

The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image: Rotterdam, Cultural Capital of Europe 2001

Greg Richards and Julie Wilson

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Summary. Cities are increasingly using cultural events to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors and investment. As part of its event-led regeneration strategy, Rotterdam staged the ‘Cultural Capital of Europe’ event in 2001. The aims were to attract visitors and to stimulate cultural consumption among residents, while positioning Rotterdam as a cultural destination. Over 2000 questionnaire responses by resident and non-resident visitors to the Cultural Capital event were used to evaluate the image effects of the event. In depth interviews were also undertaken with policy-makers and cultural managers, to permit evaluation of survey findings in the context of richer qualitative material. The image of the city as a cultural destination did improve in 2001, but the physical and tangible elements of the city’s image (modern architecture, water) and its character as the working city of the Netherlands continued to dominate.

Introduction

Cities have long used mega events such as World Fairs, Expos and sporting events as a means of revitalising their economies, creating infrastructure and improving their image (Getz, 1991). Recent studies of city marketing and tourism have pointed to the increasing use of events as a means to market places and major cities in particular (for example, Law, 1993; Robertson and Guerrier, 1998; Waitt, 1999, 2003; Schuster, 2001). This phenomenon can be linked to a general increase in competition between cities for the attention of important stakeholders, including consumers, investors and policy-makers. As a result of the increasing integration of the global economy, a greater number of places are drawn into this competitive environment and, at the same time, the built environment, infrastructure and amenities in different places tend to become more similar.

Cities therefore need to find new ways of

distinguishing themselves from their competitors. As Paddison (1993) points out, city marketing is often directed at the leveraging of private capital to support infrastructural developments. For example, signature buildings frequently feature in urban strategies to develop an image or ‘brand’ and create competitive advantage, often at great financial cost. Recent examples include the Bilbao Guggenheim museum, the Tate Modern gallery in London and the Baltic Flour Mills in Gateshead.

However, Paddison (1993) also underlines the relative inflexibility of such infrastructure-based strategies. The cost of building such landmarks is perhaps one of the most important reasons why events have become an increasingly important aspect of inter-urban competition in recent years. Events provide a means of adding flexibility to fixed structures, supplying a source of spectacle

Greg Richards is in the Fundació Interarts, c/Mallorca 272, 9a, 08037 Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. Fax: +34 487 2644 and the School of Geography, Rovira i Virgili University. E-mail: grichards@interarts.net. Julie Wilson is in the School of Geography, Rovira i Virgili University, Plaça Imperial Tàrraco 1, 43005 Tarragona, Catalonia, Spain and the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. Fax: +44 (0) 117 344 3002. E-mail: jw@urw.net.

which adds to the image value of a landmark. Events may also be used as a platform for creating landmarks, as in the case of the 1992 World Expo in Seville or the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. They often represent a less costly means of distinguishing places and often generate significant media interest. Events may also encourage people to visit a place more than once and, by hosting a series of different events, a city may profile itself in a number of different potential markets. Cities therefore compete fiercely for the honour of hosting events such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup Final or a World Expo (Hall, 1992).

Cities and their hinterlands have become stages for a continual stream of events, which lead eventually to the 'festivalisation' of the city and 'festival marketplaces' (Harvey, 1991). With the growth of the 'symbolic economy' (Lash and Urry, 1994; Zukin, 1995) and the 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), culture has become increasingly important as a means of consuming the city (Ritzer, 1999). Indeed, Harvey (1989) maintains that the growth of 'blockbuster' events is a feature of the increasingly rapid turnover of consumption.

In such a climate, cultural events in particular have emerged as a means of improving the image of cities, adding life to city streets and giving citizens renewed pride in their home city. This enhancement of community pride and destination image following an event has been referred to as the 'halo effect' (Hall, 1992), the 'showcase effect' (Fredline and Faulkner, 1998) and the 'feel-good effect' (Allen *et al.*, 2002). Zukin argues that

culture is a euphemism for the city's new representation as a creative force in the emerging service economy ...[and that]... culture is the sum of a city's amenities that enable it to compete for investment and jobs, its 'comparative advantage' (Zukin, 1995, p. 268).

Zukin's view of 'culture' as covering all the amenities of a city reflects the fact that the very notion of 'culture' has expanded to take

in not just 'traditional', 'high' culture attractions such as museums, theatres and concert halls, but also increasingly includes elements of 'popular' culture, such as pop music, fashion, ethnoscaping (Appadurai, 1990) and sport. Both high culture and popular culture have become important sources for the images which are used to underpin the 'brand image' of cities (Kearns and Philo, 1993).

Increasing competition between cities in a crowded field of images is one of the major factors stimulating cities to adopt such branding strategies, or even 'hard branding' (Evans, 2003; Meurs and Verheijen, 2003) that seeks to transform fixed cultural capital into competitive advantage through the staging of cultural events or the construction of cultural landmarks. City branding used to be associated with the flight from an industrial past (Holcomb, 1993; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996), but is now linked to enhancing the urban landscape with globally branded arts and entertainment destinations, encapsulated in the 'fantasy city' (Hannigan, 1998). As Hannigan (2003) suggests, a successful brand should be instantly recognisable, play on the desire for comfort and certainty and provide a point of identification for consumers in a crowded market-place.

Some major cultural events have arguably become 'brands' in their own right, such as the Edinburgh Festival, the Cannes Film Festival or the Notting Hill Carnival. The European Cultural Capital (ECC) event has also arguably become a 'brand', which is now extending to other continents as well (Evans, 2003). Such is the value of this brand that the honour of staging the event is almost as fiercely contested as the Olympic Games. For example, 14 UK cities competed in the starting line-up for the honour of hosting the 2008 ECC event.

However, it should be remembered that this strategy of using replicated and branded events as a means of distinguishing cities leads to a paradox whereby those cities seeking to differentiate themselves and escape routine identities tend to end up striving for similar urban and cultural landscapes (serial reproduction, or serial monotony; see Har-

vey, 1989). Similarly, Rojek observes the growth of “universal cultural space” that “provides the same aesthetic and spatial references wherever one is in the world” (Rojek, 1995, p. 146). In response, new formats for major cultural events are now being devised to enhance the image of cities and regions (such as the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona or the World Cultural Forum in Rio de Janeiro, in 2004), even if these new formats tend to emulate previous mega-event models in reality. Nonetheless, the Universal Forum of Cultures 2004—originally conceived as a stand-alone event for Barcelona—is now receiving competitive interest from cities including Durban, Fukuoka and Monterrey for hosting this latest global branded event in the future.

