

International Advisory Board Rotterdam

Dutch Experts City Marketing Reflection Group



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The purpose of the Reflection Group is to reflect on the advice presented by Wim Pijbes and on the results from the work group, and to provide feedback from the perspective of city marketing.

Composition:

Conrad van Tiggelen (NBTC), Ruth Giebels (independent marketing adviser), Peter Kentie (Eindhoven 365), Frans van de Avert (Amsterdam Marketing), Björn Stenvers (Amsterdam

museums), Erik Braun (EUR), Zef Hemel (UvA, absent from the meeting)

Advisory roles:

Kim Heinen (Rotterdam Partners), Corinne Lampen (Municipality of Rotterdam), Sander de Iongh (Rotterdam Partners), Kitty Tang (Municipality of Rotterdam)

What is the question?

On 6 February 2017, the first meeting of the Dutch Experts 'City Marketing' Reflection Group took place in the context of the IABx Culture. At the beginning of the meeting, the question was raised what the essence is of the advice required: is this about the international cultural policy or is it simply about visitor numbers? Why does the city actually want to have an international cultural policy, what does the city want to achieve with it? What kind of public do you want to attract to Rotterdam? What are the biggest opportunities for Rotterdam city marketing and which part does culture play in it?

Harness the power of the DNA and tell the entire story!

Tell the entire story of the city. That means not only newcomers, raw and experimental (exciting grass roots initiatives), but also the story of the international port and the success that can be found in high-end architecture and top quality in the highest culture segment.

It was observed that city branding and city marketing are often confused in the advice from the work groups. Branding is primarily about the idea: what comes to mind when you think of Rotterdam? You want the public to think of something and that it is also realized (a promise). Ask yourself what you are as a city. What is your profile? You can't be everything to everyone.

Make choices. What are you going to put in the display window?

Abstract the 'Genius Loci' of the city, what is the magical pull of the city, its atmosphere that depends on the locale, its uniqueness?

One distinctive element is the rawness of Rotterdam. It is deeply ingrained in the city and makes Rotterdam exciting. The activities of the 'grass roots' make Rotterdam exciting and different in a cultural sense. The group is interesting for a limited target group with a limited international reach, but it has the potential to grow. The many grass roots initiatives strengthen the city's DNA and propagate it. Combine that element with a number of Rotterdam specific themes: Port, Water and Architecture. Water is to Rotterdam what the ring of canals is to Amsterdam

Create trust with a long-term strategy for the future

Decide on your strategy: do you want to increase an economic factor, or do you want to strengthen/enrich your DNA? One solution is to buy something (festival, exhibition, blockbuster

etc.); without any anchoring, however, any effect it may have will just drift away over time. Make sure that successes last.

The spin-off of activities can be bigger if they are focused on a long-term strategy and planning. Work on a long-term strategy, ideally for the next thirty years, in which the city works towards a higher level of performance, step-by-step, therefore organically. It all starts with an exciting calendar of events that fits a robust time line for urban planning to 2040 and a strongly developed geographical sense for centre building and densification on the basis of which parties within Rotterdam can start cooperating.

Take a clear position on the direction you are heading in. Set a clear course and decide which parties will be the driving force. Power often derives from the ability to set limits. Cooperating and working together to bring something to a higher level should happen on a voluntary basis. The cultural sector can join in and if it does not relish it, then so be it. Bear in mind that the sectors never agree with each other. If you take them into account too much, it will become one grey diffuse mass.

Be consistent and persevere!

Build your programme from the DNA and the visitors profile

City marketing concerns itself with attracting and binding the public. Branding and marketing are therefore closely interwoven. What sort of public do you want to attract? The international visitor is important, but do not forget the regional or national visitor.

Everyone can organize or hire a beautiful exhibition. That is not particularly difficult. However, this will not attract foreign visitors. That is the hardest part. For example: 5% of the people visiting the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam come from abroad. 50% of the people visiting Amsterdam are from the Netherlands. (Editor: check these numbers!)

Rotterdam's residents, national visitors and international visitors are all important for the cultural sector and the city:

- People from Rotterdam create the cultural offerings. Appreciate it and propagate it. That is the core of the Rotterdam DNA.
- International visitors contribute to creating a strong and attractive image abroad, which will have a positive effect on attracting international talent (students, employees) and companies. Relatively speaking, that contribution to image is more important than the contribution to spending.
- National visitors contribute to the critical mass. Largest group in numbers. Particularly important because of its economic value.

What are the reasons to travel for the target groups you want to attract? What are the expectations? Compare this with other profiles. Rotterdam is about the rawness and it is a breeding ground. Do not polish it. Maybe you do not want to invent another blockbuster, as Wim Pijbes recommends. In Rotterdam, things actually come into being. That is what makes the city unique.

Experiment: aim for the multitude of subcultures

Experimenting also includes Rotterdam as a laboratory for culture and architecture. Cherish the creative talent and let it experiment. The description of Rotterdam as innovative/raw remains an empty shell if you do not facilitate the basis.

