

Rotterdam Study Trip June 2023



Rotterdam Study Trip – June 2023

Objectives

- To undertake benchmarking / best practice visit to Rotterdam to inform the vision for Belfast's waterfront
- To further consolidate the Waterfront Promenade Framework and help inform Maritime Belfast's role in terms of delivery
- To better understand the successful linkages between public realm, public art, interpretation, heritage, animation and ground floor uses
- To identify different approaches to the water's edge
- To further develop the Board and staff as an effective team

Why Rotterdam?

Parallels with Belfast, similar maritime history, taming of the rivers to create the city and port, the devastation suffered during WW2, and development of the port into a major logistics centre, and a city that embraces unique and challenging architecture.



A brief history

- Rotterdam emerged as a small settlement established around the River Rotte from 950. Flooding in the 12th century led to the construction of dikes and dams further upstream, and in 1270 a dam was constructed on the River Rotte, which connected to the city's main river the NieuweMaas (River Meuse).
- Rotterdam was granted city rights in 1340, and a shipping canal completed in 1350 allowed trade with England and Germany. Further taming of the river in the 1870s led to development of the port, allowing access for larger ships. The port of Rotterdam was home to both the Dutch East India Company, and the Dutch West India Company, and companies such as the Holland American line.
- During WW1 Rotterdam was a spy centre because of Dutch neutrality and its location between Britain, Germany & Belgium. The city was badly bombed in WW2 following the German invasion of the Netherlands, but was gradually rebuilt from the 1950s onwards, developing a new spatial infrastructure and embracing architectural interventions.
- Rotterdam is now a major logistics and economic centre and Europe's largest seaport.





**Itinerary - 48 hrs in
Rotterdam**

Guided tour from Oliver,
Schulze + Grassov

Accommodation:

Hotel New York, former
Holland America Line
headquarters building

Public realm on Kop van
Zuid, Wilhelminakade and
Wilhelminapier

Water taxis to Centrum, explored
the city streets, the iconic Market
Hall building, Cube Houses and
Binnenrotte Square – public
space to house outdoor markets,
and Groterkplein – outdoor
performance space

Lunch at Teds rooftop
restaurant, then Central
Station and Schouwbergplein

Visit included: Architecture
exhibition – three converted
barges, and Rotterdam
Maritime Museum and
Harbour



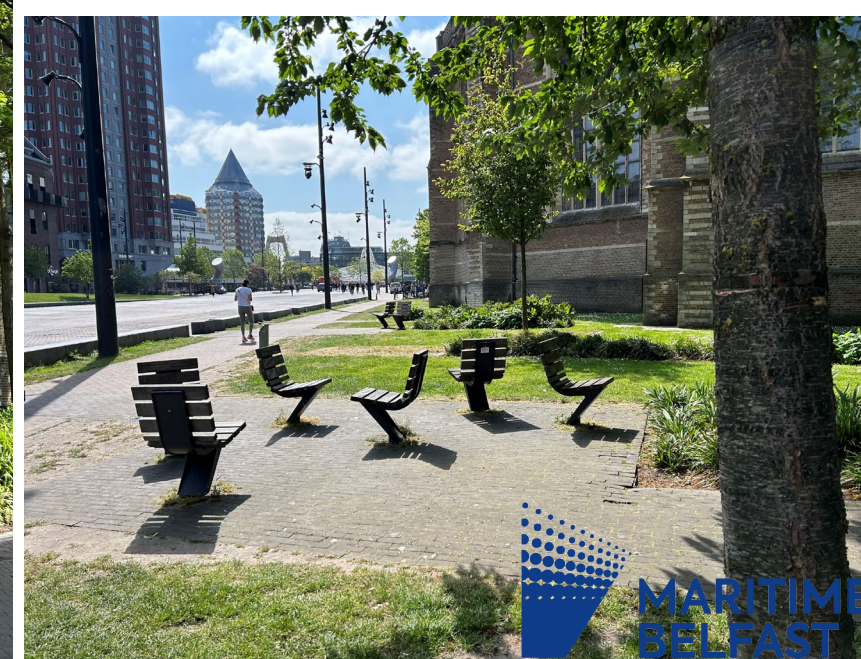
Market Hall, Cube Houses and Binnenrotte Square