In the absence of experimenting with or aspiring to new formats, though, cities are starting to innovate with existing formats, although the longevity of this particular strategy is uncertain. For example, hosts of more recent ECC events have attempted to pin down a more distinctive aspect of the city’s current (or desired) identity by employing a specific theme for their version of the event but, to date, little has been done to evaluate whether this type of strategy is sufficient to overcome the potential serial reproduction effect of branded major cultural events. Indeed, the image effects of events on their host cities *per se* have not been examined much in research thus far, in spite of the wide range of disciplines from which existing research on mega-events has emerged.

The aim of this article is to examine the influence of the European Cultural Capital event on city image, using the specific example of the Rotterdam ECC event staged in 2001. It examines the success of the Rotterdam 2001 ECC in terms of the aims established for the event, particularly in improving its international image and generating economic benefits through tourism. The study draws upon surveys of different types of visitor to the event—local residents and domestic and international tourists—and qualitative research with policy-makers and cultural institutions in Rotterdam. Compari-

sons are also made with other studies of city image held elsewhere in Europe prior to and during 2001, in order to monitor external image change for Rotterdam in the international domain. In concentrating on the cultural image of the city developed for tourist consumption, the paper does not consider the many other potential aims of image change, such as attracting business tourism, mobile middle-class executives and investment.

Place Images and Events

The image of a place is usually very important in attracting visitors and place image research has been particularly prevalent in the tourism studies field. Research has tended to underline the complexity of the image concept (for example, Jansson, 2003), a point that is made clear when reviewing the image literature, although in broad terms, images could be described as the ‘currency of cultures’ (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998), reflecting and reinforcing particular shared meanings and beliefs and particular value systems.

Major events have become a particular valuable form of cultural currency, particularly in terms of their image effects. As Hall (1992, p. 14) notes: “it is apparent that major events can have the effect of a shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favourable perception as a potential travel destination”. This potential has been a reason for events being used as an image-enhancement tool, particularly for large cities (Law, 1993; Holcomb, 1993; 1999; Sassen and Roost, 1999; Judd and Fainstein, 1999; Selby, 2003).

A major problem with such strategies is that their impacts are very hard to measure. This is particularly true in the case of the relatively nebulous area of city image. One of the major problems is the complexity of images; multifaceted, highly subjective and often aimed at different publics (Paddison, 1993). Previous empirical work on visitors’ images has highlighted the wide range of ‘attributes’ associated with destination places, often evaluated on multidimensional

scales (see, for example, Crompton, 1977; Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1982; Gartner and Hunt, 1987; Richardson and Crompton, 1988; Gartner, 1989; Calantone *et al.*, 1989), 'attribute checklists' (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991) or category-based approaches (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000). Other researchers have examined unstructured and interpretive qualitative data on tourist images and experiences (such as Reilly, 1990; Jenkins, 1999).

On the conceptual side, many theorised notions of place imagery (most notably from behavioural geography, for example, Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Golledge and Stimson, 1997; Nasar, 1998), have distinguished between 'designative' and 'appraisive' components of the image. The 'designative' or informational aspect is related to the categorisation of cognitive elements of the environment. The 'appraisive' aspect is concerned with feelings, values and meanings, or what is 'felt' about a place. The appraisive component can itself be demarcated into two different components (Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Wilson, 2002)

- The evaluative (concerned with the expression of an opinion) (see Nasar, 1998; Walmsley and Young, 1998).
- The affective (concerned with the specification of a preference) (Gartner, 1993; Dann, 1996).

The cognitive–affective dichotomy has been employed by many authors, albeit often with differing terminology (for example, Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1993; Dann, 1996; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Um, 1998). Other authors have shown that such images and their subjective meanings are often shared as a 'common image' (Harvey, 1973; Walmsley and Lewis, 1993) or 'collective images' (Lynch, 1960). The current study attempts to examine the common images held by visitor groups to the Rotterdam ECC 2001 event, including local residents and domestic and international tourists, in terms of both the designative and appraisive dimensions of the images.

The complexity of measuring image is

added to by the wide range of factors that can influence image formation (see, for example, Mayo and Jarvis, 1981; Ahmed, 1994). Some studies have developed models of image formation that include information sources (variety and type), socio-demographics and socio-psychological travel motivations (Baloglu, 1996; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) or temporal factors (Gunn, 1993). Image modification (of images 'received' by individuals and groups following direct experience of the city) has been the focus of various studies (for example, Gunn, 1988; Pearce, 1982; Chon, 1990) which have emphasised the difficulty of changing firmly fixed preconceptions held by actual or potential visitors. However, the current article focuses on the modification of the 'projected' images of the city, in that Rotterdam has attempted to use cultural events as a means of changing its image from that of a 'working city' into that of a cultural city.

Some studies have also considered the processes of changing imagery received by visitors—for example, through the use of different information sources (Telisman-Kosuta, 1989; Butler, 1990; Bojanic, 1991) or specifically through pictorial images (MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997). Other studies have considered the effect of geographical or cognitive distance from a place (Walmsley and Jenkins, 1992; Ankomah *et al.* 1995, 1996; Hunt, 1975). Familiarity with a place may also be important (Baloglu, 2001) and this has often been measured in terms of previous visitation or direct destination experience (Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986; Fridgen, 1987; Chon, 1990; Ahmed, 1991; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Milman and Pizam, 1995; Dann, 1996; Baloglu, 2001).

The current study combines some of the different approaches to place image described in the literature by examining different components of imagery, using the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. Longer-term changes in image are also analysed via qualitative enquiry with the specific aim of examining the durability of

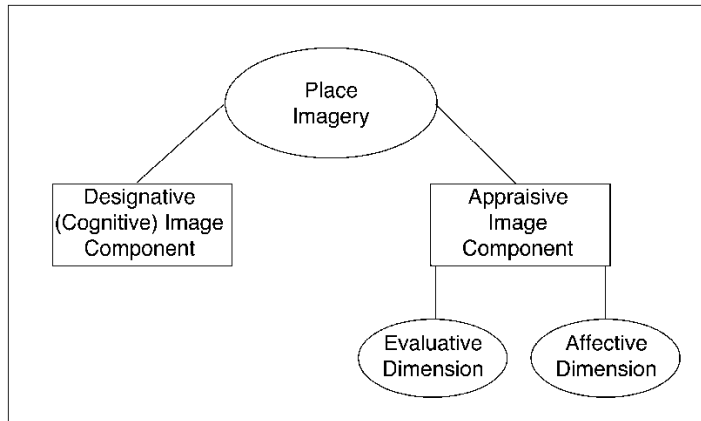


Figure 1. Components of place image.

the image effect of the Rotterdam 2001 ECC event.

