

On the red carpet

Expats in Rotterdam and The Hague



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1. Introduction

In a range of Dutch cities, in recent years a policy has been developed which is specifically directed to knowledge workers or expatriates – often simply called *expats*. Special expat information centers were opened in, among other cities, The Hague, Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Leiden and Eindhoven. Rotterdam, the city which forms the central focus of this research, established an Expat Desk at the end of 2008. Although differences exist regarding the exact design of such expat desks, they share the objective of giving expats a ‘red carpet welcome’ to make their stay more comfortable and to make them feel at home in the city. The expat desks’ services vary from offering help with the application for a residence permit to providing practical information about housing, health care and education.

The establishment of specific expat desks in the Netherlands reflects an international trend of countries and urban regions competing for international human capital (Ewers 2007: 120). National and local governments increasingly try to create favorable living and working conditions for expats. In contrast with other types of migrants, expats experience an enabling policy environment, rather than a restrictive one. The German sociologist Thomas Faist (2008) argues regarding highly skilled migrants that there has been a shift from a ‘red card’ to a ‘red carpet’ strategy.

Despite the increased attention to expats in national and urban policy, up until now not much is known about the experiences of these ‘welcome guests’ themselves. Are they attached to the city they live in? And what do expats think should be done to make the city a more attractive living environment? To answer these and other questions, we conducted research among more than one hundred expats in Rotterdam and The Hague.¹

1.1 Research questions

In the – mainly international – literature on expats, these temporary migrants are often characterized as globetrotters or cosmopolitans. They are perceived as people who mainly have ‘thin’ global ties, instead of ‘thick’ local ties (cf. Turner 2001: 241). At the same time, however, policy makers are convinced of the importance of attracting expats and retaining them for the city. There seems to be a contradiction between the image of expats as cosmopolitans and of expats as urban citizens. By studying expats’ cross-border and local ties, we hope to gain more insight into this possible tension.

The first two research questions, which will be answered based on 75 interviews with expats in Rotterdam, are:

1. What cross-border activities do expats undertake and to what extent do they feel attached to people and places abroad?
2. What urban activities do expats undertake and to what extent do they feel attached to the city and its residents?

¹ This report is based on the publication *Over de rode loper. Kennismigranten in Rotterdam en Den Haag*, published in 2010 by Nicis Institute and available online (see www.nicis.nl). We wish to thank the respondents for their valuable time and effort. This research was supported with grants from Nicis Institute, ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius and the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS).

The third research question focuses on how expats evaluate the local living environment and expat policy. We make a comparison between the 75 interviews conducted in Rotterdam and 30 additional interviews with expats in The Hague. A comparison between Rotterdam and The Hague is interesting, because both cities present themselves as ‘world cities’ – The Hague calls itself ‘Legal Capital of the World’ and Rotterdam uses the name ‘World Port World City’ – and both try to offer an attractive living environment for expats. However, whereas The Hague has a long tradition of providing specific expat services, Rotterdam has only recently adopted such a policy. The following question will be answered:

3. How do expats in Rotterdam and The Hague evaluate the local policy and what do they think should be done to make the city more attractive for expats?

1.2 Research design

Between June 2008 and October 2009, 75 interviews in Rotterdam and 30 interviews in The Hague were conducted. The respondents met the following criteria:

- They live in Rotterdam or The Hague, or in one of the surrounding suburbs²;
- They came to the Netherlands because of their own (highly skilled) job or because of the highly skilled job of their partner³;
- When the interview was conducted, they had lived in the Netherlands for a period of between six months and six years⁴.

Various strategies were used to recruit respondents. First of all, we have contacted various (public and private) organizations that deal with expats, such as The American International School of Rotterdam (AISR), The Rotterdam International Secondary School (RISS), the Chamber of Commerce, InTouch Rotterdam, the Expatriate Archive Centre in The Hague and the expat desks of Rotterdam and The Hague. Furthermore, we have visited meetings where expats could be found, such as school parents meetings, coffee mornings for spouses, religious services and the ‘I am not a tourist’ fair organized by Expatica. Some of the interviewers were (former) expats themselves and contacted people from their own social network. We also used snowball sampling, which means that respondents were asked if they knew any other expats who could be interviewed. The respondents were interviewed on a face-to-face basis, using a questionnaire consisting of open- and closed-ended questions. The interviews generally took between 1.5 and 2 hours. Since the respondents were not randomly selected, there is no guarantee that the results of this research are representative for the whole population of expats in Rotterdam and The Hague.

² The included suburbs of Rotterdam are Capelle aan den IJssel, Barendrecht and Lansingerland. In The Hague, they are Rijswijk, Wassenaar, Leidschendam-Voorburg and Zoetermeer.

³ By ‘highly skilled’ we mean a job which requires at least higher vocational education.

⁴ These restrictions concerning the expats’ length of stay were placed because we are interested in people who have temporarily settled in the city, but who have been there long enough to talk about the different aspects of city life which are central to this research.

1.3 Respondent characteristics

In selecting respondents, we strove to obtain a varied group regarding sex, type of respondent (expat or partner), age and nationality. Below, we give an overview of some important background characteristics.

Sex

In both cities, a majority of the respondents are women. This can be explained by the fact that most of the partners, who came to the Netherlands because of their partner's job, are women.

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|--------|-----------|-----------|
| Male | 29 (39%) | 11 (37%) |
| Female | 46 (61%) | 19 (63%) |

Type of respondent

Almost all male respondents came to the Netherlands because of their own job; only one respondent (in Rotterdam) came because of his wife's work. Of the female respondents in Rotterdam, 24 came because of their own job and 22 because of their partner's job. In The Hague, 14 female respondents are partners and 5 are expats themselves.⁵

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Expat | 52 (69%) | 16 (53%) |
| Partner | 23 (31%) | 14 (47%) |

Arrival and stay in the Netherlands

About two thirds of the respondents in both cities came to the Netherlands because they were sent out by their (partner's) company. Most others came to the Netherlands because of the perceived career opportunities in their field of expertise. Some respondents came to study and found a job after they were graduated.

More than half of the respondents in Rotterdam and The Hague lived in the Netherlands between one and two years when the interview was held. More than three quarters of the 'Rotterdam' expats live in the city itself; the others live in one of the suburbs. About two thirds of the 'The Hague' respondents live in the city; most of the others live in Wassenaar and Leidschendam-Voorburg.

⁵ In this report, the term 'expat' is used both for respondents who came to the Netherlands because of their own job and for respondents who came because of their partner's job. We will only distinguish between types of respondents in the cases where important differences exist.

Age

Most respondents in Rotterdam are between the ages of 25 and 45. In The Hague, the average age is somewhat higher, between 25 and 55. The youngest respondent in Rotterdam is 20, the oldest 55. In The Hague the youngest is 25 and the oldest 66.

