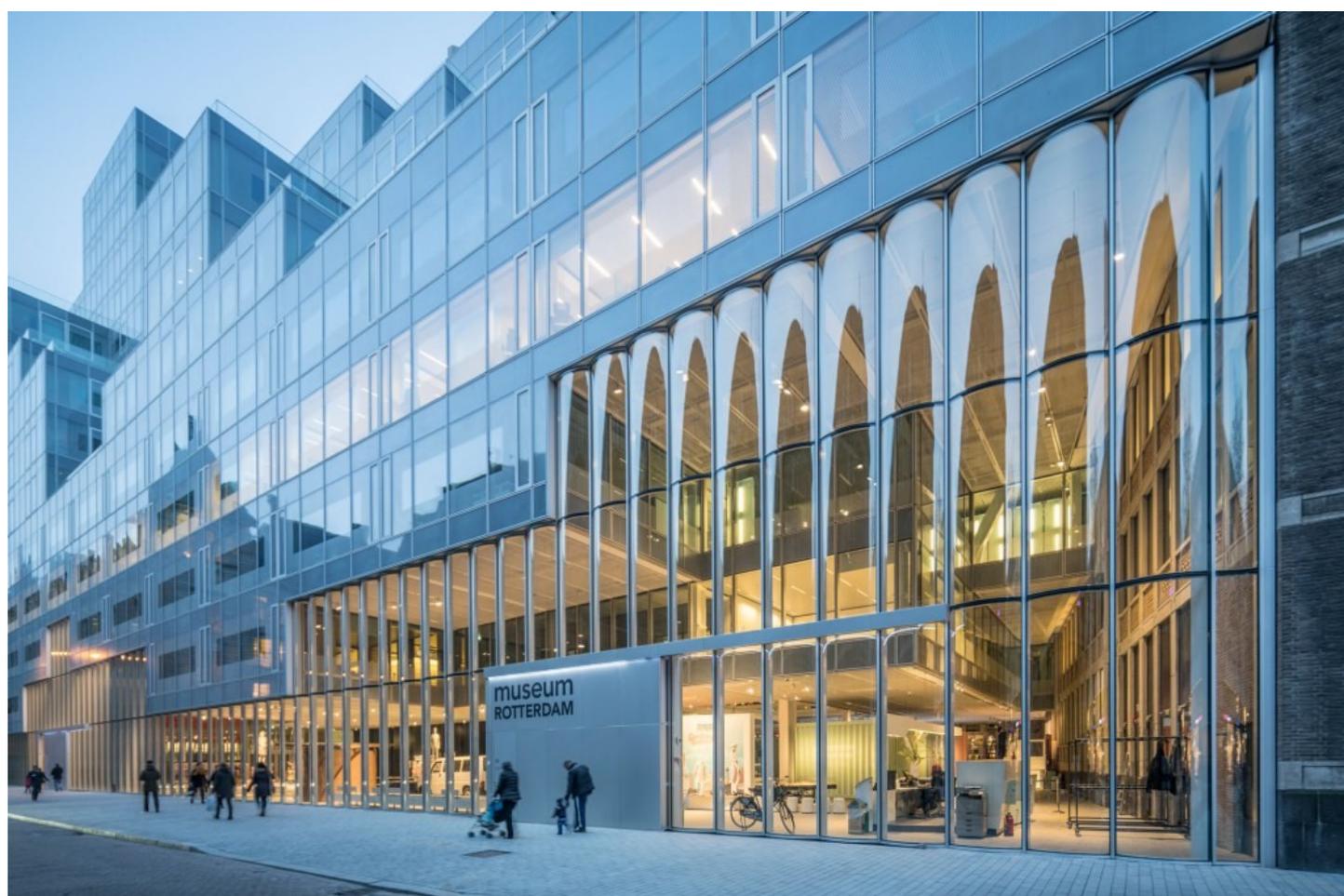


# International Advisory Board Rotterdam

## Working Group Architecture



### Participants:

AIR, Patrick van der Klooster

TU Eindhoven, Juliette Bekkering

OMA, David Gianotten

De Rotterdam Tours, Brenda Kamphuis

Kaan Architecten, Kees Kaan

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TU Delft, Machiel van Dorst

IABR, George Brugmans

Rotterdam Partners, Sander de Iongh

## Preamble

Unlike the other work groups, this work group consisted mainly of non-local players. For that reason, the work group paid less attention to the wider cultural offerings of Rotterdam, and did not wish to make sweeping statements about it. The work group focused primarily on the question how the potential of the architecture sector for the city of Rotterdam could be used to better advantage. Observing that 'Rotterdam is the City of Architecture' is like finding yourself in front of an open goal, but actually putting the ball in the back of the net is far from straightforward. It will not be down to the content, drive and entrepreneurship within the work group and the sector (in the broadest sense of the word). There is a great involvement with, and at the same time also care about the consolidation and potential expansion of the architecture brand in the medium and long term.

## The exploration by Wim Pijbes

The work group is critical about the [analysis \(https://iabrotterdam.wordpress.com/analysis-wim-pijbes/\)](https://iabrotterdam.wordpress.com/analysis-wim-pijbes/) by Wim Pijbes. At the same time, the work group endorses his intuitive recommendation that architecture, also in an international sense, is a unique selling point of Rotterdam.