Previous Studies of Event Impact

Although festivals range widely in their nature and require a wealth of perspectives to be studied properly (Schuster, 2001), most research on event impacts has tended to concentrate on the economic impacts (for example, Crompton and McKay, 1994). However, an economic emphasis is perhaps limited in terms of understanding the full range of event impacts. For example, in his pre-event study of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Waitt (1999) identified shifts in the political agenda for staging 'hallmark events'. First, a shift from welfare to entrepreneurial goals; secondly, a functional transformation of cityscapes to generate cultural capital; and, thirdly, the growing importance of media images. This indicates that economic goals are being augmented by socio-cultural and image objectives. Hence, recent studies have begun to consider the socio-cultural impacts of events, such as Johnston's (1999) social impact assessment of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras; Waitt's (2003) study of the socio-cultural impacts of the 2000 Sydney Olympics and Jones' (2001) study of the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Attention has also turned to the image impacts of events and as Hall remarks; "hallmark events may be re-

garded as the image makers of modern tourism" (Hall, 1992, p. 155). Strong city images based on events are perhaps now so important that those images "are starting to dominate the natural or physical features in the identification of cities" (Burns *et al.*, 1986, p. 5). Hiller (1989, 1998) and Ritchie and Smith (1991) were among the first to place importance on the image effects of major events. For example, Ritchie and Smith's study of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics indicated that the image of Calgary had changed in the minds of many non-resident respondents. Since the early 1990s, there has been an increase in the number of studies acknowledging the image impacts of major events (for example, Foley, 1991; Roche, 1994, 2000). However, a somewhat narrow and one-dimensional interpretation of the term 'image' has often been adopted in such studies, with little consideration for the different dimensions of the image of the events' host destinations. In parallel, very little consideration has been given to event-based image effects over time.

This lack of attention to the image effects of events in general also extends to the study of cultural events and, as Formica and Uysal have argued, "few if any studies related to cultural and historical international festivals have been developed and published" (Formica and Uysal, 1998, p. 16). Given the general complexity of trying to

measure image effects, it is not surprising that previous studies of cultural event impact have also tended to concentrate on economic or visitor impacts (for example, Myerscough, 1994; Gratton and Taylor, 1992; Munich Tourist Office, 2002).

Recently however, more image-related impact studies of cultural events have begun to emerge. For example, Myerscough's (1991) study of the 1990 Glasgow ECC event briefly considered image effects. This research showed a more positive cultural image of the city developing in the run-up to the event and during the year itself, but dropping off very rapidly thereafter. Dos Santos and da Costa (1999) examined the image impacts of the Lisbon 1998 Expo event and found that over three-quarters of visitors considered that it had enhanced the international image of Lisbon and of Portugal as a whole. Puczkó and Rátz (2001) studied the image of Budapest in relation to the Budapest Spring Festival. This research indicated that festival visitors had a more positive image of the city than non-visitors. In spite of this apparently positive image effect, however, Budapest did not have as strong an image as Vienna, one of its closest tourism destination rivals. A recent study of the Edinburgh Festival examines the success of the event in modifying the image of Scotland as a whole, but does not specifically deal with the image of the city itself (Prentice and Andersen, 2003). Other studies that purport to assess image change following major cultural events do exist, but have tended to be based more on assertion than empirical evidence (for example, Robertson and Guerrier, 1998).

The present study attempts to provide a more complete evaluation of the impact of the Rotterdam event on the image of the city, both for visitors to the event itself and longitudinally in the European tourist market as a whole. The following two sections of the article give a general background to the European Cultural Capital event and the city of Rotterdam.

The European Cultural Capital Event

Arguably, the European Cultural Capital

event originally had purely cultural aims. The event was designed to "help bring the peoples of the member-states [of the European Union] closer together" through the "expression of a culture which, in its historical emergence and contemporary development, is characterized by having both common elements and a richness born of diversity" (European Commission, 1985). The development of the original event concept was also motivated by a wish to give the Community (later Union) "an attractive image" (Sjøholt, 1999, p. 341). Overall, the event was designed to reflect the cultural positioning of the European Union (EU) as a 'unity in diversity', with each host city displaying its own local or national culture as well as the shared elements of 'European culture'. The promotion of a shared European culture has arguably become an important aspect of EU policy in recent years, since culture is considered an important 'glue' which binds the EU member-states together (Richards, 2001).

Athens was designated the first European Cultural Capital in 1985. Since then, the event has rotated around the member-states of the EU; with a different city being awarded the honour every year.¹ The aims of the event were basically twofold: first, to make the culture of the cities accessible to a European audience; and, secondly, to create a picture of European culture as a whole (Corijn and van Praet, 1994). However, as the event has developed, it has been used in different ways by the cities, either to support, extend or challenge the original ECC concept.

Corijn and van Praet (1994), in their review of the history of the Cultural Capitals, highlight the way in which different cities treated the designation. Athens—for example, concentrated on big foreign names and ignored ancient Greek art. Florence highlighted its own historical importance, while Amsterdam projected itself as a European art city. Berlin was criticised for having an elitist approach, while the event was hardly visible among the normal cultural bustle of

Paris. The common feature of all these cities was that they were already established European 'Cultural Capitals', identified by Bianchini and Parkinson (1993) as having a wealth of cultural facilities.

Sjøholt (1999) identified common elements in the approaches adopted by the earlier host cities—for example, the 'festival prototype' (Florence '86 and Dublin '91), 'workshop prototype' (Amsterdam '87 and W. Berlin '88), the 'creative tradition prototype' (Madrid). The turning-point for the ECC event came with the designation of Glasgow in 1990, an example of the 'infrastructural implementation' prototype (Sjøholt, 1999) which was also characteristic of Lisbon '94 and Athens '85. However, Glasgow (unlike its predecessors) was neither a capital city nor one of the established 'cultural destinations' of Europe (van der Borg, 1994). Glasgow won the nomination against competition from other British cities largely on the basis of promised commercial sponsorship and the fact that it planned to use the event to stimulate urban regeneration and to boost the image of Glasgow as a cultural city. Certainly, Glasgow has been exemplified as a model of 'image reconstruction' that was later copied by other cities but, although the Glasgow event is often seen as a success regarding its new image, evidence to underpin this assumption is inconclusive (Gómez, 1999). Paddison (1993) argues that the event had relatively little impact on the overall image of the city, underlining the transience of event impacts. As Bianchini (1999) argues in the context of European cultural policy, this transition marks the advent of the 'age of city marketing' (mid 1980s to present). In this period, concern shifted away from the socio-political concerns of the 1970s towards economic development and urban regeneration policies. The extent to which urban redevelopment and city marketing objectives have replaced purely cultural ones in cultural policy is illustrated by the objectives of recent hosts of the ECC event. For example, the Glasgow event was judged an economic success, producing a net economic benefit to the city of between

40 and 47 million Euros in 1990, mainly as a result of tourist expenditure (Myerscough, 1991).