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Younger than 25 | 3 (4%) | 1 (3%) |
| 25 to 35 | 38 (51%) | 9 (30%) |
| 35 to 45 | 24 (32%) | 8 (27%) |
| 45 to 55 | 9 (12%) | 10 (33%) |
| 55 and older | 1 (1%) | 2 (7%) |

Family situation

Of the 29 male respondents in Rotterdam, 13 are married, 2 have a partner but are not married and 14 are single. Among the male respondents in The Hague, 7 are married, 1 has a partner but is not married and 4 are single. Of the 29 male respondents in Rotterdam, 10 have one or more children, and in The Hague, 8 out of 11.

Among the female respondents, a distinction can be made between the expats and the partners. Almost all of the women who came to the Netherlands because of their partner's job are married; 3 live together but are not married. Most of these female partners have one or more children. Among the female expats, marriage is far less common: only 1 respondent (in Rotterdam) is married. Of the female expats in Rotterdam, 10 do have a partner but are not married; 13 are single. In The Hague, 2 female expats have a partner, and 3 are single. Except for the married woman in Rotterdam, none of the female expat respondents has children.

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Married | 33 (44%) | 21 (70%) |
| Partner, not married | 15 (20%) | 3 (10%) |
| Single | 27 (36%) | 8 (20%) |

Job level

Almost all expat respondents have a job that requires a university degree. A majority of the partners do not have a paid job.

| Expats | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Higher vocational education | 2 (4%) | 1 (6%) |
| University | 48 (92%) | 15 (94%) |
| Other | 2 (4%) | - |

| Partners | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| No paid job | 16 (70%) | 11 (79%) |
| Intermediate vocational education | 2 (9%) | - |
| Higher vocational education | - | 1 (7%) |
| University | 4 (17%) | 1 (7%) |
| Other | 1 (4%) | 1 (7%) |

Job type and salary

The expat respondents work in various sectors. In Rotterdam, the company they work for is often related to the harbor, such as Maersk or Hoyer Global Transport. Other respondents in Rotterdam work for architectural offices (such as Mecanoo in Delft or KCAP in Rotterdam), have an academic position (mainly at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Delft University of Technology), or work for a large multinational company such as Unilever or Shell. Some of the expat respondents in The Hague also work for a multinational (for instance Shell or BHP Billiton). Others work for one of the region's international judicial organizations, such as the European Patent Office (EPO) in Rijswijk.

The net monthly income of the expats varies considerably. About half of the expat respondents in Rotterdam and The Hague earn between 1,500 and 3,000 euro per month. These are mainly female expats who are still at the beginning of their careers and who are, for instance, PhD students at a university. About a third of the respondents earn between 3,000 and 6,000 per month. The remainder, mainly male expats, have an income of more than 6,000 euro per month.

Nationality

In this research, 35 different nationalities are represented. Next to the nationalities listed below, there are respondents who, for instance, have a Pakistani, Indian, Taiwanese, South Korean, Malaysian, Russian, Turkish, Danish, or Estonian

passport. Four respondents (3 in Rotterdam and 1 in The Hague) have Dutch nationality. Of these respondents, 2 have dual nationality. The other 2 were born in the Netherlands and left the country at an early age.

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| American | 13 (17%) | 11 (37%) |
| British | 9 (12%) | 2 (7%) |
| German | 6 (8%) | - |
| French | 5 (7%) | 1 (3%) |
| Japanese | 5 (7%) | - |
| Polish | 4 (5%) | 1 (3%) |
| Chinese | 3 (4%) | - |
| South African | 3 (4%) | - |
| Portuguese | 3 (4%) | 1 (3%) |
| Italian | 2 (3%) | 3 (10%) |
| Canadian | 2 (3%) | 3 (10%) |
| Australian | 2 (3%) | 2 (7%) |

1.4 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows. In chapter 2, we answer the first research question, focusing on the cross-border activities and feelings of belonging of expats in Rotterdam. Among other things, we investigate their migration history and the composition of their circle of friends.

Chapter 3 focuses on the second research question, namely to what extent expats in Rotterdam can be seen as ‘urban citizens’. We pay attention to the activities expats undertake in the city, their contact with other Rotterdam citizens, and their opinion on ‘integrating’ into Dutch and Rotterdam society.

In chapter 4, the third research question will be answered. We investigate how the respondents in Rotterdam and The Hague evaluate several municipal services and to what extent they appreciate the city’s living environment.

In the final chapter, we summarize the most important findings of this research and give some policy recommendations for improving the quality of expat services.



2. Expats as cosmopolitans

As we mentioned in the introduction, relatively little empirical research has been done on the experiences of knowledge workers or expats. This is especially true for the Dutch situation. Despite this lack of research, in literature on citizenship and globalization, often statements are made about expats. In such studies expats are often seen as 'anti citizens', which has to do with two stereotypical images expats have: (1) that they do not have local ties, (2) that they live in an 'expat bubble'.

The first image is reflected in the work of the American organization sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter. According to her, expats are cosmopolitans who are not rooted in a local or national community. These 'world citizens' are tolerant toward various cultures and feel at home anywhere. In her book *World Class*, she writes:

'Cosmopolitans are card-carrying members of the world class – often literally card carrying, with passports or air tickets serving to admit them. They lead companies that are linked to global change. Comfortable in many places and able to understand and bridge the differences among them, cosmopolitans possess portable skills and a broad outlook. But it is not travel that defines cosmopolitans – some widely travelled people remain hopelessly parochial – it is a mind-set.' (1995: 22-23)

The second image of expats is that they do have very strong ties, but that these are restricted to their own expat community, sometimes called the 'expat bubble' (cf. Fechter 2007). According to this view, expats' outlook is not universalistic, but rather very particularistic. René Cuperus, a Dutch publicist and columnist, writes in his book *De wereldburger bestaat niet*:⁶

'Cosmopolitanism is supposed to be an uninhibited curiosity toward and celebration of cultural differences and lifestyles. However, this is the opposite of the 'cosmopolitanism' of the international jet set, living in their privileged gated communities and practicing an 'our-kind-of-people cosmopolitanism'. Although they preach that they 'feel at home everywhere on the planet', they move from one expat community to another. These communities are as identical as the international schools their cosmopolitan children attend.' (2009: 28, translation from Dutch by the authors)

In this chapter, we investigate to what extent these two dominant images of expats are applicable to the respondents interviewed in Rotterdam. First, we pay attention to their migration history and prospects. Are they really 'unrooted globetrotters' who move from one place to another, or do they think about staying longer in the Netherlands? Second, we study the composition of expats' social networks and answer the question of with whom do they identify themselves. Do they really live in an 'expat bubble'?

⁶ In English this means something like 'There is no such thing as a world citizen.'

2.1 Unrooted globetrotters?

We asked the respondents in what countries they lived before coming to the Netherlands (migration history) and what their plans are for the future (migration prospects).

Migration history

We asked the respondents if they have ever been in a country other than their country of origin for a period of six months or longer. For two thirds of the respondents, this is indeed the case.

Thirty respondents went abroad before because of their study, for instance as an Erasmus Exchange Student, part of the European Union student exchange program. Some of the respondents have been in the Netherlands as a student, as a result of which they already knew the country to some extent before they came there as an expat.

More than half of the respondents are living abroad for the first time because of their (partner's) job. Only a very few expats resemble the image of the unrooted globetrotter. One respondent, who lived in eight different countries in the past twenty years, could be said to fit this stereotypical image.