## Question from Rotterdam Partners: Marketing

The work group interpreted the question of Rotterdam Partners as a marketing question. 'How can Rotterdam position itself better as a cultural hot spot, nationally and internationally, and thereby become an attractive tourist destination for people from outside Rotterdam and particularly from outside the Netherlands?'. This question leads to number of consequences according to the work group:

- If the city council really goes for 'Rotterdam is the City of Architecture', then commitment and determination are required to make implementation a success. 'Avoid' a hollow image. Work it!
- Position a clear core message or proposition, which is conveyed powerfully and consistently, with a clear choice and deployment for 'target group channels'. Present a business case in the conviction that this is a smart move. And they come with considerable investments. The message is based on what can actually be delivered.
- Use the image created and the landscape/mechanisms developed in the (recent) past that provide evidence for the slogan 'Rotterdam is the City of Architecture'. It goes without saying that the rethinking process and prioritizing is part and parcel of this, in order to make existing forces widely visible again and to develop new forces.

## Undercurrent and surface current ( see below)

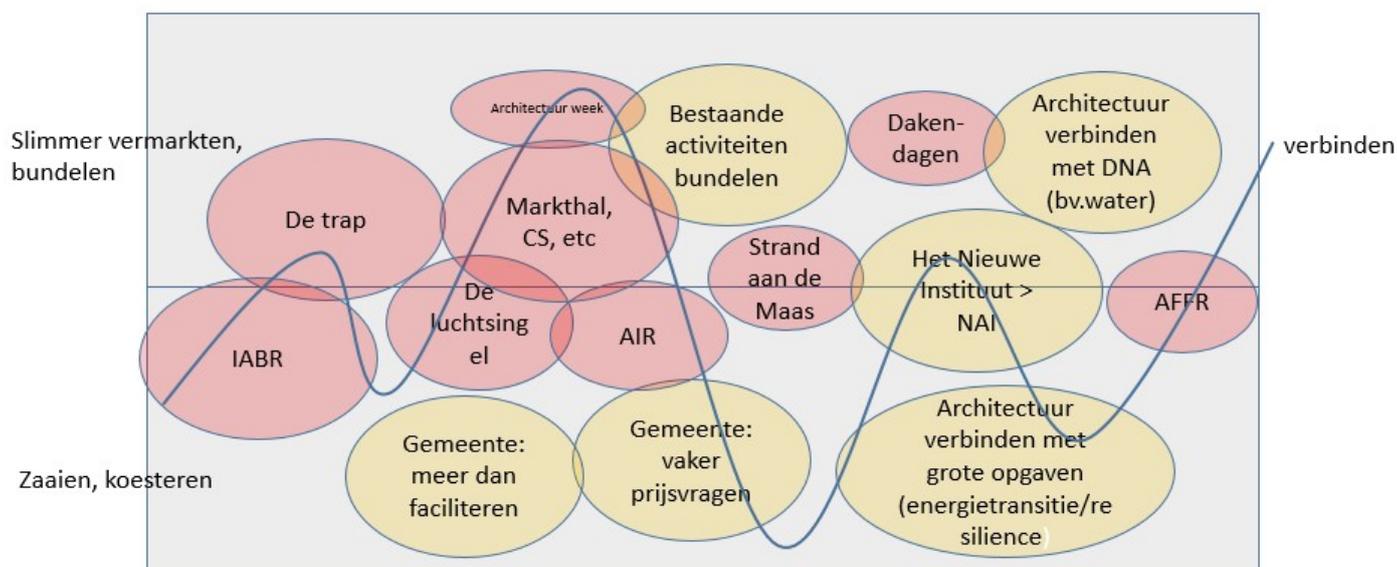
The work group distinguishes between an 'undercurrent' and a 'surface current' in the Rotterdam architectural practice, which are mutually connected very strongly. The undercurrent represents what is happening now, current events:

- special new developments,
- debates,
- genuine reflection and working on complex social issues where designed-based research is an important instrument,
- the discourse about a new grand design for urban planning in Rotterdam in 2030 and beyond,
- 'movements' that link up climate challenges, the city's resilience, spatial design and architecture (Resilient Rotterdam),
- orders / competitions for new special buildings and urban planning issues (as we said before; a merely facilitating role for the authorities will not do).

The surface current represents issues arising from architecture such as special buildings, or activities and events aimed at a wider public, the products that are often the result of what happened in years gone by.

In the attached sheet we have tried to clarify this categorization and accommodate various activities in it. The events in the reddish ovals are already taking place. The items in the yellow ovals represent a desired development. Some activities in the undercurrent have a potential for the surface current and/or a potential for growth.

- Without the undercurrent, the surface current (and therefore the visitors that are always drawn to something special, to innovation) will just dry up. If you want to put Rotterdam on the map for a long time, Rotterdam will need to cherish and strengthen this 'undercurrent' by investing in it;
- And at the same time, the undercurrent needs the surface current. Together, they can put Rotterdam on the map and draw visitors: from your interested specialist to your average tourist. Activities that take place in the undercurrent and have a strong exponent in the surface current are extremely important. To put it differently, activities connecting the surface current and the undercurrent are crucial for the city to stand out internationally. The undercurrent needs showcases in the surface current to maintain its position in the world. They are connected like yin and yang. Identify activities in the undercurrent that have potential in the surface current and use these;
- Additionally, there should be more connections (both in the undercurrent and the surface current) with the DNA of the city, and with other elements of the cultural offerings of the city respectively. Our operations in the surface current aren't smart enough – there are too many disjointed activities. We ought to strive for bundling and sometimes smarter marketing of a number of existing activities (sometimes also by giving some undercurrent activities a more explicit exponent in the surface current);
- The undercurrent/surface current model may have wider relevance for the entire sector. A healthy undercurrent (small, grass roots, experimental, deep, inventive, the courage to think big, explorative, shaping the agenda, creating new alliances) is the precondition for a sustainable strong cultural climate. However, the surface current attracts the wider audience, which in turn benefits the undercurrent.