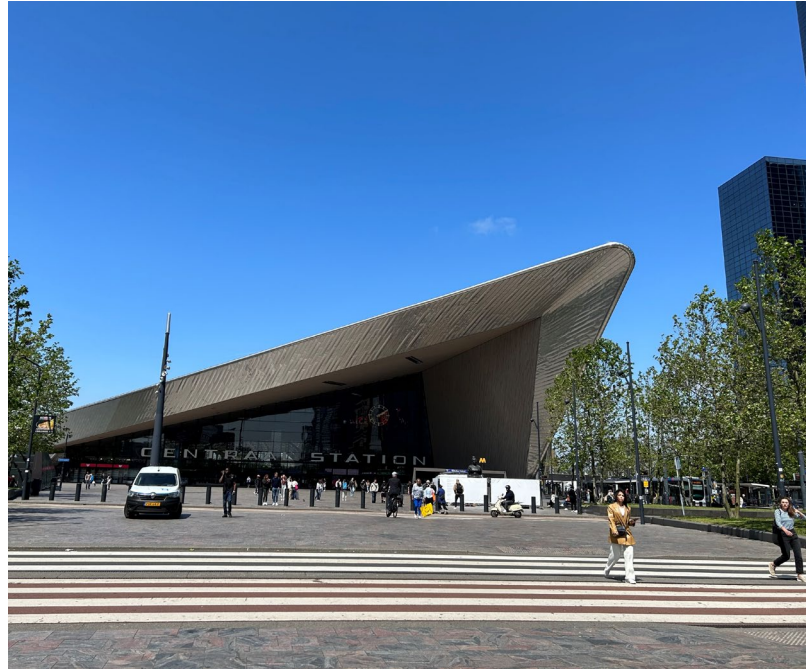
Open-air theatre by the water at Grotekerkplejn



Teds at Op Het Dak, rooftop restaurant and garden, Schouwbergplein (Theatre Square), planting examples, rotating chairs



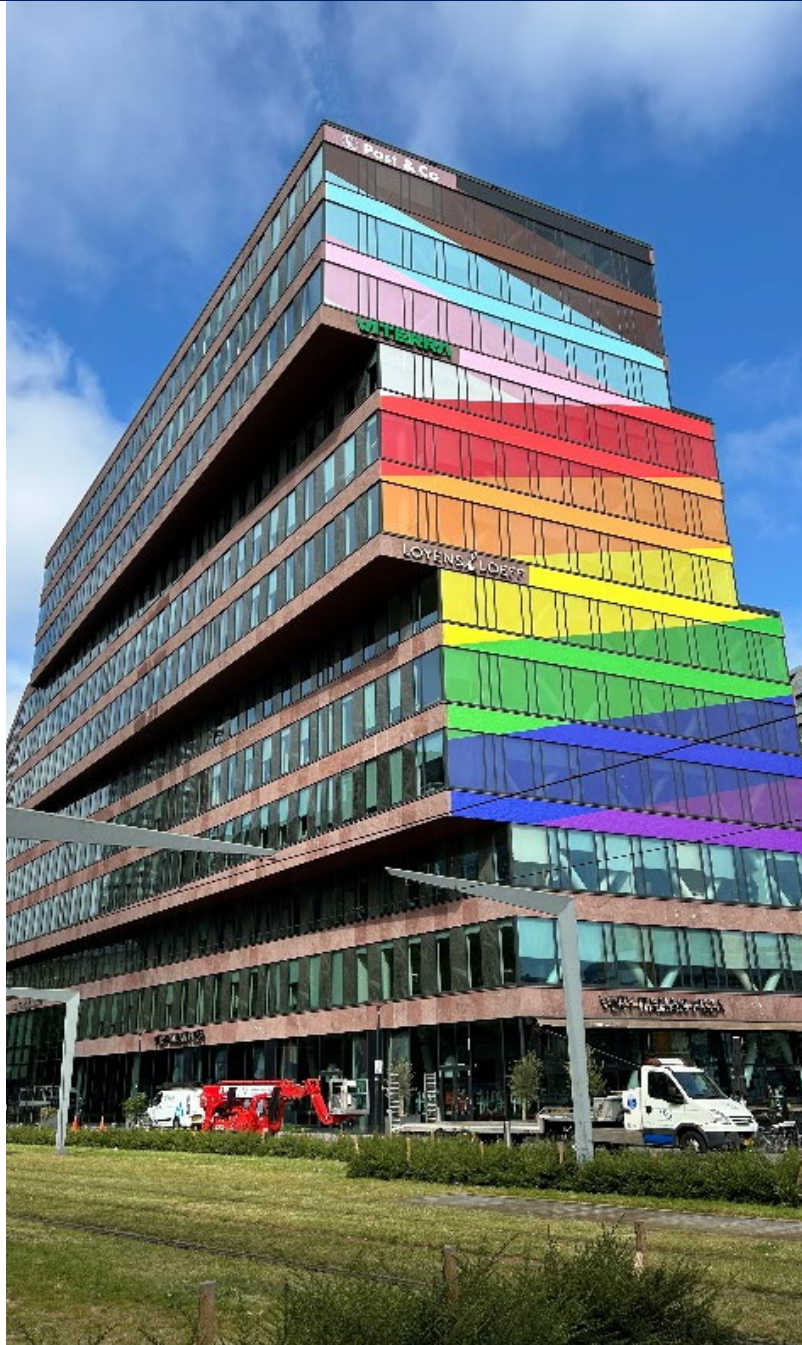
Central Station and underground bike storage