Table 2.1: Previous stay abroad for a period of six months or longer, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Previous stay abroad | Number of respondents |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Never before | 24 |
| Once before | 26 |
| Two or three times before | 16 |
| Four or five times before | 8 |
| More than five times before | 1 |

Frequently mentioned earlier destinations of the – mainly 'Western' – expats are cities in Europe and North-America. Cities in 'non-Western' countries are mentioned far less often. Relatively few examples exist of the classic cosmopolitan who got to know various 'exotic' cultures. When expats talk about cosmopolitanism, they mostly refer to experiencing different cultures within a Western context, for instance when they speak highly of the multicultural character of London, Toronto or Amsterdam.

'I like London, because it's a melting pot of very different cultures. It's a modern city; you can really develop any kind of interest there. And Toronto, I love it, it's well organized, clean, and there is a mix of cultures.' (woman, 37, Italian nationality, expat)

'Amsterdam is really attractive for expats. Because there are more expats there, it feels international and cosmo-politan. Yeah, that's the reason.' (woman, 39, French nationality, expat)

Migration prospects

To learn more about the expats' migration prospects for the near future, we asked them when, according to their (partner's) contract, their stay in the Netherlands will end. Combined with the year and month of arrival, we were able to calculate their expected length of stay.

Table 2.2: Expected length of stay according to the expats' contracts, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Length of stay | Number of respondents |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Six months to a year | 5 |
| Two or three years | 24 |
| Four or five years | 13 |
| Six or seven years | 2 |
| No final date set | 31 |

More than half of the respondents expect their stay in the Netherlands to last between two and five years. It is striking to see how many respondents do not yet know when they will leave. In their (partner's) contract, no final date is set.

We also asked the respondents if they would like to stay longer in the Netherlands. How the respondents interpreted this question largely depended on their specific circumstances. For some, 'longer' meant 'until after the final date set in their (partner's) contract'; others understood it as 'a few more years' and for yet others it meant 'for good'. Despite this variety in views, not much difference seems to exist between respondents who have a final date set in their contract and ones who do not. Among both these groups about half of the respondents would certainly like to stay longer and a smaller number would perhaps.

Table 2.3: Desire to stay longer in the Netherlands, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Wishes to stay longer | Number of respondents |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | 5 |
| Maybe | 24 |
| No | 13 |

The reasons why some respondents wish to stay and why others prefer to leave often concern similar issues. For instance, some would like to stay longer because of the job opportunities they see in the Netherlands, whereas others expect those opportunities to be better in other countries. Compare the following quotations:

'I like working here. I got used to the way they work here, and I never worked in Portugal, so I think I won't adjust there, and the rules are different. I don't see myself going back, for now.' (woman, 26, Portuguese nationality, expat)

'Multiple factors are decisive for my stay here. Currently the economy is really bad, especially for architects, so it is not the right moment to look for possibilities. But my dream is to start my own office, and doing that in a foreign country is substantially more difficult, for instance regarding administrative things, than doing it in your native country, in my case Poland.' (man, 29, Polish nationality, expat)

Besides work, social factors play an important role in the decision whether to stay or not. Some respondents would like to stay longer because they do not want to disrupt their children's education. Others primarily want to leave because of their children.

'Both my husband and I have lived in many countries, so living abroad is not such a big challenge. But when you have a child it actually brings a different dimension. How should my child be raised, that is the big question. We are somewhat transient here, even if we decide to stay five more years. We are not staying twenty years. But I don't want to be pulling my daughter halfway through primary school to a different country. That is the main decision factor.' (woman, 39, French nationality, partner)

'I don't want to stay longer, because of my family. My children are very young: the first is 3 years old, the second 3 months. It's quite difficult for my wife to look after them. I mean, we have no care assistance. In Korea we can get some support from other family members. But here, we have to do everything by ourselves.' (man, 32, South Korean nationality, expat)

Whereas some respondents say they want to leave to experience life in other countries, others say they are finally settled in the Netherlands and in the short turn do not want to have to get through that process again.

'Actually, I want to go back to Turkey, so, no, I do not want to stay longer. Well, I'm not sure if I will go to Turkey, I eventually will, but first I would like to try something else. I mean another culture and another country. I guess I will apply for different countries like the US, or Hong Kong, or Australia. Then, after two years or so, I will go back to Istanbul.' (woman, 30, Turkish nationality, expat)

'Maybe I will stay here longer. I like to live here and also I did some effort to learn the language, to integrate, and that took some energy from me. And I don't only want to put energy in it; I also want something in return. You want to enjoy your stay a bit and you start to build up your life. But if it occurs that I get a good job offer in Germany or somewhere else, probably I wouldn't say no.' (woman, 29, German nationality, expat)



Although the life of expats is often portrayed as ‘fluid’ or ‘liquid’, the theme ‘integration’ appears to be important as well (cf. Waters 2003; Favell 2008). In the next chapter, we will further investigate the expats’ integration into the local community in Rotterdam and into Dutch society as a whole.

2.2 Living in an expat bubble?

According to the second dominant image, expats live in an ‘expat bubble’: their social networks are said to consist mainly of other expats, to whom they feel strongly connected (cf. Cuperus 2009; Fechter 2007). Based on the respondents’ answers to questions about their circle of friends and their feelings of belonging, we will investigate to what extent this stereotypical image is correct.

Friendships

We asked the respondents where most of their friends and relatives live. More than two thirds of the respondents say most of their friends and relatives live outside the Netherlands. However, this does not automatically mean that most respondents indeed belong to an international ‘expat community’. Most respondents’ friends and relatives actually live in their country of origin. The answer category ‘elsewhere’ does point to the existence of networks of expats all around the world. About one in seven respondents chose this answer.

Table 2.4: Place of residence of most of the respondents’ friends and relatives, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Place of residence of most friends/relatives | Number of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|
| In the same neighborhood | 4 |
| Elsewhere in Rotterdam | 10 |
| Elsewhere in the Netherlands | 6 |
| In the country of origin | 44 |
| Elsewhere | 11 |

Feelings of belonging

We also asked the respondents with what groups of people they identify themselves. One of the questions was ‘What do you feel yourself to be in the first place?’ In answering this question, the respondents could choose from various answering categories. Table 2.5 gives an overview of the most frequently given answers.

Table 2.5: The most frequently given answers to the question, 'What do you feel yourself to be in the first place?'; absolute numbers (N=75)

| I feel myself to be... | Number of respondents |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A home-country national | 31 |
| A world citizen/cosmopolitan | 16 |
| A foreigner | 8 |
| An expat | 8 |
| A European | 5 |
| Other | 7 |

Again, these figures show that the country of origin plays an important role in the lives of expats. Almost half of the respondents say they primarily identify themselves based on their homeland nationality. Some respondents say they always feel connected to their home country no matter where they are. Others, however, state that moving abroad has changed their homeland identification.

