

International Advisory Board Rotterdam

Appendix to Dutch Experts (content/executive)



A conversation with Benno Tempel, director of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (the Municipal Museum of The Hague), in the context of the IAB culture

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Profile of Rotterdam (cultural)

On an international level, Rotterdam has several irons in the fire. In addition to the IFFR (**I**nternational **F**ilm **F**estival **R**otterdam), the Kunsthal, Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Rotterdam

Philharmonic Orchestra, there are a number of classy galleries. Moreover, Theater Rotterdam (TR) is important. The creators involved with TR predominantly operate internationally. They are well connected to international networks and have established links with international festivals. In the context of the IAB, it is important to think not only about people visiting the city, but to cast our net wider: the Gemeentemuseum reaches far more visitors (around one million) with its exhibition of the Mondriaan collection in Brazil than in its own museum.

The importance and visibility of the grass roots initiatives and community art are touched upon in an IAB work group. However, grass roots initiatives do not attract an international public. After all, a city has to capitalize on its big brands. Still, it is a good idea in marketing to highlight the grass roots and to bank on the multifaceted cultural profile of the city.

Profile of Rotterdam (in a broader sense)

The city is remarkably *inclusive*. People from all walks of life can be seen on the streets or found sitting next to each other in a pub. The roughness that people associate with the appearance of the city is also visible in its population. On the other hand, there is too much control, there are too many rules.

Rotterdam is a university town, but the Erasmus University only has tenuous links with the city itself. It is a remote, dull university, and the students themselves are hardly visible in the city centre. As soon as they have graduated, students leave. The medical cluster in the centre is more visible in the city. It has already been mooted in an IAB work group that the target audience for the IAB should be the 18- to 28-year-olds. The city ought to include this group more, in particular the student group.

Museum sector

Here in the Netherlands, people are often fixated on *numbers*. Having said that, the numbers reached by the Rotterdam cultural sector are not bad at all for a city of its size. In general, Dutch museums are doing quite well. And Dutch museums are a big pull for foreign tourists. There are seven international museums in the Netherlands, two or three of which attract numerous foreign visitors. Blockbuster exhibitions are important to national or regional visitors, but the percentage of international visitors that is reached with blockbuster events is relatively small. Visitors from abroad tend to come for the permanent collections. In that respect, the profile of the collection in Boijmans is not very clear. That means it is difficult for Rotterdam to work on a more international culture public using the permanent collection in the Boijmans museum. The city could reflect on what could be added to the offerings by museums so as to appeal to more international visitors. Which parts of the collection complement the rest of what the Dutch museums have to offer? What kind of museum does the Netherlands need and can it be realized in Rotterdam? The city's history would suggest so.

Strategy

The attempts to draw in a wider international culture public should not be based on a city level, but on a nationwide strategy. How can we sell Dutch culture better? From that angle, it is better to see the big cities in the Netherlands as one polycentric entity, in which various distinctive characteristics can be observed. Put the Netherlands on the map as a collection of hot spot cities. The economic policy and that of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also that of NBTC Holland Marketing

should be aimed at that.

In a European context, there is a high density of museums of modern art. Relatively speaking, there are rather many museums in the Netherlands. The attraction of the Dutch museums is therefore not to be underestimated. Museums could be a flywheel for a city or for a chain of Dutch cities. Such a conglomeration offers several opportunities: the pressure on Amsterdam is too much after all, as the museums there can no longer cope with the droves of visitors. The museums in the other big cities are still capable of dealing with sizeable increases in visitor numbers, for example the Gemeentemuseum and Museum Boijmans.

Visitors

Another question is which kind of visitor is desirable or can be expected. Most people come because of architecture, not so much for the cultural offerings. A visit to a museum is a standard part of the average tourist's programme, almost irrespective of the occasion. It is a pity that architecture, the primary reason for the visit, no longer has an Institute in Rotterdam that can provide some explanation. The spending pattern of tourist varies widely from that of a conference-goer. In the final analysis, what matters is that visits to the city have an effect on small and medium-sized businesses. The Hague and Rotterdam are somewhat similar; at first sight, they seem to be slightly lacklustre cities (if you don't live there) They also have things in common with respect to gastronomical delights; there are many high-quality restaurants, and therefore interesting to visitors from Belgium, for example. Prerequisites of this nature will accommodate both visitors, companies and residents.

Finally, does an ageing population offer opportunities? The answer would be: "Well, only up to a point", as this trend is set to stop after 2021. The Gemeentemuseum has begun to look to the future. The imbalance that can be seen in society can also be seen as an opportunity. It would be interesting to include the 'have nots' in the Gemeentemuseum. Such a social approach would suit the museum. Dutch museums are much closer to their public than American ones are to theirs for example, as these are mainly guided by the whims of patrons and investors.

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