In 2000, the ECC event in Helsinki had two major aims: "to enhance the quality of life of the inhabitants and to increase international awareness of Finnish culture" (Helsinki City of Culture Foundation, 2000, p. 3). Helsinki, one of the lesser-known European capitals, wanted to put itself on the cultural map of Europe with the event. In their study of Porto 2001, dos Santos *et al.* (2003) concluded that the event had not been as successful in attracting visitors as the 1994 Lisbon ECC event, but it had succeeded in widening the cultural audience for Porto. In Bruges (ECC in 2002), a city which already attracts 3 million visitors a year, one of the major aims was to convince more day visitors to stay overnight, thereby increasing the economic impact of tourism (Brugge 2002, 2001). An additional aim of the Bruges 2002 event was to shift the image of the city away from that of an historical city with traditional cultural heritage by adding elements of contemporary culture, an aim shared by the other European Cultural Capital of 2002: Salamanca, in Spain.

Although many cities have claimed that cultural motives remain at the fore of the event, success is often measured in terms of the visitors it attracts. Annual visitor numbers increased substantially relative to the year prior to the event in a number of cities—for example, 12 per cent more in Copenhagen in 1996 (theme: 'Kaleidoscope'; Fridberg and Koch-Nielsen, 1997) and Stockholm ('Culture and the city') in 1998, and a claimed threefold increase in the case of Antwerp in 1993 ('choose arts') (Richards, 2000). Sjøholt (1999, p. 343) maintains that common to most host cities up until the Millennium was a hope that the year could function as "a seedbed for multiplier effects within cultural industries" and, given the trajectory since then, this looks set to continue as a key aspiration. The ECC event is also attractive not only as a means of developing the cultural infrastructure of a city, but as an economic development tool

and a means of enhancing the image of the city and these were also the basic arguments used by Rotterdam when the city began bidding for the event.

Rotterdam as a Cultural Capital

With a population of almost 600 000, Rotterdam is the second city of the Netherlands, Europe's largest port and a major industrial, trade and business centre. Rotterdam has undergone a long post-war trajectory of economic and cultural regeneration (Meurs and Verheijen, 2003) and its regional economy experienced strong post-war growth. However, in the 1960s, the city began to suffer problems because of overdependence on transport and traditional manufacturing. In the 1980s, Rotterdam experienced renewed growth in the business services sector and managed to attract the headquarters of many large international firms. In the 1990s, the city also developed new 'clusters' in telecommunications, audio-visual services, design and media, which have provided a basis for developing the city as an 'arts and cultural city' (van den Berg *et al.*, 1999). However, in terms of the cultural sector, Rotterdam has always been in the shadow of the Dutch capital, Amsterdam. Competition with Amsterdam has provided a major stimulus to develop a cultural image alongside the existing image of an industrial port city.

In Rotterdam, therefore, culture has long been a major theme of tourism marketing. The strategic marketing plan for the Rotterdam city tourist office (VVV) for the period 1992–94, for example, identified the key elements of the tourist product as water, architecture and culture. The weakness of Rotterdam was its relatively poor supply of traditional cultural facilities, particularly on an international level, compared with cities such as Amsterdam. Rotterdam therefore decided to project an image of being a modern art city, using its futuristic architecture as a spearhead. Product developments undertaken in the 1990s in relation to cultural tourism included the opening of the National Architecture Museum, the Kunsthal, the develop-

ment of the Museum Quarter and the Witte de With 'cultural quarter' (Hitters and Richards, 2002).

In Rotterdam, the general cultural policy has shifted away from the traditional Dutch model of decentralising and subsidising cultural resources (Beyers, 1993), towards lowering barriers to participation through marketing (Brouwer, 1993). By enriching the cultural life and profile of the city, the local authority hopes to be able to compete more effectively with other 'second-tier cities' (such as Barcelona, Frankfurt and Milan) in attracting tourists, investment and jobs. To achieve this, a development programme was established with the aims of stimulating internationally orientated culture, building the image of Rotterdam as a cultural festival and event city, and supporting the applied arts, such as architecture, design and photography. In fact, image is seen as so important for Rotterdam that an 'image manager' was appointed in the city's Communications Department.

Brouwer (1993) argues that, for Rotterdam, art is becoming increasingly interchangeable with sport and tourism, as another 'top attraction' that can be used to attract the 'new urban middle class', whose high incomes can stimulate the local economy. As a result of this cultural event-led strategy, Rotterdam recorded the highest event attendance growth rate of all Dutch cities in the 1990s (Bonink and Richards, 1997).

The staging of the ECC event in 2001 fitted well in this general strategy. The decision to bid for the event was taken after local government officials had visited the ECC in Antwerp in 1993. Impressed by the success of Antwerp, which claimed to have attracted 10 million visitors that year (although only 2.2 million of these actually attended events in the Cultural Capital programme) (TFPA, 1994), Rotterdam decided to emulate its closest rival port city. The budget for the Rotterdam event was almost 24 million Euros; much lower than most other ECC events (Table 1). The year-long Rotterdam event encompassed over 500 sep-

Table 1. Budget for selected European Cities of Culture/Cultural Capitals

Year	City	Budget (million €)
1985	Athens	27.2
1986	Florence	20.4
1987	Amsterdam	9.0
1988	W. Berlin	27.2
1990	Glasgow	54.4
1991	Dublin	45.3
1992	Madrid	22.6
1993	Antwerp	40.8
1994	Lisbon	23.6
1995	Luxembourg	136.1
1996	Copenhagen	86.2
1997	Thessaloniki	285.8
1998	Stockholm	54.4
1999	Weimar	28.1
2001	Rotterdam	23.6
2001	Porto	104.0

Source: based on Richards *et al.* (2002).

arate activities, which attracted a total of 2.25 million visits (Richards *et al.*, 2002). The diversity of the Rotterdam programme supported the overall theme of 'Rotterdam is many cities'; based on a cultural programme that was much more ambitious than the joint ECC in 2001, Porto, which attracted 1.25 million visits to the 450 events in its programme. The Porto theme was 'Bridges to the future', which underlined a desire to "associate the image of Porto with a desire for the future" (Porto 2001, 2001, p. 3).

The basic aims of the Rotterdam ECC 2001 event were to:

- stage a festival with activities aimed at the whole city, attracting a broad audience as well as art-lovers;
- strengthen structurally the cultural infrastructure of the city in terms of participation, activities and facilities;
- help to improve the international cultural image of Rotterdam; and
- generate long-term economic benefits—for example, by stimulating tourism.

In order to determine the extent to which these aims had been achieved and to analyse the changes in Rotterdam's image, a study was undertaken during and after the ECC

event. The remainder of this article focuses on the research findings to date. Longitudinal studies of the long-term effects of the event are planned over the coming years.

Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources was employed in the current study, including surveys of residents and non-resident visitors to Rotterdam at the time of the ECC event and depth interviews with key informants from the cultural sector in Rotterdam.