'I really feel French, that won't change. I do not feel like an expat at all.' (woman, 41, French nationality, partner)

'I feel close to America. I am always going to be American. But when I think about my relationship with America right now, it's very different than when I lived there. So at this point in time I live outside of the US and my relationship is a bit, let's say, strained. I care for a lot of people there but I don't have a strong relationship with the country. I feel closer to the people than to the country.' (woman, 27, American nationality, expat)

Partly because of the ambiguous relationship they have with their home country, for relatively many expats calling themselves a 'world citizen' seems to be an attractive option. The arguments expats give for choosing the categories 'world citizen', 'foreigner' or 'expat' are often much alike. Many of them say they feel neither Dutch nor a national of their home country.

'If I would say I feel myself to be a foreigner in the first place, it would sound a bit pessimistic, right? But I don't feel that I belong somewhere. So maybe you can say I feel like a world citizen, that's the same for me, but it sounds a bit more optimistic.' (woman, 26, Turkish nationality, expat)

'I feel myself to be an expat. Because when I am here, I feel myself to be quite Portuguese in the way I see things. But when I'm in Portugal I realize that I have become a bit Dutch, in the sense of being very pragmatic. And then I don't feel Portuguese at all. So in the end, I feel like an expat.' (woman, 26, Portuguese nationality, expat)

Based on the circles displayed below, we also asked the respondents to characterize their relationship with various groups: from totally separated to totally connected.



We calculated the mean scores, ranked in Table 2.6 in order of ‘closeness’.

Table 2.6: The relationship with various groups, mean scores

| The respondents’ relationship with... | Mean score |
|---|------------|
| People of the same nationality in the country of origin | 4.8 |
| Expats in the Netherlands | 4.0 |
| People of the same nationality in the Netherlands | 3.7 |
| People of the same nationality in other countries | 3.4 |
| Foreigners in the Netherlands | 3.3 |
| Expats in other countries | 3.1 |
| Residents of Rotterdam | 2.9 |
| The Dutch | 2.8 |

The connection with people in the home country seems to be strongest, followed by the relationship with other expats and people of their own nationality in the Netherlands. The identification with expats outside the Netherlands proves to be quite weak. If there exists something like an expat bubble, this is more likely to be based locally than on a transnational level.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have investigated to what extent the respondents resemble two stereotypical images that exist of expats. The results show that neither one adequately describes the lives of expats.

The respondents came to the Netherlands with the idea of staying here for a few years and then returning to their country of origin or moving on to another country. In this respect, their lives are indeed relatively unbounded. However, many respondents say they are considering extending their stay. They primarily moved to the Netherlands because of their job, but in the course of their stay, they have become connected to their city of residence in other ways as well. Moreover, some respondents say that although it is nice to live in different countries, the process of adaptation takes a lot of energy.

The image of expats locked up in their own expat communities also needs refining. Although some respondents mainly associate with other expats and identify themselves primarily as expats, most expats have mixed social networks and multi-layered identities.



3. Expats as urban citizens

It is often assumed that migrants' cross-border ties are an impediment to local participation and identification (cf. Van den Brink 2006: 292; Scheffer 2007: 285). However, previous research on middle-class migrants of Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan origin in Rotterdam showed that many migrants combine homeland ties with urban activities and identifications (van Bochove et al. 2010). In this chapter we investigate whether this is also true for temporary migrants, such as the expats interviewed for this research. To what extent can they be regarded as urban citizens? We first examine in what local activities expats are involved. Next, we pay attention to their experiences with integrating into Dutch or Rotterdam society.

3.1 Spending leisure time in the city

Expats are sometimes said to live in the city as if it is a hotel: they check in, use the available facilities, and check out again (cf. Nijman 2007: 184; Friedmann 1998). In other words, expats add to the city's financial capital, but they do not contribute to civil society. In this section, we will investigate to what extent such statements are applicable to the respondents in this study. We will examine the expats' activities regarding recreation and consumption, their involvement in the civil society (membership and voluntary work), and their involvement in local news and politics.

Recreation and consumption

We asked the respondents how often they undertake various activities relating to recreation and consumption. Table 3.1 shows that about half of the respondents dine out, go shopping (especially spouses who do not have a paid job) and/or go out once or more a week. Recreational and cultural facilities are used less often.

Table 3.1: Frequency of various activities, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Type of activity | Once or more a week | Once or more a month | Less than once a month |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Dining out | 34 | 37 | 4 |
| Shopping | 28 | 37 | 10 |
| Going out | 36 | 24 | 15 |
| Recreational activities | 22 | 22 | 31 |
| Cultural activities | 5 | 26 | 44 |

Note. Going out includes activities such as visiting a bar, disco, cinema or pop concert. Recreational activities include visiting a swimming pool, sauna, zoo, amusement park or park. Cultural activities include visiting a museum, gallery, exhibition, theater or classical concert.

Next, we asked the respondents at what location they undertake these activities. Table 3.2 shows that an important part of the activities takes place in Rotterdam. However, many respondents also visit other cities within and outside the Netherlands. Particularly with respect to cultural activities, the respondents are looking for variety. They, for instance, go to an exhibition in Amsterdam or pay a short visit to Paris or London.

Table 3.2: Location of various activities, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Type of activities | Practically always in Rotterdam | Both in Rotterdam as well as in other places | Hardly ever in Rotterdam |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Dining out | 39 | 35 | 1 |
| Shopping | 41 | 28 | 6 |
| Going out | 34 | 35 | 3 |
| Recreational activities | 34 | 35 | 3 |
| Cultural activities | 9 | 49 | 15 |

Membership and voluntary work

Of the 75 respondents, 55 are at present a member of one or more organizations. In many cases, this involves a fitness club or other sports association. Besides sports clubs, specific expat associations are popular as well: about one third of the respondents join such an organization. The activities of expat associations vary from coffee mornings for women to children's activities and monthly drinks. Some of these organizations are based on shared nationality (such as Japanese or American associations); others are directed to employees of a certain company (such as Unilever) or concern a specific activity (such as an expat golf organization). Furthermore, some respondents – especially those with an Asian background – are a member of a religious community.

Almost all of the organizations that the respondents are a member of are based in the Netherlands, in many cases in Rotterdam. Some respondents are also a member of an organization in the homeland or another country.

Table 3.3: Membership in and voluntary work at various organizations, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Type of activities | Currently a member | Currently a volunteer |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| School | NA | 24 |
| Sports club | 39 | 3 |
| Expat association | 24 | 5 |
| Religious organization | 11 | 3 |
| Other organization | 12 | 1 |

Note. 'Other organization', for instance, includes a labor union or a musical club.

Voluntary work also proves to be a local affair. Schools are an especially popular place to work as a volunteer. Performing voluntary work is less common than being a member of an organization: 28 of the 75 respondents currently volunteer. Many respondents have performed voluntary work in the past, but at present do not have the time for it. Some respondents would like to be a volunteer, but they do not know where or how.

'I have been telling myself I want to volunteer but I have no idea of what I can do. I am socially orientated, but you need to speak the language to do voluntary work with other people. They should make a website like they have in The Hague. Just give me some ideas about how I can get more involved. I don't want to work with dogs, no, I want to work with people, and I want to do something meaningful. I am sure that there is a way of doing that.' (woman, 28, Romanian nationality, expat)

The respondents who came to the Netherlands because of their partner's work often do have enough time to be involved in voluntary work. They appear to be able to find their way within this field, judging by the fact that 18 of the 23 partners interviewed in Rotterdam currently are volunteers.

