and requires further addition. His input is fairly credible as a marketing text, but fails short as a possible ground for cultural policies for the city of Rotterdam. Considering the setup of the IAB-process and the expected spin-off on policy making, it is important to note this.

The workgroup acknowledges several principals from Pijbes' analysis and makes several suggestions for further detailing and exploration of the analysis.

## Suggestions for analysis by Wim Pijbes

### *Methodology*

To come to an analysis of which aspects of our art and culture are recognised by international media, Pijbes made use of a selection of news coverage from a number of leading international newspapers and publications. The workgroup stresses that the selection of these media also determines the selection of a certain audience: that of the highly educated, older newspaper reader. Research into online media could have presented an entirely different image regarding, for example, the international appeal of Rotterdam to a younger audience, both nationally and internationally. This shows that the research has been supply driven, whilst it could also be interesting to analyse how a visitor moves within the city. The media research has therefore been too limited.

The method of choice for this analysis can be defined as 'mainly quantitative'. Amongst others, the exploration mainly focusses on large cultural events and audience favourites that attract large crowds to Rotterdam or its institutions. With the assignment Pijbes had in mind this approach is understandable, but it does not fully take the cultural framework into consideration that some would say is essential for an attractive city. The quality of Rotterdam's cultural sector should therefore form the starting point of an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, whereas touristic attractiveness should be seen as a by-product of a durably cultivated cultural sector of Rotterdam. It is here where development is taking place right now; attention to activities unfolding at grass root-level and the mid-section in a multicultural city seems to lack completely from the analysis. Precisely these represent the strength of Rotterdam.

### *Cultural hotspot or 'just' an interesting city?*

An elementary aspect missing from the analysis is choosing what type of cultural hotspot Rotterdam should (aspire to) be. Daily mass tourism such as in Barcelona or Amsterdam, is not desirable for

Rotterdam.

From a cultural-touristic perspective, two types of cities can be defined: cities with a clearly recognizable cultural profile (such as London, Rome, Edinburgh, Bilbao) and cities which attract a wider range of visitors based on a more general appeal. This last category has a less clearly defined cultural profile, but share a number of common characteristics: reason to travel, a lively inner city with arts and culture and a high standard of hospitality, ample hotels and a large museum. Rotterdam falls into this last category. Reason to travel to Rotterdam in many cases is its architecture. The other conditions form the final push for visitors deciding to come to Rotterdam: these make Rotterdam 'an interesting city.'

If (from a marketing perspective) a choice should be made for a certain profile, then this should correspond with that of the city. In this we acknowledge Pijbes' comment that city branding revolves around authenticity. Which elements of Rotterdam's profile should be considered essential in this case? What makes Rotterdam an interesting city? First of all, the city is never 'finished'. Refurbishment and renewing never comes to an end, even in the most densely built areas. There appears to be enough space for new developments, without damaging the history and identity of the city. The both physical and mental space within Rotterdam is seen to be an important element. It is exactly this what makes Rotterdam an interesting city.

Secondly, Rotterdam is a 'port of arrival'; not just of goods, but also of people. Rotterdam has to be endeavoured. Visitors (and inhabitants) experience a certain degree of rawness to get to their destination. This appeals to many people and should be maintained. Berlin for example makes much better use of its position as port of arrival: they've opened their doors for Turkish artists. The ports are in themselves already interesting (Katendrecht, Merwe-Vierhaven), but the embankments are as yet underused.

The workgroup recognised the potential of the ports and river pointed out by Pijbes in his analysis. The port continues to be of major economic importance to the city, but its impact is lost in the physical, social and cultural systems. The image and effluence belonging to the port, is part of the character or DNA of the city and should apply to the city's profile. It is not necessary to 'over-landscape' these areas of the city. The existing gap between the city and the water is justly commented upon in the analysis. For decades, ideas about how to make use of the water and embankments have been formed, but with very little success. The connection between port, river and arts & culture is something that should now be further realized.

Accessibility of all areas within the city is essential to visitors. Clustering can enhance the cultural profile of the separate areas (around the river and port, for example). By doing so, locations transform into *destinations*. Clustering has already been executed around the Museumpark, Katendrecht, Witte de With-quarter and most recently, Merwe-Vierhaven. These developments would benefit from more support.

#### *Cultural profile, opportunities*

The culture of Rotterdam is not easily defined; one cannot identify one single discipline which puts its mark on the city. With ample theatres, stages, visual arts, etcetera, the cultural infrastructure is well in place. A regularly occurring issue is the discussion about the necessity of a large concert hall for pop music. There are many festivals catering to each taste, of varying qualities.

It is evident that icons and top of the bill exhibits contribute to an increase in visitors. However, this elite is not present in Rotterdam. There is no internationally acclaimed organisation or even a single institution that defines Rotterdam. The cultural icons that Pijbes focusses on are not strong enough. The IFFR is identified as an event with growth potential, whilst the festival itself does not play a role of major importance within the field of art house films. Plus, there are not enough seats and screens

available in Rotterdam to realise real expansion. The Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra is described as being a major attraction of the city. It is indeed a top of the bill orchestra, however, it is not a reason to visit for international visitors.