A study of visitors to the Rotterdam ECC 2001 event was undertaken, carried out in collaboration with Rotterdam Culturele Hoofdstad (or RCH, the event organisers), the City of Rotterdam and Rotterdam Festivals with the aims of establishing a visitor profile for and examining the motivations, activities, attitudes and expenditure of event attendees. Surveys of visitors were conducted at 11 different events within the ECC programme, selected to represent a mix of cultural forms (including 'high' cultural events such as the Hieronymus Bosch exhibition and 'popular' culture events such as the WOMEX world music event) and events with a local or a more international character. The surveys were carried out predominantly through self-completion questionnaires handed out and collected during the events. A small number of questionnaires were returned after the events by post. A total of 2200 questionnaires were returned. Many of the items used in the questionnaire were derived from the ATLAS surveys described below, ensuring a high degree of comparability between the two studies. The image attributes were based on those already developed by Rotterdam Marketing (WE-MAR, 2000), again allowing comparisons to be made with other image measurements prior to the event (the 13 image attributes are listed in Table 2).

A study of the external image of Rotterdam and other cultural destinations in Europe was conducted by the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) in

Table 2. Agreement with image attributes among visitors to Rotterdam 2001 European Cultural Capital (percentage totally agree)

Image attribute of Rotterdam	Rotterdamers	Residents of Zuid Holland	Other Dutch visitors	Foreign visitors	Total	Image dimension
Modern architecture	84.9	78.6	88.0	66.4	80.1	Designative
Water	79.9	83.8	89.1	68.5	79.6	Designative
Multicultural	83.1	81.3	85.3	60.2	77.5	Appraisive
Working city	84.2	79.7	81.3	57.0	76.3	Appraisive
International	74.4	77.5	84.3	61.8	73.7	Appraisive
Dynamic	66.3	70.9	75.4	44.9	63.7	Appraisive
Culture and art	64.0	65.3	71.3	38.1	59.0	Appraisive
Lots to discover	62.1	57.7	71.7	33.2	56.8	Appraisive
Events	65.8	60.4	65.8	26.2	55.7	Designative
Shopping	54.4	66.7	59.7	25.9	50.1	Designative
Nightlife	43.5	46.3	42.3	21.4	38.5	Designative
Cosy (gezelligheid) ²	38.5	41.1	32.2	13.0	31.1	Appraisive
Unsafe	20.5	19.1	21.4	8.4	17.7	Appraisive

1999 and 2001/02. This study involved surveys which covered the profile of the visitors and their assessment of destination image for 19 European cities, with a total of 12 000 responses over the 2 survey periods. These surveys obviously exclude people who did not visit cultural sites during this period.

By comparing the results of these surveys it is possible to assess the short-term image effects of the Rotterdam event.

In order to assess in more detail the longer-term effects, a series of depth interviews were conducted with policy-makers, cultural venue managers and marketing organisations on the impact of the event on the cultural climate of the city and its image as a cultural destination. A total of 10 interviews were completed in 2002/03.

Research Findings

Visitors to the RCH 2001 Event

The overall visitor profile for the event as revealed by the RCH 2001 study was not significantly different from that of previous studies of cultural attractions and events undertaken by ATLAS in the Netherlands and elsewhere (Richards, 2001). The respondents

were divided almost evenly between male and female. Over half the respondents were over the age of 40, underlining the appeal of 'high' culture events to an older audience. Over 70 per cent of the sample was either employed or self-employed, with significant groups of retired people (12 per cent) and students (9 per cent). The visitors were predominantly from managerial or professional backgrounds, and the vast majority (over 70 per cent) have a higher education qualification. The relatively high status of the respondents is underlined by the fact that almost 40 per cent of the sample had annual incomes above 40 000 Euros.

The final sample of visitors to the Rotterdam ECC 2001 event consisted of 48 per cent local residents, 35 per cent domestic tourists and 17 per cent foreign tourists. A comparison with representative visitor surveys held at the same events indicated that our sample contained fewer local residents and more foreign tourists than the total visitor population to the Rotterdam ECC.

Visitors' Image of Rotterdam

Image components. The aspects of the city image that were most striking for both resi-

dents and tourists visiting Rotterdam ECC 2001 events were the designative, physical attributes of *modern architecture* and the *water* in the city (see Table 2). These are followed by four appraisive image components: Rotterdam as a *multicultural* city, a *working* city, its *international* orientation and its *dynamism*. These elements of the image all stem from the function of Rotterdam as a major international port and a major industrial centre. In essence, these components define the character of the city as seen by both residents and visitors. *Culture and art* is still a relatively highly rated appraisive image component, illustrating that the Rotterdam ECC has been successful in raising the profile of art and culture facilities in the city. *Events*, *shopping* and particularly *nightlife* score lower as designative image aspects, perhaps because these may be perceived as more general urban amenities that are not used by all visitors.

Perhaps most significantly, the appraisive components *cosy* and *unsafe* score the lowest. Because these components are related to people's personal feelings about the city (they can both be classified as appraisive-affective), clearly the city does not affect visitors very strongly on a personal level. This implies that the city lacks the 'atmosphere' necessary to affect visitors either in a positive or a negative sense. Rotterdam is not really seen as a cosy city, apart from by Rotterdammers. The majority of visitors do not feel that Rotterdam is unsafe, but Rotterdammers feel more unsafe than tourists, perhaps because they are more aware of the crime that does take place. Dutch tourists from outside Rotterdam tend to imagine Rotterdam in terms of its physical features and appraisive aspects such as 'multicultural', 'international' and 'dynamic'. Residents of Rotterdam tended to be much more positive about their city than tourists in terms of the strength of their agreement with favourable image attributes.

Some of the image attributes for Rotterdam are strongly correlated with each other and also with other aspects of the visitor experience. For example, positive responses

to the association of Rotterdam with events are most highly correlated with associations with *art and culture* and *lots to discover*. There is also a significant positive correlation ($r^2 = 0.484$) between the score given for the event's programme and the score for Rotterdam as a tourism destination, which suggests that the ECC event had some positive impact on the image of Rotterdam as a tourist destination. The image of Rotterdam as a city with lots of events was also positively correlated with its score as a tourism destination. This indicates that visitors who perceive the city as an event city also see it as more attractive because of the existence of events.

A comparison of 10 image indicators common to the current study and image research undertaken in 2000 by Rotterdam Marketing (WEMAR, 2000) indicates that the score for art and culture was considerably higher in 2001 (see Table 3). Culture was ranked 10th by the 2000 respondents compared with a ranking of 5th for visitors to the Rotterdam ECC event in 2001. Although this difference can be partly explained by a more positive reaction among the more culturally orientated visitors to the actual ECC event, a survey of residents of Rotterdam and the rest of the Netherlands carried out in 2001 by the *Algemeen Dagblad*, a Rotterdam-based national newspaper, also indicated an 11 per cent rise in the 'cultural rating' of the city over the same period (Hamerlynck, 2001). Although the ranking of *art and culture* among the image attributes of Rotterdam apparently increased in 2001 among both those who had visited Rotterdam and non-visitors, the traditional image aspects of the city remained dominant (Table 3). A rank correlation between image attributes in the current ECC 2001 study and the WEMAR 2000 Rotterdam image study indicated a high degree of consistency in the ranking of most of the common attributes ($r^2 = 0.73$).