Examples of city architecture



Use of colour, and the Luchtsingel crowd funded wooden bridge



Incorporating carpark, retail and residential in one building, use of angles and setbacks, huge steel structures



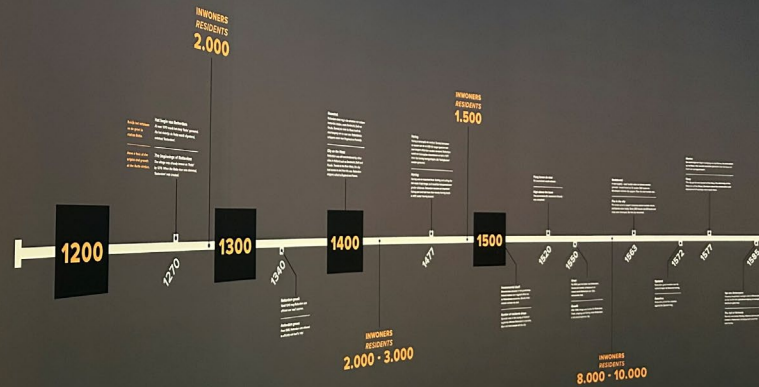
The Maritime Museum: outdoor exhibits



The Maritime Museum

ACHT EEUWEN ROTTERDAM

In bijna achthonderd jaar groeit Rotterdam uit tot de grootste haven van Europa. Acht eeuwen geschiedenis waarin de ontwikkeling van de stad en zijn haven hand in hand gaan. Volg de tijdlijn en ontdek de belangrijkste hoogte- en dieptepunten in de geschiedenis van havenstad Rotterdam.