Visitors do not come for architecture or culture alone, but for the experience. The contribution of the big cultural icons is marginal if it is just about huge visitor numbers. The big cultural icons are of course important for a specific target group of CEOs from the business world/port and for foreign executives/officials (governments). However, this does not translate to visitor numbers.

What strikes us in the analysis of Wim Pijbes is that the Boijmans museum did not benefit from the increasing number of visitors to or residents of the city. We should not jump to the conclusion that 'Boijmans is not worth a detour'. Rather, we should investigate why Boijmans has not grown along with the rest. One can think of several reasons for this. By charting these matters, an answer may be found to the question how the city can benefit more from the internationally strong collection of Boijmans and how Boijmans can benefit more from the city's appeal.

The RPhO and Boijmans do tell the story of Rotterdam. Thus, Boijmans tells the story of how the owners of the port had ideas about collecting art that was different from those of the Dutch national museums. The Boijmans is a museum with an international collection instead of a national one. It tells the story of Rotterdam as a city doing business with the rest of the world. Looking outward rather than looking inward. By telling it in this way, Boijmans does strengthen the DNA of an international city. The old does not have to be in the way of the new. It depends on how you integrate both elements.

The image of the culture sector is too diffuse at the moment. Currently, the art/culture searcher only sends out the message: 'Everything is amazing', and moreover people have the perception that interesting festivals are sold out all the time (Film Festival, North Sea Jazz). One point to pay attention to therefore is to communicate the availability of tickets clearly.

The biggest opportunities are seen in the analysis and the advice of the 'Grass roots'. Raw, experimental and new. That is what is distinctive. This group has a large network that you want to facilitate. The 'icons' and the 'Grass roots' should cooperate, there is the potential for innovation that makes Rotterdam exciting and different. This is possibly one of the most important conclusions and the basis for success to take a huge step towards lifting the entire cultural image of the city to a higher level.

Use tribes and tribal marketing. Look for the connections between the various small worlds within the grass roots. Recognize the contacts (national and international) of the grass roots and use them for the city.

Economically, it's also interesting to aim for the multitude of subcultures.. Subcultures thrive without networks or culture clubs. Subcultures meet each other. Facilitate the subcultures to make their products bigger.

Arrange the distribution of the products to the target groups. Create certain places as distribution hubs, and collaborate with them. For example, in Amsterdam the library is such a hub where museum elements come together and from which the cultural programme spreads like an oil spill.

Make sure it is embedded for a long time. It is important that a power block of culture is created that logically cooperates with other sectors.

City marketing as a connector

Rotterdam has the excitement of Berlin. The port and river are not being used and they offer opportunities. Architecture very much defines the image of Rotterdam and is the thread running through the city's developments. Architecture is about robustness, resilience. It contributes to

branding and image. The combination of port and architecture in Rotterdam is special.

It is essential to bear in mind that the decisions that led to Rotterdam having received a lot of attention in recent years as a city of architecture were actually taken in the previous century. Which infrastructural decisions are being taken now from which Rotterdam will reap the benefits 30 years from now?

Ensure cross selling. Culture has an economic importance: connect economy and culture. That connection creates the buzz in the city.

Rotterdam is the city of new arrivals. Also look into the elements that people come to Rotterdam have in common.

Preconditions

Focus in particular on providing the visitor with better information during his stay in Rotterdam. The vast majority of visitors come to a city virtually uninformed. This means there are opportunities in terms of providing information and hospitality. Hospitality is an important precondition, it has to be in good order. That requires attention. However, if we analyse that process in Rotterdam at this moment in time, that is not really the case. At any rate, the Rotterdam people are hospitable.

A number of suggestions:

- Deploy the best trained people in those places where there is the most contact with the visitor/public.
- Additionally, you can also improve elements of the city (wayfinding, hospitality etc.), this immediately makes the visitor experience more enjoyable.

Tips

- Focus internationally on a big international theme that returns a number of times per year, which reflects the DNA of the city and with which you can reach the media internationally (e.g., art – IFFR/Art Rotterdam in Jan/Feb – month of architecture June (and provide special programming during this month every year), port days (September). Create smart combinations where architecture and the port (both as locations) and both grass roots and high culture (both as content of programming) are like a red thread running right through it.
- The number of festivals, the “festivity”, is too high. It overshoots the mark.
- Do not forget your ‘locals’, validate yourself first. If you own people enjoy something, the rest will follow.
- People often go to a city without a clear idea.
- Facilitate the process.
- You have to learn to discover Rotterdam.
- Cherish your architectural creators.
- Graphical art and visual culture are also big in Rotterdam, so why isn't anything done with that?
- Also involve residents in this process.
- Also go beyond your city boundaries: look to the town of Schiedam, for example. That is where you can see the old, it complements Rotterdam beautifully.

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