When looking at the image of Rotterdam according to visitor characteristics, significant differences are evident. For example, women are far more likely to agree that Rotterdam is a centre for culture and art and events than men. Younger respondents tend

Table 3. Rotterdam image attributes before and during the RCH 2001 event (percentage of respondents agreeing with attribute)

Image attribute of Rotterdam	WEMAR 2000 study	<i>Algemeen Dagblad</i> 2001 study	RCH 2001 study
Modern architecture	69		80
Water/harbour	88	98	80
Multicultural	69		76
Working city	79	89	75
Culture and art	42	53	58
Events	51		55
Shopping	71		50
Nightlife	57	64	38
Cosy (<i>gezelligheid</i>)	46		32
Unsafe	45	40	18

to think Rotterdam is a more international, multicultural city, which they associate more positively with shopping, nightlife and events. Older respondents tend to emphasise the dynamism of Rotterdam and its associations with water; images with a more traditional basis that reflect the city's sea port orientation. A similar division is evident when looking at students and retired people. Events as an image associated with Rotterdam tend to be emphasised by students and those in employment far more than retired respondents, which may suggest that the current events policy does not provide as much benefit for senior citizens.

When looking at foreign respondents, there are some marked differences according to tourist origin. For example, French tourists tend not to agree that Rotterdam is a multicultural city, possibly because they also tend to visit high culture events with low ethnic minority participation. German tourists tend to see the city as more international than French tourists. Belgian respondents also tend to see Rotterdam as more international, as well as being linked to culture and art, architecture, shopping, dynamic, lots to discover and having lots of events. In spite of the initial assumption that the more positive attitude of the Belgian tourists might relate to a high frequency of visitation (due to the geographical proximity of Belgium to the Netherlands), there was no significant differ-

ence in image attributes by extent of previous visitation.

Relationships between place image and reasons for visiting Rotterdam. The reaction to the different image attributes for Rotterdam varied according to the visitation patterns of respondents. Tourists coming to Rotterdam for the first time were significantly less likely to agree totally with the attributes than others, probably because they did not have enough information to make a firm judgement about the nature of the city. The image of the city therefore appears to become stronger with a higher frequency of visitation (hence a higher degree of familiarity), although the greatest difference is found between first-time visitors and those who have visited only once or twice before. It seems that the image of the city is sharpened considerably between the first and the second or third visits, with subsequent visits having considerably less impact.

There were also significant differences in image in terms of purpose of visit. Those coming to Rotterdam specifically for the ECC event tended to see Rotterdam as an international city with modern architecture. Interestingly these respondents tended to see Rotterdam less as a cultural city or a centre for events. This may be because people with a specific motivation for visiting Rotterdam as ECC had higher expectations than those visiting as part of a holiday or business trip.

Tourists who agreed most strongly with the image attributes for Rotterdam were also more likely to be highly satisfied with their visit. This suggests that those people who identified most closely with the image that Rotterdam promotes are also most likely to be satisfied with their visit to the city and the event. This underlines the importance of ensuring that visitor experiences of the city are realistic against their expectations. In addition, tourists who saw Rotterdam as a suitable destination for a cultural holiday were also significantly more likely to be satisfied with their visit to the city. These tourists were also more likely to see Rotterdam as a cultural and art city.

The image of Rotterdam relative to other cities. One aspect of the image assessment of Rotterdam was to ask visitors to evaluate Rotterdam and a number of other cities as cultural destinations (Figure 2). This question was posed in previous years during the ATLAS surveys in different European countries, and was also posed in other locations during 2001. This makes it possible to judge the image effects of the Rotterdam ECC event over time as well as providing an additional measure of the image impacts of the event for people who did not visit Rotterdam in 2001.

When the image of Rotterdam is measured against other European cities over time, it is clear that the Rotterdam ECC had a positive effect on the image of the city in 2001. The proportion of respondents to the ATLAS surveys conducted outside Rotterdam indicating that they considered Rotterdam to be in the top 5 cultural destinations in Europe increased from under 3 per cent in 1999 to 5 per cent in 2001. Rotterdam consequently rose from 20th place to 15th place in the ranking of 22 European cities as cultural destinations in the ATLAS survey.

Tourism data also indicate a short-term increase of tourists to Rotterdam in 2002, with an increasing percentage of foreign tourists within this (Table 4). However, the total tourist hotel nights decreased slightly in 2003, implying that effects on tourism had

been short-term. Also interesting was that the percentage of foreign tourists dropped against domestic tourists in hotels during the ECC year itself but returned to the 2000 level after the event.

Perspectives of the Rotterdam Cultural Sector

The interviews conducted with policy-makers, event organisers and venue managers in Rotterdam were also important in interpreting the image effects of the event. Most of the interview respondents felt that the ECC 2001 event had a positive impact on the image of Rotterdam, although there were differential effects within the city.

The event gave an extra impulse in displaying the cultural face of Rotterdam to people from outside the city. However, there was little image change among local residents, except for those in the cultural sector (Rotterdam Festivals).

One of the problems identified by interviewees was the ambitious nature of the event programme, which made it difficult to 'read' for those outside the cultural sector. Some of the most successful events were smaller innovative projects, which lowered the overall visibility of the event, particularly for the local audience. "In 2001 people didn't experience a big event ... If you didn't look for it, you didn't see it" (journalist, *Algemeen Dagblad*). The few major events, such as the Hieronymus Bosch exhibition that attracted over 200 000 visitors, did have an impact: "I've never seen so many queues in Rotterdam. People suddenly said, 'Here's something good'" (journalist, *Algemeen Dagblad*).