EIGHT CENTURIES OF ROTTERDAM

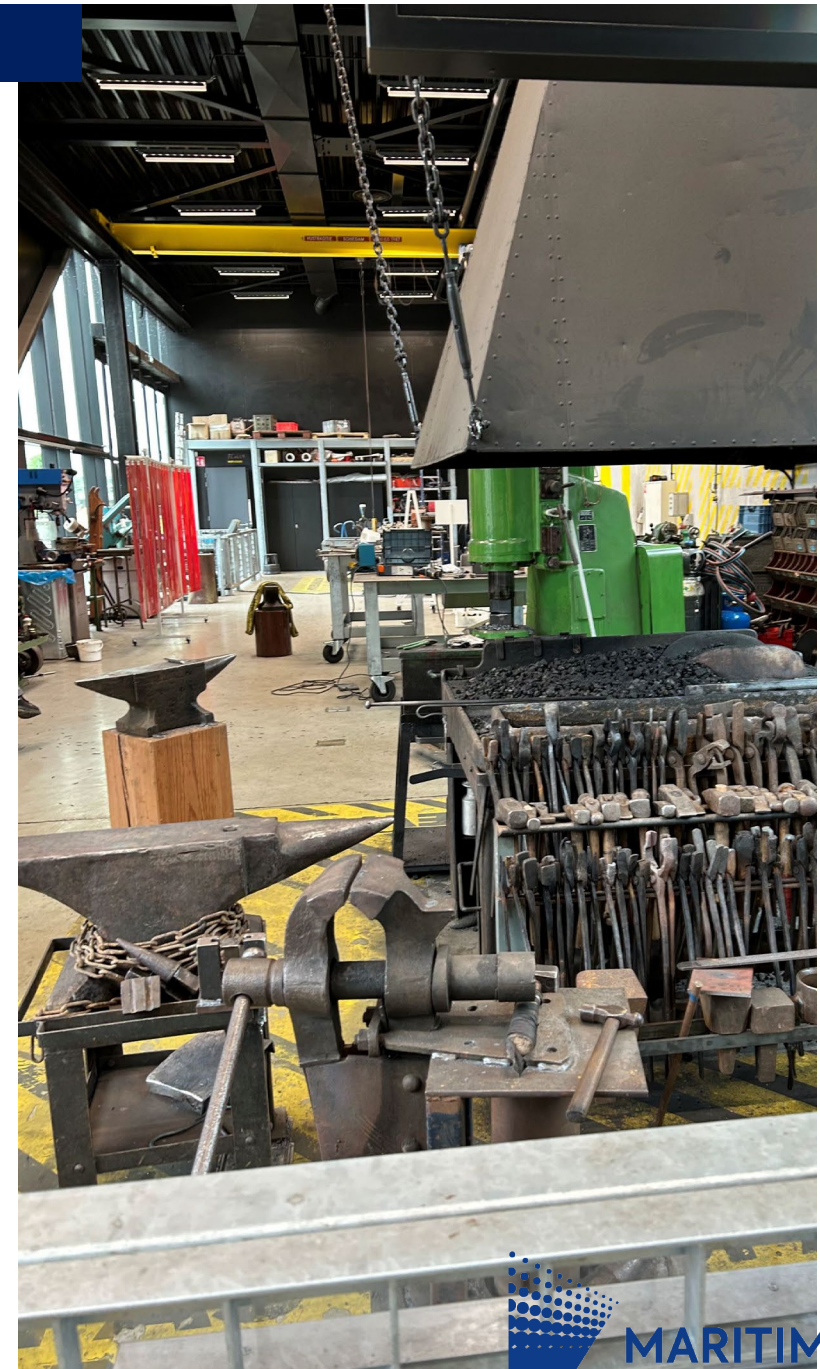
Over almost eight hundred years, Rotterdam's port has grown to be the biggest in Europe. Eight centuries of history throughout which the development of the city and its port went hand in hand. Follow the timeline and discover the key highs and lows in the history of the port city of Rotterdam.