Involvement in news and politics

We also asked the respondents to what extent they are involved in news and developments in Rotterdam and if they are interested in local politics. One of the questions concerned how often they use various sources to stay informed about the local news in Rotterdam. Table 3.4 shows how often respondents discuss the local news with their colleagues and friends and how often they stay informed through the Internet, television or newspapers.

Table 3.4: Frequency of use of various sources to stay informed about news and developments in Rotterdam, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Source | Once a week or more | Less than once a week | Never |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Colleagues | 25 | 17 | 33 |
| Friends | 17 | 33 | 25 |
| Internet | 18 | 20 | 37 |
| Television | 14 | 12 | 49 |
| Newspaper | 24 | 16 | 35 |

Some of the respondents frequently discuss developments in Rotterdam with their (Dutch) colleagues. Respondents who want to improve their Dutch language skills follow the news on Dutch websites or read the newspapers which are freely available in public transport. Many respondents say they know more about the Dutch national news than about the local news. They more often watch Dutch national TV stations than local ones. Further analysis shows that a relatively large group of respondents does not use any of the sources to stay informed about the local news in Rotterdam. Some say they do not feel the need to do so, while others would like to become more involved.

'On CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, they broadcast Dutch news twice a week, so I watch that. But I don't follow the local news in Rotterdam. Literally, there can be happening something in this street and I wouldn't know it. That's how associated I am.' (woman, 45, Canadian nationality, partner)

'I get frustrated because I don't know what is happening in Rotterdam and in Holland to a lesser degree, but more in Rotterdam. One of the first questions that people ask when they come to visit is: "Is Rotterdam a safe place to live?"; and we always say: "Yes". But some of that is because we are ignorant. If there was a murder of three children five doors away, we wouldn't know.' (man, 46, British nationality, expat)

We also asked the respondents more specifically about their interest in Rotterdam local politics. For instance, we asked them if they would vote in the local elections if they had the right to do so. Some respondents said they would certainly vote, because they are residents of the city and the policy that is developed affects them. Others think they should not have the right to vote, since their stay is only a temporary one; they do not have the feeling that Rotterdam is 'their' city. Most respondents, however, say they would like to vote, but only if they knew more about the political parties and their views.

'I think if we, as foreigners, will be allowed to vote, we first of all should be informed about the politicians and their political ideas. Then we can vote. When I feel that I know what I am doing, I will vote. But just voting without knowing anything about it, no.' (woman, 29, Brazilian nationality, expat)

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion in Rotterdam and the Netherlands

The activities expats undertake in their leisure time largely involve consumption and recreation. About half of the respondents are also active in civil society as a member of an expat association or as a volunteer. Many expats – including the ones who at first glance seem to be relatively unattached to their new living environment – are concerned with their place in Rotterdam and Dutch society. They live, work, consume and recreate in the Netherlands, but at the same time they feel they are not completely part of society. In what follows, we will take a closer look at these processes of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion in Rotterdam and the Netherlands.

Friendships in Rotterdam and the Netherlands

We asked the respondents whether they have friends in the Netherlands, and if so, if these friends live in Rotterdam or elsewhere. Only one respondent did not have any friends in the Netherlands; 28 respondents have friends in Rotterdam as well as in other places in the Netherlands; 24 respondents only have friends in Rotterdam; and 9 respondents do not have friends in Rotterdam, but do in other Dutch cities.

Most of the respondents not only have friends who live in the Netherlands, but also have friends who are Dutch. We asked the respondents to estimate the number of Dutch friends they have. In Table 3.5, their answers are divided in different categories.

Table 3.5: Respondents' estimate of the number of Dutch friends, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Number of Dutch friends | Number of respondents |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 0 | 3 |
| 1 | 32 |
| 2 - 5 | 24 |
| 6 - 9 | 9 |
| 10 - 20 | 6 |
| More than 20 | 1 |

The respondents who indicated that they have at least one Dutch friend were then asked where they first met this/these friend(s). Table 3.6 shows the most frequently mentioned meeting places.

Table 3.6: Meeting place Dutch friends, absolute numbers (N=75)

| Meeting place | Number of times mentioned |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Work | 39 |
| Neighborhood | 26 |
| Children's school | 13 |
| Sports club | 12 |
| Other association | 17 |

Note. The numbers do not add up to 75, since multiple answers were possible.

The places where expats spend most of their time (the work and living environment) are also the most important places where they have met their Dutch friends. In the case of the expat respondents, the workplace is the most important meeting place; for the partners, it is the neighborhood.

Table 3.5 shows that 'one' is the most frequent given answer to the question 'How many Dutch friends do you have?' Although some respondents praise the Dutch for their English language skills and their tolerance towards foreigners, many say that it is not easy to get in contact with them, let alone becoming their friend. According to various respondents, this has mainly to do with language barriers. Some mention the existence of cultural differences as well. Both barriers will be further explained below.

Language in- and exclusion

Many respondents agree on the fact that the Netherlands is an easy country for expats to live in. Everything seems to work well: the public transport runs on time, the streets are relatively safe, and – most importantly – almost everyone speaks English.⁷ Many see it as a big advantage that they can live in the Netherlands without needing to speak the language.

'The Netherlands accepts many foreigners, from many different countries. The Dutch speak English very well, which makes it easy to communicate with them. This is amazing for me. They have Dutch as their mother tongue but all speak English so well.' (woman, 40, Japanese nationality, partner)

'Rotterdam is an easy place to live. It is very multicultural, there is always stuff going on, it's an interesting place to be with lots of events. I think it helps that people are so good in English here. I don't know if that would be the same elsewhere. And there are a lot of international people living here, I didn't necessarily expect that. That made it easier to get involved and to feel happy here.' (woman, 28, British nationality, partner)

Still, many respondents say they want to learn Dutch. Most respondents currently follow a language course or have done so already. Of the 75 respondents, 6 say they speak Dutch (quite) fluently; 34 speak it just a little; 33 only know a few words; and 2 respondents say they do not speak Dutch at all. Many of them say that a course alone is not enough to learn the language; practicing in daily life is just as important. Since most Dutch people start talking in English as soon as they know someone is an expat, opportunities to practice are often lacking.

The advantage that the Dutch in general speak English so well thus becomes a disadvantage when expats want to get more involved in Dutch society (cf. Favell 2008: 145). According to the expats, speaking the language is the most important condition for integration: only when you speak the language, you can really understand a country and its people. This makes integrating into Dutch society difficult to achieve.

'It's a country that up to a certain point it's easy to integrate in. For instance housing and public transport are very easy. Setting up your life here is easier than in France or in other countries. So for an expat it is quite easy to start working here. But integrating in Dutch society is a different story; you have to put a lot more effort, mainly because of the language.' (man, 37, Italian nationality, expat)

Some respondents have the feeling that Dutch people, either consciously or unconsciously, try to keep foreigners at a distance. Language is an important gatekeeper.