## Analysis/findings of the Architecture work group

- The image of Rotterdam as a city of architecture is based primarily on interventions and decisions made in the previous century. Architecture and urban planning are extremely slow disciplines. Ideas and plans may be drawn and developed quickly – but in the case of buildings, the implementation and realization can easily take six to eight years. For example, the urban design/master plan for the Wilhelminapier by Teun Koolhaas dates from the 1980s. At the same time, this strategic Rotterdam location is still under development. The same applies for public and touristic iconic buildings such as Rotterdam Central Station, the Market Hall and De Rotterdam that have been delivered by now. These all involve innovative concepts, each of which has had to wait for over a decade for its realization;
- Urban planning and landscape architecture in particular, and after all architecture itself as well, are increasingly active with regard to setting an agenda of urgent (social) issues and in that sense quite the opposite of slow. The design, and the process of designing itself, represents the future. It leads the way. The fact that big challenges as a result of climate change, increasing social inequality and urbanization play an important part is a plus. They are challenges that Rotterdam is already confronting (such as the water challenge) or will confront (such as the energy transition). In Rotterdam, in other words, architecture and innovation come together as a matter of fact, easily and ideally, effectively;
- The (international) debate about the role and the meaning of architecture and urban planning is therefore conducted with enthusiasm in Rotterdam. At a local level, the public and professionals participate actively in debates organized by AIR (Architectuur Instituut Rotterdam), among others but also by other members of society. On an international level, Rotterdam manages to feed the discourse with the IABR and binding it to itself, thereby linking Rotterdam to the world and the world to Rotterdam. At the same time, we must conclude that the impact of the debate (in a wider sense) is relatively small in the daily practice of urban development and port development. Just like urban development, cultural change takes time, and the willingness to fall and pick yourself up, and research, knowledge exchange and debate are important carriers for that. The work group finds that in Rotterdam, contrary to its tradition/image, the urban development and

- knowledge development (experiment, debate, research, innovation etc.) take place more or less along parallel lines/independently of each other, so that the whole is increasingly less than the sum of its parts;
- With its current research, knowledge and culture infrastructure in the presence of mostly internationally operating design bureaus, Rotterdam has great potential to profile itself again as an international knowledge city in the field of architecture, urban planning and urban development. The city itself has for decades been a laboratory for innovative ways of urban development, where it has tackled social and socio-economic challenges. Now that the port will have to find answers to the questions regarding energy transition and at the same time will need to fight for its right to exist in the next economy, Rotterdam has a unique chance to manifest itself as an interesting showcase, as a Living Lab or as a Test Site at home and abroad;
  - As a knowledge institute, the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the Delft University of Technology played a prominent part in the reconstruction of Rotterdam after the Second World War. Moreover, as a training institute it has always been able to supply the Rotterdam bureaus and municipal services with plenty of design talent. It is particularly the knowledge function that Rotterdam has gradually lost sight of. The Delft University of Technology on the other hand does participate in the international and ambitious AMS programme in cooperation with the city of Amsterdam and acclaimed (international) knowledge institutions. A similar ambitious programme, for example with a focus on the water and energy challenges in relation to urban development driven by a social agenda would suit Rotterdam very well. It suits Rotterdam both in terms of subject matter and in its ambition to profile itself internationally;
  - In the 1990s, Rotterdam moved heaven and earth to become home to the Netherlands Architecture Institute. The component parts of the NAI moved from the capital to a brand-new building on the Rochussenstraat. The state-funded NAI combined a number of tasks/roles (presentation, collection, research, debate, information for the public) and developed into an leading institute of architecture internationally. On account of the budget cuts and the transformation into the Institute for the Creative Industry, the former NAI has changed in character and architecture has had to relinquish a figurehead.
  - The International Architecture Biennale (IABR) lost its home, and foreigners interested in architecture lost a reason to travel to the city. Rotterdam behaved like a rabbit caught in the headlights. Going back to the NAI is impossible – what is done is done. On top of that, full control/funding is now in the hands of the national government, particularly with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, which focuses on creative industry instead of architecture. However, if Rotterdam wishes to make a name for itself internationally as the City of Architecture, an active attitude, involvement and vision is obviously required, because of the gap that has arisen, whether it is an active approach towards the HNI (Het Nieuwe Instituut, The New Institute) or the active search for a new Rotterdam home for architecture, with an agenda leaning more towards Rotterdam. Also consider the position of the Rotterdam Museum, with its vast knowledge and collection of the history of urban planning in Rotterdam;
  - Involve local businessmen and focus them on their activities on the architectural profile of the city and help/stimulate them in coming up with innovative concepts. Companies in Rotterdam such as Urban Guides and Rotterdam Tours manage to attract tens of thousands of people each year to Rotterdam with activities related to architecture. Also use the local interest in architecture and the local (but internationally operating) designers community to brand Rotterdam as a city of architecture and to provide substance to this image. Engage the business sector and in particular try to get the Port Authority on board to achieve the desired architectural profile.
  - An internationally renowned city of architecture cannot rely exclusively on its past status or its knowledge infrastructure or events policy. The built environment must also match / relate to international trends if not blaze a trail. The position of the designer community is crucial to this and has an attractive potential in Rotterdam. Bureaus are working all over the world and are well connected with the international avant garde. Drawing up/updating the city council's policy