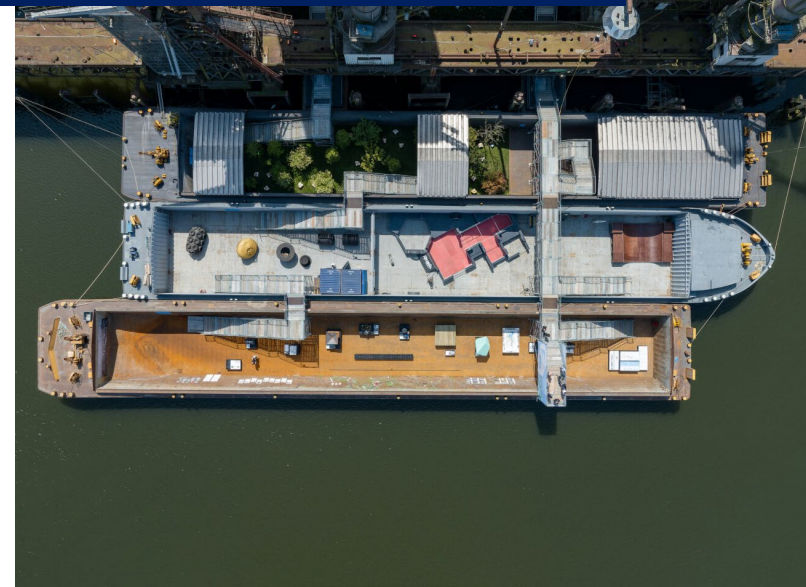
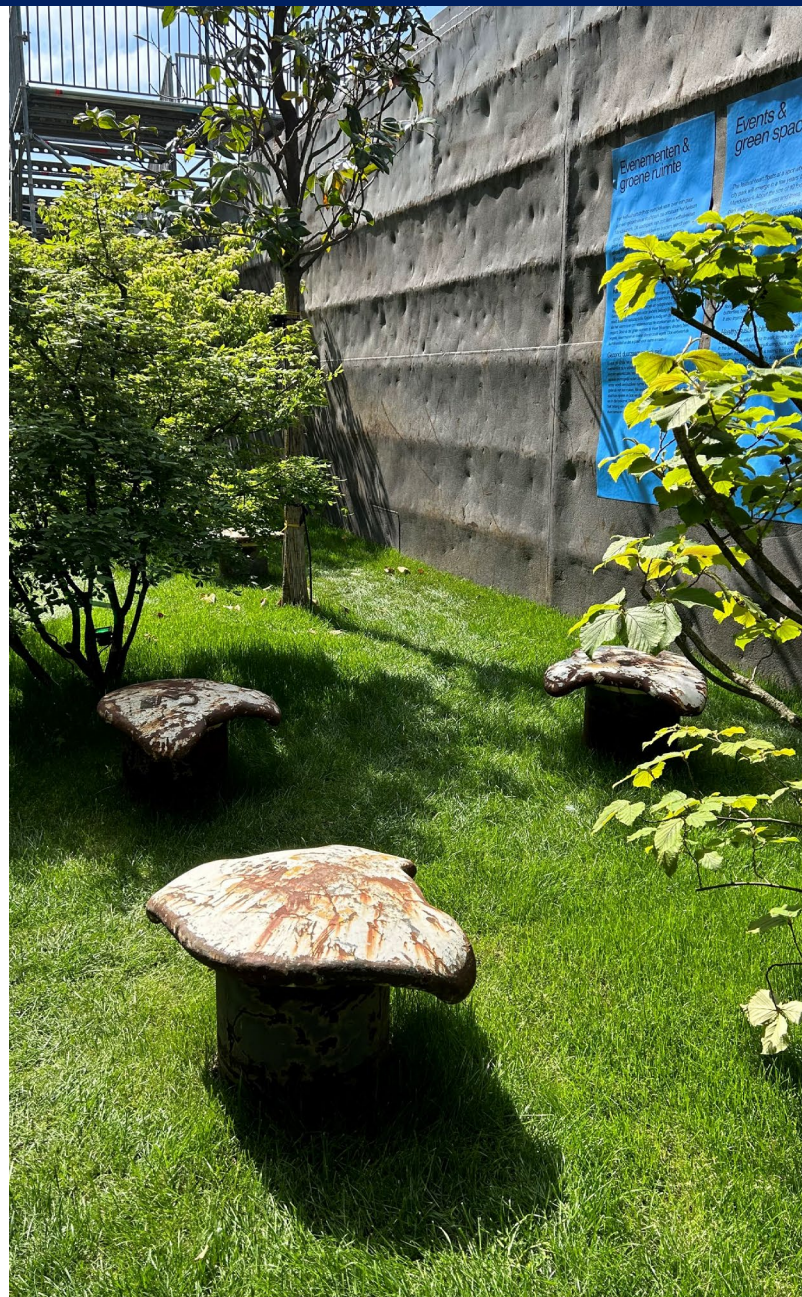
