

International Advisory Board Rotterdam

Working Group Big Locals



Participants:

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Ina Klaassen

Theater Rotterdam, Melle Damen

Kunsthall Rotterdam, Emily Ansenk

International Film Festival Rotterdam, Janneke Staarink

Codarts, Wilma Franchimon

North Sea Jazz, Jan Willen Luyken

Rotterdam Unlimited, Guus Dutrieux

Nederlands Fotomuseum, Ruud Visschedijk

De Doelen concert and Conference Centre, Gabriel Oostvogel

1. How we present our cultural offer in such a way as to truly put ourselves on the map internationally?

2. Which elements – of our existing offer – can help us to achieve that goal?
3. What can the cultural sector contribute to the branding/story of the city?
4. Where will we be in 2025?

Introduction

The middle class is growing worldwide, creating a pool of potential new tourist visitors to cities. Rotterdam wants to grab a share of this potential and is actively focusing on this market as a relatively new player. In order to enhance the appeal of Rotterdam as a destination over the long term, we need to shift the focus from “bricks” to “content”. In the view of the working group, Rotterdam should explicitly opt for a cultural profile because culture is the carrier of the city’s identity and Rotterdam has sufficient quality and distinctive culture to offer. According to the working group, international appeal is not only important for attracting more foreign visitors to Rotterdam but also for giving our city’s national status a boost. Rotterdam’s national prominence has its origins overseas, as evidenced by the national media interest prompted by certain articles in the international media. However, a good international positioning of the city not only requires putting the city on the map as a cultural destination, but also – conversely – that the international should take hold in Rotterdam, that the international map should come to Rotterdam. It is a two-way street and a strong, flourishing position requires openness, time, money and interest. In other words: the international orientation must be intrinsic. The working group discussed the questions with enthusiasm and at its second meeting also discussed the essay by Wim Pijbes. The working group is convinced that there are many opportunities and that together, we can plan for success in Rotterdam. In answer to the first three questions, in this paper the working group makes proposals for how to put the assignment into practice, while stressing that a healthy cultural urban climate consists of much more than the proposals listed below. This position paper concludes with a vision for 2025 that the working group believes these proposals could help deliver.

Culture must be central to the city’s international profile

Culture is the carrier of the city’s identity and contributes to its storytelling. This is why we put strong brands in the shop window and build our reputation among international professionals and trendsetters. The cultural offer is rich, diverse and rooted in the city. All art disciplines are represented here. The structural programming of the cultural institutions and the festivals represent a carefully and jointly developed offer based on Rotterdam’s DNA, with elements that complement and strengthen one another. Rotterdam is one of the cities in which cultural diversity is resulting in} a new generation of creators and users with their own views on the world and the future of Western metropolises.

Making choices

Rotterdam has won awards and earned recommendations as a destination in the travel guides and international newspapers following the construction of special iconic buildings. The task now is to hold onto and extend that position through continuity in the quality of supply. The working group expects that initially, a focus on cultural icons will be most promising. They have the required international allure and appeal to large groups of visitors. Rotterdam also boasts sufficient quality to

put itself in the international spotlight several times a year. Rotterdam can set itself apart compared to other cities with architecture. This theme has proven itself and Rotterdam delivers on its promise. Supplementary to the essay by Wim Pijbes, the working group stresses that Rotterdam is a diverse city with a rich and diverse cultural offer. This fact is distinctive and a strength of the city that could be put to better use in its positioning. This calls for a specific approach in tandem with the marketing which the institutions do themselves to build their brands.

Communicate authenticity

Rotterdam communicates its authenticity by presenting itself in terms of 'newness' and the local city culture. Wallpaper's description of Rotterdam as "off beat and fiercely committed to the new" is in the city's DNA. By this is meant that icons generally attract international interest, but that the cultural climate consists of much more than cultural icons alone. On arrival, the visitor who chooses to come to Rotterdam for its icons is pleasantly surprised by the cultural identity of the city. There is an atmosphere and mentality that says that everything is possible and allowed, because the city isn't finished yet.