Many interviewees made a clear distinction between cultural visitors and other visitors. Most accepted that the cultural capital attracted mainly those people who visit culture anyway, rather than reaching significant new audiences. Rotterdam was not intended as a 'mass event' and therefore did not try and reach the culturally uninterested. This harvested criticism from many residents and local media, who complained that there was

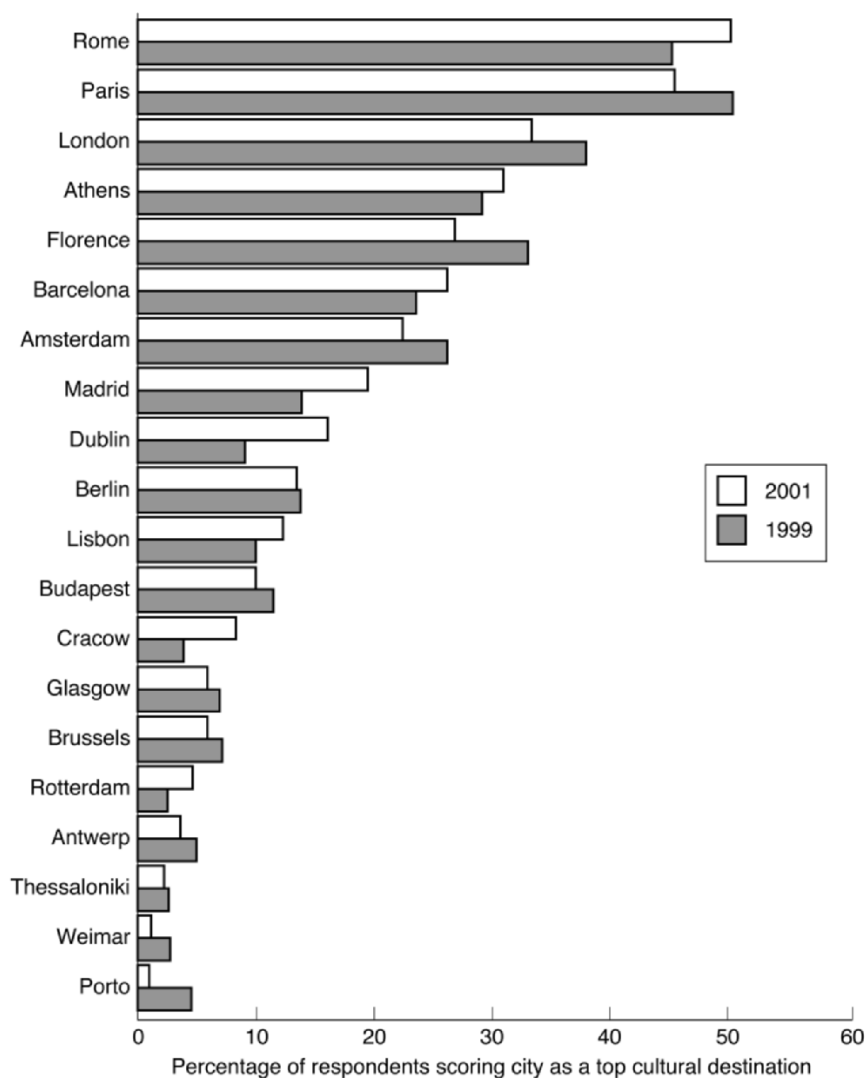


Figure 2. The image of Rotterdam in 1999 and 2001.

little in the programme for local people (journalist, *Algemeen Dagblad*). Those involved in organising the event, however, maintain that “These people never go to cultural events anyway” (Marketing Department, Rotterdam Historical Museum). As outlined above, the event aimed for improvement in the city’s cultural infrastructure in terms of cultural participation, facilities and activities. However, the visitor surveys indicated no evidence of a significant extension of cultural consumption to new groups. In addition, almost no physical development of

cultural facilities was undertaken specifically for the Rotterdam ECC 2001 event (unlike with the Porto ECC 2001, where a new concert hall—the *Casa de Música*—and a new museum were constructed specially). The main cultural infrastructure benefits in Rotterdam are therefore only likely to be seen in the long term, if some of the activities developed as part of the 2001 programme are repeated. The cultural sector respondents also expressed general satisfaction in terms of the economic benefits gained (a total visitor spend estimated at €105 mil-

Table 4. Visitors staying in hotels in Rotterdam 2000–03

Year	Total hotel guests in Rotterdam	Percentage of Foreign tourists	Percentage of all overnight stays in the Netherlands
2000	462 400	59.6	2.97
2001	511 800	54.9	3.40
2002	462 800	62.4	3.09
2003 ^a	188 300		2.79

^a First six months only.

lion against a total budget of €24 million), but there was a perception among the cultural venues that the commercial sector benefited more from these than the cultural attractions.

The respondents generally acknowledged that there was little use made of the 'European' aspects of the event. Although Rotterdam was designated as ECC together with Porto, the links between the two cities were weak, apart from one or two joint activities. The organisers of Porto 2001 in particular were critical of Rotterdam, indicating that they felt there was little willingness on the part of their Dutch counterparts to work together (interviews with Teresa Lago and Pedro Burmester, Porto, 2003).

Overall, the consensus was not that the cultural capital event achieved spectacular improvements to the image of Rotterdam; rather, it was viewed largely as one part of the long process of revitalisation of the city. Following the physical redevelopment after the Second World War, there was a need to add cultural elements to the existing economic fabric, explaining why Rotterdam has therefore expended a lot of effort in recent years in developing cultural events and facilities in order to improve the cultural image of the city. Interviewees generally felt that the ECC event could be seen as the crowning glory of this effort. In reality, however, the event may mark the end of a major phase in the city's history, as the election of a more conservative local government in 2002 might have the effect of reducing funding for culture, making the continuation of previous investments much more difficult.

People used to call Rotterdam an ugly

city ... but this has changed during the past 15 years. The Cultural Capital in 2001 is closing a period when the Labour Party tried to create a diverse cultural image for Rotterdam ... [following the elections] ... I think the cultural image of Rotterdam will change dramatically (Rotterdam Historical Museum).

However, some respondents are confident that the momentum created by the ECC event will continue

because the local government has changed everyone is very anxious that [the improvements in the cultural climate] will not continue ... but the energy is there (Cultural Department, Rotterdam).

One of the ways in which the city is planning to capitalise on the momentum of the ECC event is through the organisation of another cultural year to be called Rotterdam 2005. At the same time, there is also a feeling that the 2001 cultural capital event was a distinct one-off. The event was different from most of the other major events developed in Rotterdam because it had no history or developmental trajectory and thus there was less chance to learn lessons from it or to anchor the event in its local context. During 2001, there were plans to create an archive of the event, which would act as a reference source for future events in Rotterdam and other cities, but this plan dissipated after the 2001 event was completed. There was also the feeling that a longer-term view was needed in order to assess the effects of the event and

as one respondent from the Development Corporation noted: "a year is not long enough to notice a change in the image of Rotterdam". However, long-term image monitoring is now likely to be linked to the 'large events policy' being developed by the city.

The findings from the interviews reflect to a large extent those of the visitor surveys. In general, the image effects of 2001 are viewed in a positive light, but debate remains as to the differential effects of image change among residents and tourists and about the durability of the positive image effects of Rotterdam as European Cultural Capital, 2001.

Conclusions

The research presented here illustrates different aspects of the complex process of stimulating image change through a major cultural event. The data indicate a marked positive change in the image of Rotterdam, among residents and external audiences, at least immediately following the event. This general satisfaction with the return on investment in the event seems justified, particularly when compared with the results of the Porto 2001 ECC, which invested far more but obtained fewer benefits in terms of either image change or economic impact (Richards *et al.* 2002).