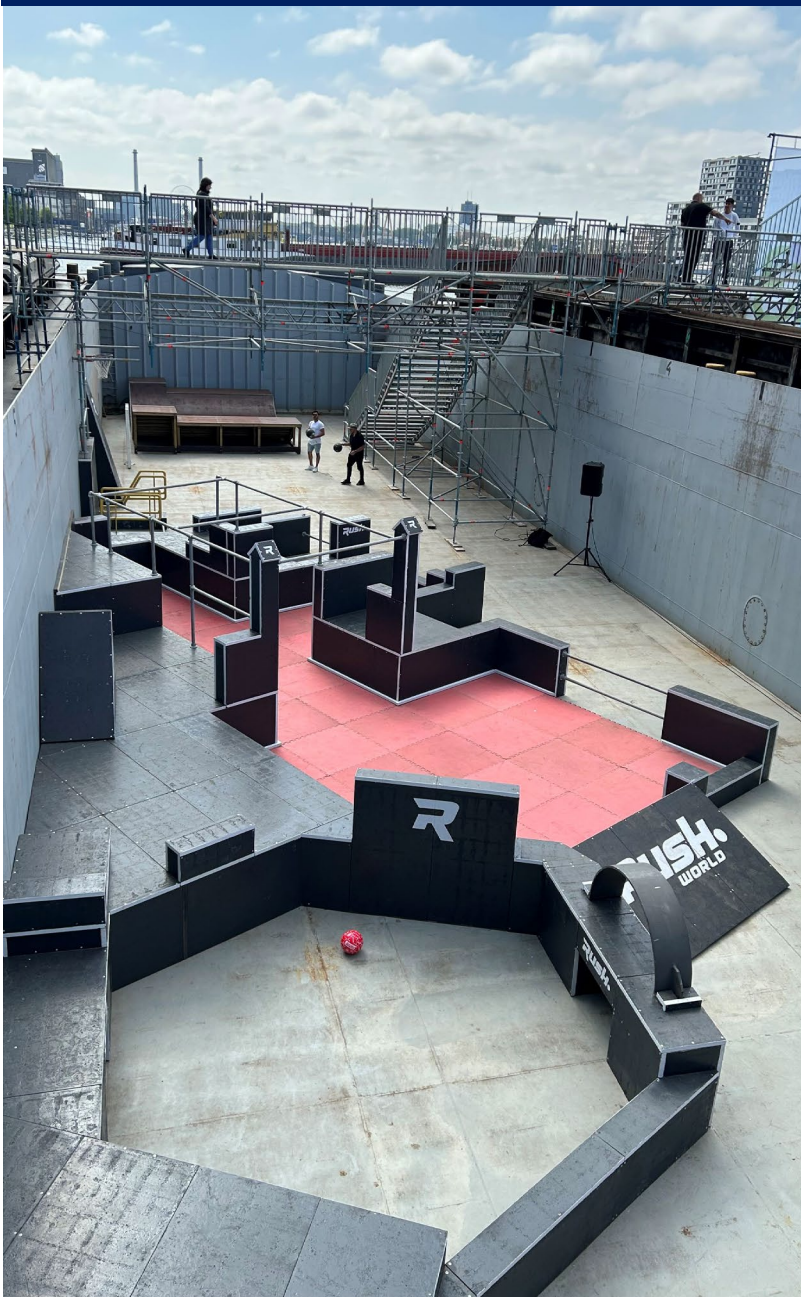
The Maritime Museum