Invest in programming periods and joint marketing

Top international programming attracts a lot of visitors and generates economic spinoffs for the city. The international offer therefore needs to increase in terms of both quality and quantity. That means investing in cultural icons (the strong brands) and marketing. In consultation, we will choose three to four recurring periods in the year in which Rotterdam will be the cultural hotspot. We will systematically expand and enhance these periods. In order to do so, we will make a long-term plan and coordinate the international agendas of cultural institutions, the municipality and businesses; because success is something you plan together well in advance. In this way, we can jointly achieve the required increase in scale. This kind of top programming should be possible with new forms of financing for large-scale programming. The working group makes the observation that such a programme will bring the city a lot of money, but that the income will not be recouped by the cultural institutions through the tills. The offer must subsequently be positioned in the market as a total package. This will require a dedicated marketing expert at Rotterdam Partners, who will work to put Rotterdam's (top) cultural offer in the spotlight and sell it internationally. This marketing expert will be fed by his/her counterparts in the individual institutions.

Exchange

Although badly needed according to the working group, promoting the offer abroad is not enough to claim a credible international position. Rotterdam needs to live up to that claim by actually having an international cultural climate that is experienced as such the inhabitants of the city throughout the entire year. That is a matter give and take. Cultural institutions operate in an international network, have a presence abroad, export their successes and ensure that cultural professionals (and press) from a given sector cannot avoid Rotterdam at a specific time of the year. This approach should certainly not be limited to the big international players. The niches also make a significant contribution to the international cultural climate. The success of the cultural sector is a combination of good and stable hardware (buildings and collections) and software (people). Interesting productions and programming are made by special and exceptional people. As a city and as cultural

institutions, it is necessary to keep on attracting interesting (new) thinkers and doers. In other words, not as visitors but as creators in and of the city.

Conditions

- A cultural social cost-benefit analysis is needed; a study into the investment and yields of the cultural sector. Where do the money flows come from and where do they go? Who gets the economic spin-offs from culture? And can new business models be developed on the basis of that?
- Research is needed into the motives of foreign visitors who come to Rotterdam, along with ongoing monitoring of the perceptions and appreciation levels of visitors
- More investment resources for culture
- A new relationship between government and cultural institutions. Where possible, replace the grants system (based on scarcity and distributive justice) with long-term commercial arrangements, making a distinction between the fixed costs of municipal ownership of real estate and collection(s), their passive management and minimum public access on the one hand and their operation, active management and programming on the other.
- Achieving these objectives must be a joint effort by the cultural institutions, municipality and business. Coordination is a necessary condition for taking joint responsibility to plan for future success.
- Cultural institutions can make better use of opportunities to lobby by participating in the appropriate forums, making better use of existing networks such as the network of higher education and backing Rotterdam residents for seats on the boards of funds and cultivating (Rotterdam) business, and through the municipal RIO meetings.
- In terms of the municipal vision of the city centre: by means of a combination of physical and digital interventions, the city can improve the customer journey by becoming a 'city lounge'. For example, that means proper information provision with improved public transport routing and signage from as far away as possible to the front door of the cultural institution. Because cultural institutions have an important initiating role and often also an implementing role in delivering the concept of the 'city lounge'.

For instance on Schouwburgplein, where cultural institutions not only provide the programming but also take responsibility for the functioning of the square itself. Moreover, cultural institutions are an important link in the so-called 'leisure chains', the sequence of different activities that visitors to the city engage in.

Ambition for 2025

- Rotterdam to be known as a summer and winter destination, with large-scale, top international programming
- Rotterdam to be known internationally as a cultural hotspot, "off beat and fiercely committed to the new"
- The authorities and industry to invest in the international position of the city of Rotterdam as a cultural free port in a deliberate and sustainable manner
- Culture to be central to the international city marketing of Rotterdam
- Harness the potential of new generations of Rotterdam art students in order to enhance the innovative power of culture in Rotterdam
- Rotterdam also to be known in the international art sector as a city with an international cultural

climate.

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