However, the image impacts observed in Rotterdam also underlined their complexity. The image of Rotterdam seems to be strongly differentiated in terms of its components and in terms of the image held by different groups of visitors and thus it is clear that we need to start talking about 'images' rather than 'image'. In general, the image components identified most strongly by respondents were the designative and tangible aspects of the cityscape, such as *modern architecture* and *water*. The appraisive-evaluative image components associated with the 'character' of Rotterdam, such as *multicultural*, *working city*, *international* and *dynamic* also scored very highly. *Culture and art* also seem to have scored relatively highly compared with

other components related to the facilities or amenities available in the city, which suggests a positive impact of the ECC on the image of Rotterdam as a cultural city by at least adding a cultural dimension to the existing images. Unfortunately the appraisive-affective components of the image of Rotterdam score lowest, indicating that the city provokes a rather neutral affective response and image formation has taken place at a more superficial and uninvolved level. This perhaps suggests that Rotterdam is lacking in the ambience/atmosphere that many cultural destinations strive for in order to complement the hard cultural infrastructure (allowing visitors to make a more emotional connection with the city).

The components of the image of Rotterdam identified by visitors to the ECC also vary considerably according to visitor origin, age, status and gender, with different groups having distinctive common evaluations of image components. In general, Rotterdammers tend to have a stronger and more positive image of their own city. Dutch tourists from other parts of the country tend to score Rotterdam higher in terms of its physical features and appraisive-evaluative aspects such as 'multicultural', 'international' and 'dynamic'. This may reflect the fact that Rotterdam has "an almost 'American' urban form" (Russo and van der Borg, 2002, p. 634), boasting the highest concentration of tall buildings and the largest proportion of ethnic minority population in the Netherlands. Domestic tourists may therefore see Rotterdam as a big international city in comparison with other Dutch cities. Foreign tourists, on the other hand, tend to score Rotterdam lower on image attributes across the board, indicating that they have a weaker, more diffuse image of the city as a whole. This study therefore suggests that the different components of place image identified in the literature can be useful in analysing the image effects of events.

A comparison of the research conducted in Rotterdam during the ECC event in 2001 with previous studies of European city image shows that Rotterdam improved its ranking

in the field of European cultural tourism destinations in 2001. The proportion of respondents seeing Rotterdam as a suitable destination for a cultural holiday rose from under 3 per cent in 1999 to 5 per cent in 2001. This still places Rotterdam way behind the established cultural capitals such as London and Paris, but it has gained ground on closer rivals, such as Antwerp and Glasgow. This indicates that the ECC event has had a positive impact on the image of the city in the short term, although whether the image improvements and increased tourist hotel nights can be sustained long term remains to be seen. There is indeed a potential paradox in using a cultural event that already has a strong brand (Evans, 2003) to try and create an image for an individual city. Research among Dutch tour operators has indicated that tourist demand tends to follow the Cultural Capital as an event each year, rather than producing a long-term demand for short-break packages to a particular host city (Richards *et al.*, 2001).

The findings underline the importance of including image assessment in the evaluation of major events, but there are also some wider implications for the study of events in general. Given the differences in city image encountered for different visitor groups, event organisers need to be aware that visitor perceptions of the event's host city are unlikely to be homogeneous. This could have a significant effect on the composition of the audience attracted to an event and may well have implications for the way in which events can be effectively marketed. This seems to be particularly important for domestic tourists, whose image of the event location may be more positive in some aspects than that held by local residents. Foreign tourists, on the other hand, may have a much less coherent image of the place and may be more inclined to attend because of the content of the event rather than its immediate location.

The differentiation of image among visitor groups is also reflected among policy-makers, who felt that the event had done little to change the image of the city for the local

population. For Rotterdammers, Rotterdam is already a Cultural Capital, but culture as appreciated by locals is not the high culture that attracts outsiders. This also emphasises the difficulty of providing for different audiences within a single coherent programme. The complex theme developed for the Rotterdam ECC event did succeed in reaching a wide range of participants, but was less successful in attracting a diverse audience to individual events of a given cultural type.

Future ECC events may have to consider whether the ECC is a suitable tool for reaching specific policy objectives or whether it is only useful as a short-term promotional device. There is also the matter of whether positive effects from an ECC event alone can continue to provide benefits for the host city, or whether events can only realistically be seen as one part of an overall growth strategy, as has been the case with Glasgow. Indeed, Sjøholt (1999) argues that high expectations of boosting growth long-term by means of events like the ECC may be unrealistic. Rather, Sjøholt suggests—with reference to the 2000 ECC in Bergen—that the lasting cultural value of the ECC might instead be in the international contacts and networks that have been cemented (although, as the interview quotes from the Porto 2001 ECC above show, international links forged for ECC events may be superficial and ephemeral in reality).

Potentially, the most interesting question to be addressed in future research relates to the durability of the positive image effects caused by such events. An interesting aspect of the follow-up research on the effects of the Rotterdam ECC will be the extent to which the city can sustain the image improvements it gained in 2001. The experience of other cities indicates that it is difficult to maintain such gains unless there is a structured programme of cultural development in subsequent years as well. In the case of Glasgow—for example, the effects of the ECC in terms of visits to cultural attractions in the city declined rapidly after 1990 and this decline was only reversed after 1996 with the opening of a new modern art mu-

seum and the staging of the European Year of Architecture in 1999 (Richards, 2001). The durability of such effects could be examined through longer-term longitudinal research, undertaking periodic measurement of the image of event locations before, during and after the event. In undertaking such studies, it would also be salient to measure the different components/dimensions of place imagery and to assess which image components are affected most strongly by the event. This would also allow the contribution of events to the overall reimagining of city destinations to be more accurately assessed.

Finally, further attention should be paid to imagery as represented by different groups, allowing due consideration of the wider picture of the appropriateness of major cultural events as a reimagining strategy for contemporary cities with a range of social and cultural justice issues. As Jansson (2003) has argued, there can never be an intersubjectively shared city image and the more effort that is put into the projection of dominant images, the more this image creation probably overlooks the complexities of social life. In other words, before celebrating any success in modifying a city's image following a major cultural event, it is pertinent to ensure that more than just the overt, dominant representations of image are considered.

Notes

1. Originally, the ECC event was geared to EC (later EU) member-states, although non-EU members such as Norway have since hosted the event (for example, in Bergen, 2000). Stockholm, for example, was selected to host the 1998 ECC event prior to joining the European Union.
2. 'Cosy' is a literal translation of the Dutch word *gezellig*, but the term in Dutch has much wider connotations, describing the atmosphere of a place, the company present or the enjoyment of an event or gathering.

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