The Maritime Museum: outdoor exhibits, harbour boats & working museum forge



Rotterdam Architecture Month – using 3 barges as event spaces, garden, urban sports + outdoor exhibition space



Interesting hoarding, lighting the ships at night, maps emphasizing the importance of the river to the city





Board & Staff comments

There should be a maritime museum in Belfast

Innovative and interesting way of telling the history of the Port, via neighbourhoods, differentiation between areas via materials – brick vs shipping containers, each area had a different colour palette & identity, display of port materials, and using models of ships / oil rigs. Fun of the children's play areas & exhibits

There is a real opportunity for a maritime museum in Belfast and I was impressed with the Rotterdam combination of traditional displays and the interactive installations designed for children. This broadens the appeal to a wider market and would complement the existing attractions. The big question of course is how to make this happen.

Really liked the Maritime Museum – blend of inside and outside – using the industrial cranes and the pop up information centre about the Harbour with skills being demonstrated. Really liked how the museum linked back to neighbourhood areas through maps and interpretation. Also it has its own boat tour.

I thought the Maritime museum was interesting with the collection of boats and not necessarily what we would have expected in a museum. The use of maps to tell the story of the city, traditional skills and crafts on display and incorporating children's activities made a difference.

I thought the Museum was very accessible, loved how the stories were told all in different sections, curved around you. Felt there was something for everyone. How they told their timeline story with maps zooming in and out was extremely effective and I think would work well for us. The fact there were men in a metal works beside it and it was accessible – smells, sparks, real work. Liked how they used the cranes to display art along the side of the river.

Having a Museum of water (especially important given Titanic, H&W, Sailortown etc)
Opportunity to revive lost boatbuilding skills
A place to hold and restore old boats (similar to railway preservation society)

The maritime museum was particularly impactful – not expensive but very well done. Use of the external exhibits

Built Environment / Architecture

Very helpful to get Oliver's insights in terms of the impact of the built environment on the waterfront eg wind direction and air currents

Iconic buildings & structures across the city – embracing architecture and adding new & interesting elements, from the Erasmusbrug bridge to the Cube Houses, the Market Hall and the Central Station

The architectural solutions which contribute to the vibrant and modern image of Rotterdam are sadly lacking in Belfast. I'm not sure how we persuade developers away from the bland, supposedly safe approach which produces repetitive and uninspired results. I'm wondering if we could engage with RSUA to explore this topic further

I learned a lot from Oliver on how to make liveable, community spaces e.g. apartment blocks divided up into groups of 4-6 where families share common areas and really get to know one another

Interesting to see how a working port – hard industrial landscape worked alongside heritage, living and working (it wasn't pretty like CPH but then Belfast grittier)

We have to have innovative architecture in TQ

Plan for skyline. Not all buildings are simple blocks that are cheap and designed to maximise profit
Use of shape / Use of Colour / Open plan buildings

Don't be afraid of high rise if done properly

Overall the city seemed much quirkier than Copenhagen and there seemed to be a willingness to take risks. The blend of the market building with the apartments demonstrates how civic / public spaces can work with commercial spaces

The outdoor space that is used for markets, creating buzz and a draw to that area. Markets so very popular and is a pull and creates atmosphere, life.

We saw examples in Rotterdam of temporary uses or structures achieved through various approaches. Temporary installations allow concepts/proposals to be tested and demand assessed. Temporary doesn't mean inferior quality and in any case "temporary" is a relative term. Not everything has to be permanent and perfect, sometimes good is good enough.

I thought the Architectural Design Week and the use of the barges was really good – and something we should 'float' with RSUA!!!

The open-air theatre stage with curtain I think we could draw from that: a focal point, protection from wind, clever event space.

The converted barges were an interesting concept although I think we could perhaps think of more interesting uses for reclaiming old working vessels.

Big takeaway was you don't need to have everything perfect – sometimes meanwhile, more temporary initiatives and even slightly lower quality work – better to have something rather than holding out for the final perfectly developed waterfront. As long as there is an element of vision, strong community / people focus.

Use of the water + water taxis

“Activating” the water itself doesn’t mean having to get wet – eg use of the barges for everything from swimming pools to sports. Tidal range not that different to ours but doesn’t seem to have held them back.

The water taxis were very good and blended in well with the fact that it was still a working port and very busy but I did not see a lot of leisure type water activity.

Water taxi service – worked really well for Rotterdam, easy to book a taxi and quick service. Not sure how transferable that would be to Belfast

Loved the water taxis, appreciate it is difficult to make economically viable but it brings the water to life, goes back to having activity on the water.

The importance of having key rules / principles for buildings built near water: Height / Proximity to water i.e. higher the building, the further from water / Skirts



Other comments

Public realm – wealth of planting everywhere, very simple, similar plants & materials and use of temporary planters outside bars & cafes to define boundaries. Even the tram lines are surrounded by grass and the use of rooftop gardens

Public transport is the dominant service, and the car comes third place to bikes and the metro & rapid transit system

Loved the multi-storey bike park and the public realm around the hotel. Also, how buildings managed to 'hide' car parking levels.

Task Group - The trip also brought into sharp focus the importance of the work of the Task group. Rotterdam authorities have overall powers to shape the city, which as we know are totally fragmented here with apparently no one body having control. This underlines the vital need for agreement on the framework and the key influencing role of MBT.