Rotterdam is therefore not a city of international icons, but of a *plural cultural profile*. The strength of this profile lies within this plurality. It is an integral part of the profile, which should be further examined and made better use of through marketing.

Furthermore, the *cultural production* in Rotterdam is put in the spotlight. We want to showcase what is being made here, not so much that which has been here. Rotterdam wants to emphasize the future, the contemporary, and not place its focus on history. For example, Rotterdam is a leading city in contemporary music. Rotterdam is dynamic, lively and diverse. Producers create movement and dynamics.

In this context, Rotterdam's youth culture clearly stands out: a lot is happening in the areas of dance and hip hop. Youth culture tends to develop outside the reach of subsidized arts and culture. The large national and maybe even international appeal of developments in youth culture in Rotterdam is largely overlooked in the analysis by Pijbes.

A critical majority is of course required for a successful evolution of 'the cultural framework'. 2016/2017 are identified as a turning point in the analysis; there is now a sufficient majority: "Further development of the city of Rotterdam should be based on its strong brands." The workgroup acknowledges the finding that Rotterdam has enough cultural capital. However, the recommendations mainly focus on the city's icons and a handful of elite exhibitions, whereas strengths and creativity can be found on a much more local level. The process should be as follows: first, realise a prosperous cultural climate that contributes to the wellbeing of residents. This will in turn contribute to a better image of the city for visitors from outside. This shift is already happening: Rotterdam's residents are increasingly enthusiastic about their city and this enthusiasm in turn leads to a new national and international appreciation for the city. It is therefore of importance to support those initiatives that have already proven to be successful.

#### *Threats to the Rotterdam cultural sector*

Pijbes notices that from 1985 onwards, there has been an increase in new cultural institutions. This finding is correct. He also points out that due to this, the cultural infrastructure of Rotterdam is relatively young and vulnerable. A troublesome issue in this is how to further consolidate the economic foundation of small and medium sized organisations. For example, what is required to sell more art?

The large offering of festivals has played a large part in the recognition of Rotterdam, but could do with renewal. There is not much development in the sense of variety, offering too much 'middle of the road' festivals. The workgroup acknowledges the finding that Rotterdam does not focus enough. With too much ease we choose a new theme each year and brand ourselves in a new way. Here too the program's quality should be the focus point, not the amount of visitors generated.

The relationship between the cultural sector and patrons might seem promising, but is considered quite weak at the moment. Cultural organisations look for patronage from the same pool and as yet approach their patrons too individually. Restructuring funding and improving how cultural organisations plan their efforts, can contribute to a stronger relationship with patrons. As we know from research, business benefits from a lively inner city because employees place a high value on the quality of their surroundings and living environment. Work tends to follow living.

## Recommendations Mid-range

The above comments lead to the following recommendations:

- The cultural framework centre stage: touristic attractiveness is a result of sustainable, qualitative cultural development. The lobby for more funding and a higher visibility of the Rotterdam cultural sector should, on an urban level, be taken on with a more central approach towards the central government. The advice given by the International Advisory Board can contribute to this.
- There is a sense of trust in the new grassroots developments: there are plenty new producers. Youth culture should be facilitated more. This can be accomplished with limited means. For example, create Europe's largest graffiti wall in Rotterdam. In relationship to youth culture development, the city could be a lot livelier at night time.
- Architecture takes up a central position in the cultural profile, which is fine. The position of architecture in the city is an obvious one: It is the most important reason to travel to Rotterdam for visitors from abroad. The city does possess a number of cultural icons, but these are not strong enough. The lack of an elite cultural institution in the field of architecture is therefore perceived as a shortcoming.
- The city is never finished: keep it that way. The urban profile of Rotterdam is characterised by plenty of physical and mental space. It is in everyone's interest to keep this space in place. This does not mean that building can no longer take place, but it means that we should broaden our outlook on the city: we should warrant the city's attractiveness for a longer period of time. As Pijbes says in his analysis: the momentum is now. All we need to do is shift our point on the horizon.
- Recognize and invest in favourable urban conditions that mould the attractiveness of Rotterdam. Keep determining factors such as hospitality and accessibility of the city in mind, but also maintain matters of importance for the cultural sector such as affordable real estate and the advancement of producers.
- Further crystalize how to make use of embankments, the river and ports; a solid connection between the port, culture, urban planning and tourism is possible. However, ideas for conjoining these often run ashore. Maintaining the atmosphere and character (rawness) of the port is essential in achieving this. Rotterdam is not just a port of arrival for goods, but also of people. Make use of these newcomers' potential.
- Patronage and funding. A new structure for funding and improving the way in which cultural organisations take on their efforts can contribute to a stronger relationship with patrons. Rotterdam's cultural sector would benefit from a fund broker that understands the interests of patrons.

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