



BEST PRACTICE: ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



Key Challenge

Insufficient or declining acceptance of tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and Innovation.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Urban

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 324.16 km²

Population | 671,125 in 2024

Type of Tourism | Cultural; City; Business.

DMO | Public-Private partnership for city marketing in order to attract international businesses, conferences and visitors.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government; Local residents; Research and Development (R&D) organisations.

Additional Challenges Covered | Creating local added value through tourism; Spatial and temporal concentration of visitors; Lack of community participation in tourism activities.

Context & Background

Rotterdam is the second largest city in the Netherlands and has the largest port in Europe. Rotterdam experienced a rapid increase in tourism in the mid-2010s, which accounted for 4% of GDP and 6% of employment in 2023 and generated around 2.6 million overnight stays (43.2% domestic). The city focuses on innovation, sustainability and inclusivity as well as good accessibility.

Key Challenge

The steady growth of the tourism sector was initially welcomed, but there were also fears that a spatial concentration of high visitor numbers and excessive party tourism could arise. To counteract this at an early stage, the tourism authorities developed a series of innovative tourism offers with the aim of spreading tourism across the entire city. These offers were intended to have a positive influence on the development of districts and, at the same time, create acceptance for tourism among residents and stakeholders.

Implementation of Solutions: Rotterdam has so far taken two important steps to engage residents and stakeholders, focusing on the further development and promotion of two “neighbourhoods” that will attract tourists.

SOLUTIONS

- Developed within the [EU project SmartCulTour](#), the *Rotterdam Living Labs* consist of two community-scaled living labs with a bottom-up approach, involving multiple stakeholders, especially residents and entrepreneurs, in the development of cultural tourism in two districts through a co-creation process. These two neighbourhoods are considered as emerging districts, each with its unique characteristics and tourism potential. In total, between 2020 and 2023, six living lab workshops were hosted to discuss current issues, challenges and future opportunities in district development. Very innovative and partly art-based tools were used (System Mapping, Visitor Flow Mapping, Personas, House of Quality, Ideation Washing Machine and Destination Design Road mapping) to support the creative idea generation and discussion process. The ideas generated by the Rotterdam Living Labs are summarised in a report that serves as a proposal to guide and maintain the sustainable development of both neighbourhoods.
- Since 2023, neighbourhood events have been held regularly following the Living Lab workshops to promote joint activities. Examples of this include the Rooftop Days and a joint painting event in which residents paint their vision of the city's future. Tourism officials dialogue with residents about their well-being and their ideas for the city.

Replicability potential: High (requires funding and an open community).

Cost & funding source: SmartCulTour was funded by the EU in the frame of Horizon 2020; 8,000 euros per neighbourhood event, funded by by Inholland University of Applied Sciences and local partners such as Rabobank.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Political willingness to involve residents and stakeholders; Funding from the EU and private sponsors; The university partner in the SmartCultour project who acted as a mediator and was perceived as a neutral scientific partner; A long-term vision.

Barriers: A passive attitude of the stakeholders in the district towards the lab, which led to more top-down approaches in the implementation of project ideas, even though the Living Lab was designed as a collaborative approach; Due to financial and political constraints, the municipalities of the two districts and other key stakeholders are not willing to take on more responsibility to ensure that the proposed ideas are further developed.

Results and Impacts

- The SmartCulTour project created an open and reflexive platform that contributed to a stronger connection between local stakeholders, especially between the community and local entrepreneurs.
- The project has led to a higher acceptance of tourism development in the two districts.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- Showcasing the benefits to the actors involved provides an incentive to participate in such projects.
- Communication with local residents works best through practical, interesting activities.
- Conversations and discussions with university staff are more accepted than with community representatives.
- Some of Smart CulTour's tools worked well (e.g. Ideation Washing Machine) and others less (e.g. House of Quality). A practical approach tends to pay off.

Useful Links

[Paint your City Project](#) | [Expertise Network Sustainable Urban Tourism](#)

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