⁷ Many respondents, however, are not satisfied with the way they are approached by civil servants. Some officers refuse to talk in English and official letters are often written in Dutch. In the next chapter, we will pay more attention to the contacts expats have with governmental institutions.

'They always talk to you in English, even if you try to speak Dutch. So I was always thinking: "Hey, I am trying to learn your language, you don't want to listen to me?" It was really frustrating. You feel like they don't want you to integrate because they don't help you to learn to speak Dutch. Lots of them told me: "You are French, you will go back to France anyway."'
(woman, 27, French nationality, expat)

Community in- and exclusion

Some respondents say that although speaking the language is a necessary condition for integration, it is not a sufficient condition. They think integrating into the Dutch 'community' is almost impossible due to various cultural factors. Two such factors – mainly mentioned by expats who do not have partners – are the strict boundaries between work and personal life and the closed nature of established circles of friends.

'One thing I noticed is that, in general, colleagues don't socialize. Back home my entire social network was work-based and here I had to figure out new ways to meet people.' (woman, 33, Canadian nationality, expat)

'I went to a colleague's birthday party and I was the only person that she had not known for eight years or that wasn't family. People see no need to make new friends. I think that as soon as they've settled down, found a partner, have their family set up, they don't reach outside anymore. At the birthday party, I was just sitting in the corner, saying "gefeliciteerd" to everyone.' (woman, 28, South African nationality, expat)

Another factor, related to the previous ones, is the Dutch habit of planning: appointments are made weeks in advance. Spontaneously inviting someone for a drink or visiting someone without announcing your arrival is quite unusual.

'Dutch society is very closed, very structured. You cannot just phone and say: "I'm in the area; can I pop in for a coffee?" You cannot even dream of just ringing the doorbell and turning up, ever. I'm so used to a culture where my door is always open. Here, everything is so structured.' (woman, 28, South African nationality, expat)

Various respondents have the feeling that they are being excluded from Dutch culture and community life. However, the expats' cultural background and their previous experiences abroad play an important role in how they appreciate social life in the Netherlands. Some respondents find the Netherlands a very open society. During their stay in other countries, their culture shock was much bigger.

'In some foreign countries, such as in Indonesia, you are living in a golden cage. But here you are integrated and you are part of everybody, you live in the neighborhood and you are part of the neighborhood, which I like. It is a more normal life. The children can go their own ways, they are not dependent on us to pick them up, or on taxis. In Jakarta, it's sort of a non-real life. It's OK for a while, but I don't like it for too long, then it's nice to be one of a million and just live your life and integrate.' (woman, 48, Swiss nationality, partner)

'When I was living in Norway I thought Norwegian people were a bit strange, but I think the Dutch are the same as me, really. I don't see any immediate barriers, it's just the language.' (man, 38, British nationality, expat)

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we investigated to what extent and in what ways expats in Rotterdam are involved in the city they live in. The results show that the city plays an important role in expats' lives. Not only do they work and reside in Rotterdam, the city is also the place where their children go to school and where they get in contact with the 'locals'.

Many expats, however, say they experience various obstacles which hinder their local integration. The biggest barrier is the Dutch language. Although the expats can manage with English, many of them have the feeling they are cut off from important aspects of city life. Many expats say they hardly know what is happening in the city and state that contacts with Dutch people do not come about easily. Because of this, many expats do not feel themselves to be full-fledged 'urban citizens'.



4. Expats about urban policy

Dutch cities are increasingly trying to create an attractive living environment for expats. In addition to the previously mentioned expat desks, various other specific expat services, such as ‘welcome packages’, are offered. In this chapter, we will discuss some of these services and investigate how expats evaluate them. Unlike in the previous chapters, we focus not only on expats in the Rotterdam area, but also on expats in The Hague and its suburbs. The Hague is sometimes described as the ultimate expat city of the Netherlands (cf. NRC Handelsblad 2009). Rotterdam only recently started to provide specific services to expats, whereas in The Hague this has a long tradition. It will be interesting to compare the services in both cities and expats’ opinions of them.

This chapter consists of two parts. In the first part, we investigate whether the expats in Rotterdam and The Hague know about the existence of various local expat services, and if so, if they use them. These questions will be answered based on additional research by Anne Steensma (2009). The second part of this chapter focuses on the opinions of expats about the general living environment in their city and what they think should be improved. These questions will be answered based on the interviews conducted for the larger research project.

4.1 Knowledge and use of municipal services

Both the municipalities of Rotterdam and The Hague have developed specific local services for expats. For her Master’s thesis in *Urban Studies*⁸, Anne Steensma investigated to what extent expats in both cities know such services exist and if they ever use them. She conducted 15 interviews in Rotterdam and 20 in The Hague (Steensma 2009).⁹ This section is based on some of her findings.

First of all, the expats were asked if they know about the existence of an expat desk in their city of residence. In The Hague, 10 of the 20 respondents know the local Xpat Desk; in Rotterdam, only 2 of the 15 respondents have ever heard of the Rotterdam Expat Desk. The unfamiliarity with the expat desk in Rotterdam can be partly explained by the fact that this desk was only opened at the end of 2008. Furthermore, the expat desk in Rotterdam is established in a less eye-catching location than the desk in The Hague. The former is located on the third floor of the World Trade Center, whereas the latter can be found on the ground floor of the City Hall.

⁸ *Grootstedelijke Vraagstukken en Beleid*, offered by the Sociology department of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

⁹ The respondents of this additional research also participated in the larger research project. Because of the small number of respondents and the fact that they were not randomly selected, based on Steensma’s findings we cannot make definitive statements about the total population of expats in both cities. However, since the respondents were not selected based on their civic participation or local integration, there is no reason to assume that their knowledge of expat services differs from that of other expats.

In addition to the expat desk, both cities provide other expat services. In Rotterdam, these are:

- The website www.rotterdam.nl/expatdesk, which provides all kinds of practical information in English for expats.
- The website www.yourrotterdam.com, which is a predecessor of the official municipal website and is likewise concerned with offering practical information.
- The 'Rotterdam Welcome Box', a selection of brochures with which the municipality welcomes new residents and employees.

Similar to the limited knowledge of the Expat Desk, only a few respondents in Rotterdam know about these other services. Of the 15 respondents, 10 knew none of the mentioned services. The 'Rotterdam Welcome Box' was unknown by all. Some respondents do know about the existence of specific expat services in Amsterdam and The Hague, but have the idea that Rotterdam does not offer anything.

'In The Hague there are lots of things for expats. They have a newsletter for expats. You also have a special card with which you have discount in some shops. They are doing much more for expats, it's really good. They don't do that here in Rotterdam.' (woman, 29, French nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

Compared to Rotterdam, The Hague indeed does provide more services. The most important are:

- The website www.denhaag.nl, which offers all kinds of practical information in different languages.
- The 'Welcome to The Hague' program, which is offered six times a year to give expats a better understanding of the city and an opportunity to expand their network.
- 'The HaGuest Card', a cooperative undertaking of business and the local government. This card is exclusively designed for the expat community of The Hague and provides them with special offers and discounts.
- 'Feel at home in The Hague/The international community fair', an annual information fair for expats.
- 'The Hague City Consuls', which offers expats the opportunity to ask questions of local 'ambassadors'.