document on architecture, supported by the Department of Urban Development and its private partners, can be very useful for that;

- Innovative development of areas in Rotterdam has placed the city on the map internationally. The manifestation AIR Kop van Zuid in the 1980s is always the most well-known example. That cultural manifestation was used to think through the development of the new city, while at the same time implementing that innovative way of thinking in reality. AIR Kop van Zuid was the start of the new tradition that resonated internationally and from 2003 onwards has been given a new lease of life by the IABR in another way. The Water Biennale of 2005 led to Rotterdam Waterstad 2035, to innovations and interventions in urban planning with which Rotterdam managed to start its international positioning as a resilient city. The work group finds that developments involving for example Stadhavens ('city docks', docks on both sides of the river), Central Station, the Rijnhaven (Rhine Docks) and M4H (Merwe-Vierhavens in Stadhavens) can be used for renovation and profiling Rotterdam as the City of Architecture;
- In addition to innovative architecture and urban planning, the urban programming (of those buildings and most certainly in the public domain) is an important reason to visit the city. Also for international visitors. Rotterdam will have to be innovative and experimental in its design, programming of its public domain (inside and outside). Cultural institutions in Rotterdam can play an important part in the programming, just like the other (cultural) entrepreneurs and other parties in the city;
- In contrast to many other cultured tourists, the (international) 'architecture tourist' is often both consumer and curious, in other words interested in both remarkable architecture and in innovation and debate. This is a valuable target group for Rotterdam, because often they are visitors that spend relatively large amounts of money and they are opinion leaders, potentially important ambassadors for the city around the world.
- Rotterdam has a strong tradition with the organization and programming of public activities with architecture as its main theme. For example, Architecture Day is a Rotterdam invention, and more than that, Rotterdam is the only Dutch city that has assigned a prominent place to architecture in its events policy. Much experience was gained in 2007, the Year Of Architecture, and 2015, the Year of Reconstruction (Rotterdam Celebrates the City) with the temporary staircase of MVRDV provided a considerable boost to public interest in the built environment. Note: the staircase was a massive success with visitors, its significance for the professional discourse, however, was relatively modest. It makes sense to use this Rotterdam tradition for a bigger international architectural event aimed at both professionals and the public at large. Use and appreciate the international status of the IABR every two years. If Rotterdam intends to profile itself internationally as the City of Architecture, then logically it should focus first and foremost on its International Architecture Biennale (see also Venice, Chicago, Shenzhen, Seoul, São Paulo etc.). After all, that is the most appropriate instrument.

## Conclusion

The work group is committed as we described above, and at the same time concerned. Rotterdam has to be careful: it is still 'selling itself' as the 'City of Architecture', but this proposition is based largely on arguments and conditions from the previous century. In short, something has to happen to remain in the public eye as the City of Architecture in the long run. A reputation may take years to build, but it can be left in tatters before you know it.

The challenge is to formulate an ambition spanning several years, in which issues such as reaching the public and attractions for the public, the touristic city profile, the events policy, the actual renovation of the city, competitions, knowledge development and distribution, design research, working on social agendas, the international and local debate, the necessary energy transition of the port, the renewal of the economy and the programming of the public and urban space go hand-in-hand, and to manage the image and the identity of Rotterdam as the City of Architecture. Make better use of the available qualities/institutions and deploy them with more determination and effect

to position Rotterdam (internationally) as the City of Architecture.

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