In The Hague, almost all respondents know about the existence of one or more of these services. Although the 'City Consuls' are quite unheard of, the other services are well-known. Not only are the respondents in The Hague familiar with the various services, almost all of them have also used one or more of them. In Rotterdam, this is only the case for 3 of the 15 respondents.

The expats were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘The expat policy in Rotterdam/The Hague makes me feel welcome in the city’. In Rotterdam, one third of the respondents agree with this statement; in The Hague two thirds agree. Respondents in both cities, however, say that the existing services should be given more publicity.

4.2 Rotterdam and The Hague: attractive expat cities?

The local expat policy is not the only aspect which determines whether or not expats enjoy their stay in Rotterdam and The Hague. Based on 75 interviews in Rotterdam and 30 additional interviews in The Hague, below we will investigate how expats in both cities evaluate the local living environment and what they think should be done to make the city more attractive.

Opinions on the living environment

We asked the respondents to give a grade between 1 and 10 to various aspects of the city. Table 4.1 displays the mean grades.

Table 4.1: Mean grades for different aspects of Rotterdam (N=75) and The Hague (N=30)

| | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Hospitality of the people | 6.9 | 6.7 |
| Quality of housing | 6.5 | 7.0 |
| Supply of restaurants | 6.8 | 7.1 |
| Supply of shops | 6.7 | 7.4 |
| Supply of cultural facilities | 7.0 | 7.4 |
| Night life | 6.5 | 5.9 |
| Quality of public space | 7.0 | 7.9 |
| Medical care | 6.2 | 6.2 |
| Safety | 7.0 | 8.0 |
| Educational system/schooling | 7.5 | 7.9 |
| Complete living environment | 7.3 | 7.7 |

Compared with The Hague, the grades for Rotterdam are considerably lower regarding safety, the supply of houses and shops, and public space. Night life, however, is appreciated more in Rotterdam. Particularly younger expats say that if they want to go out, The Hague has not much to offer.

'There is only one concert place here; they should open another one. But the problem is that there are not many young people in The Hague, because there is no university here. So as a consequence, there is a lack of activities for people who are in their twenties or thirties.' (man, 29, French nationality, expat, The Hague)

In both cities, medical care is not evaluated positively. In particular those respondents who dealt with health problems themselves give a low grade. They blame their negative experiences on language barriers, bureaucracy and differences in manners.

'When my wife needed medical care, no one spoke English; that was hard. We didn't speak a lot of Dutch and when you deal with health problems, you need someone to help you. A friend of mine had a stroke, but they thought he was drunk. That affects expats. It makes you feel very foreign.' (man, 46, American nationality, partner, Rotterdam)

'I had some medical issues here. I was being sent from doctor to doctor, being sent back again. Having like ten appointments before X-rays are being taken where from the start to me it was clear that something was wrong. The quality of care isn't a Rotterdam thing specifically, but my experience has just been bad. It's the only experience I've had.' (woman, 28, South African nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

We also asked the expats to what extent they think their city is an attractive 'expat city'. Table 4.2 shows the reactions to the statement 'Rotterdam/The Hague is an attractive city for expats to live in'. Again, The Hague is evaluated more positively.

Table 4.2: Opinion on the attractiveness of the city for expats, in percentages, Rotterdam (N=75) and The Hague (N=30)

| Attractive to expats | Rotterdam | The Hague |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Totally agree | 17 | 40 |
| Agree | 43 | 40 |
| Don't agree, don't disagree | 27 | 10 |
| Disagree | 12 | 7 |
| Totally disagree | 1 | 0 |

Note. One respondent in The Hague did not answer this question.

Needs and wishes

We asked the respondents in Rotterdam and The Hague what they suggest should be done to make the city more attractive. The most frequently mentioned wishes and needs are listed below.

1. More information in English

The most important recommendation of expats in Rotterdam is to improve the information services for expats. Although expats praise the Dutch for their knowledge of the English language, many say they face communication problems at public services. Many official letters are written in Dutch, and civil servants often only speak Dutch.

'The authorities should speak more English. When you are calling the telephone service they just speak Dutch to you. Like in the Stadhuis, that is very Dutch oriented. Also, provide more information for foreigners on all kinds of things, like when you are allowed to take your trash out.' (woman, 27, Finnish nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

'It would be great if things like the government letters could be provided in English. That would be the major thing. Also, there should be a book or something of where to go and what to do in terms of signing in with the bank, how to get your soft-number. This was quite a difficult process.' (woman, 30, British nationality, partner, Rotterdam)

Some respondents say they can understand that most communication is in Dutch. A British expat, for instance, remarks that a Dutch person in the UK cannot expect to be approached in Dutch either. In other words, expats should adapt to the country they live in, not the other way around. However, the bureaucratic process causes frustration, especially when they have the feeling that officers can speak English but refuse to do so. Because of such experiences, many expats do not feel the 'red carpet welcome' the municipality claims to offer (cf. City of Rotterdam 2009: 17).

Not only do expats encounter problems in communicating with public services, they also think there is a lack of information in English concerning, for instance, cultural facilities or public transport.

'Diversify the cultural offer and make it more accessible for the expats, because you have the "Uit Agenda" which is great, but it is in Dutch so before you learn Dutch you don't really have access to it. I find very little cultural offer like plays and stuff in English.' (woman, 30, Romanian nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

'The system on the tram, with the "ov-chipkaart" and all that stuff, that is so hard for people to know, especially if you just arrived. You don't know where to go or what to do. Also, to park your car in the city with a chip card. . . If you just arrived and you don't know about the chip card, or you don't have a chip card yet, you don't know what to do.' (man, 48, American nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

Rotterdam's specific expat services, such as the Expat Desk, the various websites and the 'Rotterdam Welcome Box' are developed to provide such practical information in English. However, as became clear earlier, these services are relatively unknown.

2. Improve customer friendliness

The second recommendation the expats make concerns the lack of customer-friendly services. In their contact with service providers such as public officers, medical staff and shopkeepers, many expats do not feel treated with respect. This complaint is made by both expats in Rotterdam and The Hague.

'The service culture in the Netherlands is not very highly developed. Sometimes you go into a shop, and you can be ignored, almost. And the service for things like telephone, Internet and cable is quite lacking. It's difficult to talk to people. And the silly contracts that they have; you have to pay for services that they tell you they can't give, but you still have to pay for them because you have a contract. And the silly things you have to do to get out of these contracts. So I suppose the service culture could be much better.' (man, 51, Canadian nationality, expat, The Hague)

The previously discussed negative experiences of expats regarding medical care also have to do with this lack of service culture. Many expats have the feeling that their problems are not taken seriously. Consequently, some expats get the idea that they are not quite welcome in the Netherlands. Others do not take it personally and think that 'it is just the Dutch way of doing things'.

3. More attractive places to go out

Third, expats in Rotterdam and The Hague think there should be more and better places to go out in the city. In The Hague, there is a lack of bars for a younger public, and in Rotterdam too, many think the night life is not exciting enough. Although many expats find what they are looking for in Amsterdam, they would like to have more places to go out closer to home and extended opening hours.

'For me, the stores should be open later. So when I get out of work I can still do some shopping. And I miss a night life centre. And public transportation at night; at night you don't have trams. My culture shock comes with these little things. For instance, I like to have a coffee after dinner, but here I have to take a coffee at home because everything is closed.' (woman, 28, Portuguese nationality, expat, Rotterdam)

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we investigated to what extent expats in Rotterdam and The Hague know about the existence of several expat services, how they evaluate the city's living environment, and what should be improved. The results show that many expats face problems in their communication with public services and would like to receive more practical information in English. The expat services in Rotterdam, such as the Expat Desk or specific websites, are only known to a few expats.

Although the expats in Rotterdam evaluate the city's living environment with an average mark of 7.3, many are not satisfied with the medical care and the quality of housing. With regard to the city's attractiveness for expats, they make several recommendations. Next to improving the supply of information in English – especially mentioned by expats in Rotterdam – expats in both cities ask for customer-friendly (public and private) services and attractive places to go out.



5. Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter, we give an overview of the most important findings of this research and make some recommendations for improving urban expat policy.

5.1 The city matters

Highly-skilled temporary migrants or expats are often characterized as cosmopolitans who are not attached to the city or country they live in. This research, however, indicates that many expats in Rotterdam do feel connected to their new living environment. A large share of the expats have a contract for between two and five years, but many of them leave their options open. Job opportunities are of decisive importance in deciding whether to stay or not. The expats' private life is another important factor. Expats who have children often deal with questions regarding their children's education. Where should they go to school, in the Netherlands or rather in the country of origin? For expats who met their partner during their stay in the Netherlands, staying longer often is an attractive option. Furthermore, the feeling of being at home in the Netherlands and Rotterdam plays an important role. Is it feasible to learn the language and to make friends or will one always be an outsider?

Policy recommendation

The fact that many expats are considering longer stays in the Netherlands shows that their lives are less mobile or 'fluid' than is often assumed. In many ways they resemble 'classic' migrant groups, such as middle-class migrants from Surinam, Turkey and Morocco (cf. van Bochove et al. 2009). Both types of migrants not only have cross-border ties, but they are also involved in the city they live in. This is an important message to municipalities who try to attract and retain highly-skilled temporary migrants. Although the decision to stay or leave is not totally up to them – of course, this is also dependent on their employer – many expats do consider staying longer. Policy makers' belief that they can influence expats' decisions is justifiable: the extent to which a city and its residents give expats the feeling that they are welcome can be of major importance in expats' decisions.

5.2 Contact with public officers

Expats in Rotterdam are less satisfied with the 'expat friendliness' of their city than expats in The Hague. This might be partly due to the fact that the City of Rotterdam does not have a long tradition of dealing with expats, as The Hague does. Rotterdam's specific expat services – such as the Expat Desk and the official municipal website – are not well known. There certainly is a need for such services; many expats in Rotterdam complain about the lack of information in English about such things as opening a bank account or applying for a citizen service number (*Burger Service Nummer*, BSN).

Although on average, expats in both Rotterdam and The Hague are quite positive about the living environment in their city, they are not very satisfied with the medical care and the places to go out. In particular expats in Rotterdam say the provision of services by public authorities should be improved. Besides the lack of (written and spoken) communication in English, some expats say services should be more customer friendly. This last complaint not only concerns public services, but also commercial organizations.

Policy recommendation

The most important recommendation for the City of Rotterdam is to improve the expats' knowledge about the services that are developed for them. Many expats need such services. Although the companies they work for often provide support in applying for a residence permit or finding a house, many other things they have to find out themselves. Expats are quite able to take care of themselves, but because of their lack of knowledge of the Dutch language and bureaucracy, many of them need help in dealing with formalities.

Many expats think it is important to learn Dutch, even though their stay is a temporary one. However, public officers cannot expect them to master the language in such a way that they can understand the jargon of public administration. A city such as Rotterdam, which presents itself as a 'world city' (cf. Chief Marketing Office Rotterdam), should provide the opportunity to communicate in a world language. This would make living in Rotterdam more attractive.

5.3 Contact with 'the Dutch'

Expats spend an important part of their leisure time in the city. Common activities are dining out, going out and – in the case of female partners – shopping. Many expats and partners are also a member of a sports club and/or an expat association. Performing voluntary work is mainly the domain of female spouses; many mothers are volunteering at their children's school. Other respondents say they would like to be more active in civil society, but they do not know how. According to them, there is insufficient information available in English on voluntary work. More generally, many expats indicate that they do not know much about local developments and events.

Although specific expat associations play an important role in expanding expats' urban social network, many expats would also like to have more Dutch friends. Even if so-called 'expat bubbles' exist, this does not automatically mean that expats prefer to live like that. Contacts with Dutch people usually do not come about easily. Many expats have the feeling they need to speak Dutch before true friendships can be formed. Although many of them follow a language course, such courses are not enough to really master the language. The expats appreciate the English language skills of the Dutch, but they sometimes have the idea that English is used to keep expats at a distance. According to many expats, the Dutch language is the biggest obstacle to integrating into Dutch society.

Policy recommendation

To get expats (even) more involved in city life, we recommend (1) improving the availability of practical information in English and (2) simultaneously providing expats more opportunities to practice their Dutch language skills. Information about local developments and events or activities is often not available in English. If more brochures or websites would provide English information, an important barrier preventing expats from becoming more civically active would be removed. There is no need to establish specific associations for expats; information in English about more general organizations will make it easier for expats to undertake activities outside their expat 'community'.

Practical information in English can help expats to become more involved in the city, but according to many expats, to really get to know the city and its residents it is important to learn the Dutch language. Next to official courses, some expats would like to have more informal contact with Dutch-speaking people. Such contacts, for instance, could be encouraged by creating mentor programs. Such programs are usually directed at 'deprived' groups such as high school dropouts (cf. van Bochove 2008; Uytterlinde et al. 2009), but some socioeconomically successful migrants could use some extra help as well in finding their place in the city.

5.4 Final remarks

Rotterdam is not as self-evidently attractive to expats as are, for instance, Amsterdam and The Hague, which have the image of being 'true' expat cities. However, at a rough estimate, Rotterdam does count about 30,000 expats. These migrants are increasingly regarded as important for the city's economic vitality and are provided with specific facilities. We conclude with a short summary of the most important policy recommendations, which are particularly relevant for municipalities which – like Rotterdam – have only recently developed a specific expat policy.

Summary of policy recommendations:

- Make expats feel welcome in the city. Special services, such as an expat desk, can contribute to such a 'warm welcome'.
- Give publicity to the existing expat facilities. Make sure demand and supply meet each other.
- Expand the supply of English brochures and websites that offer practical information about the city. This should include not only information regarding rules and regulation, but also about recreation, local events, associations and voluntary work.
- Give expats who want to learn Dutch the opportunity to get in touch with Dutch people, for instance through a mentor program.

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On the red carpet

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