

# **DUTCH CULTURAL TOURISM IN OPTIMA FORMA**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Standing in the very heart of Faubourg Saint-Germain, and surrounded by marvelous 18<sup>th</sup> century 'hôtels', I feel very honored to have the opportunity to deliver a speech on the impact of cultural tourism on Dutch heritage.

I'm not quite sure who has ever visited the Netherlands, but hopefully you will all be our guests during our Forum next year!

*Now, let me try to energize your fantasy.*

Most of you know the British photographer Martin Parr. He is a man with a golden eye (sheet 2). Working for Magnum, he recorded the loosening of community ties, the mass embrace of consumerism and the manic pursuit of leisure and global tourism (sheet 3). Mostly in Great Britain but also in the Netherlands, he registered the vanity fair of the middle class and monotonous comfort of the sub-class (sheet 4).

As anyone can take hundreds of digital pictures now in a short span of time, the enlightened art of photography has encompassed into a 'democratic' art. Martin Parr once said: 'most people take pictures of the things they love (sheet 5), because they identify themselves with the subjects they photograph, in order to say: this is part of me.'

This is also valid for tourists interested in Dutch cultural heritage, like museums, landscapes or historical cities (sheet 6). In fact, monuments tell stories about the past (sheet 7) and do actually contribute to people's identity. Eventually, this will strengthen our quality of living and our happiness. And all these sites are promoted without a Minister of Tourism, we never had one.

*Till now, nothing is new.*

Tourism is a dynamic and growing industry vital to the economic strength of Europe. In 2004, foreign tourists were spending almost 6-10% of their daily spending at cultural heritage sites; the majority flows to communities and businesses around sites. The EU tourism industry generates more than 4% of the EU GDP, with about 2 million enterprises employing around 4% of the total labour force (which is approximately 8 million jobs). So, a big multiplier effect.

Slowed of course by today's economic crisis, tourist flux in the Netherlands is expected to stabilize till 2012 (sheet 8). But after a couple of years the economic curves will grow, leading from the current amount of 11 million to about 14 million foreign tourists per year visiting our country. About 18% of these tourists came to the Netherlands for cultural reasons. In the future, the Netherlands will be extra attractive for our reasonable climate, this is what we call, our North sea-Riviera. In that respect, authenticity and sustainable tourism are the magic words; now, but even more in the future.

*But what do these eye-catching words actually mean?*

According to Pine en Gilmore in their successful book 'The experience economy', published ten years ago, customers want more than a product. They are willing to pay for an experience. Companies are creating platforms for these experiences, where the customer is being entertained, overloaded with warm feelings and believes he is participating in an unforgettable event. However, since the publication of this book, strategic marketing has changed. The experience and especially the emotions surrounding that experience remain essential, but now activities should have a specific meaning, an identity and especially authenticity. The retention of the authenticity of heritage places is important. It is an essential element of their cultural significance, as expressed in the physical material, collected memory and intangible traditions that remain from the past.

Since 2000, the classic approach in Dutch monument care in which we thought in numbers and looked at monuments as rare foreign stamps, is replaced by a new way of thinking. In fact, it is change in mentality. It is a move from restriction to development. I call it the **emancipation and democratization** of our cultural heritage.

In the decisions that has to be made in order to (re)design 'a beautiful Holland', history is one of the key issues, apart from issues like economic effects, security, safety, social effects. It is all about the integral historical setting. It is the *monument plus its* direct surrounding. The historic values have to be taken into account. That's the *emancipation* of heritage!

The *democratization* of our heritage, implies that more and more Dutchmen are interested in the future of their own surrounding. In other words, they want to participate in the urban planning of the government, because it is their neighborhood, their back yard. Citizens should be involved in the making of our society. Heritage is just around the corner. Yes, it is that simple! It is the emotion connected to heritage. They say: *my father worked his ass off in that factory for forty years. Nobody is going to demolish that factory now. I want to conserve it. It is 'my place'!* It is my tiny history, not that big global history. Citizens give meaning to these places. Part of their identity is interwoven with these places. They tell them who they are, where they come from. (And we are back to Martin Parr).

On a higher level, we spoke about these issues during the EHHF meeting last year in Vienna and Bratislava (sheet 9). In our final statement we pointed out that as heritage is getting hotter every day, 'investment in heritage has a direct impact on the growth of cultural tourism, which leads to long term social and economic benefit'.

Also the European Council agreed in May 2010, that 'it is necessary to foster the contribution of culture to sustainable tourism, as a key factor for local and regional attractiveness and economic development, as well as a driver for highlighting the importance of cultural heritage in Europe'.

I agree, of course! In my opinion sustainable tourism is tourism in an optima quantity and in an optima quality (sheet 10). Only then, cultural tourism is a blessing and not a curse!

*Let me show three examples of Dutch cultural tourism. They will show some real dilemmas.*

**First example. The Canal Circle Zone in Amsterdam** (sheet 11).

In 2008 Amsterdam attracted 5 million foreign tourists (top 5 in Europe), but they stayed in our capital city only for two nights. Hmmmm. Most of them came from Germany, Great Britain and Belgium. About 40% visit Amsterdam because of the old canals built in the so called Golden Age. That makes 2.7 million visitors per year (sheet 12). By the way, the Red district is next to the Canals, but I really don't know the amount of their visitors....

The unique selling point of the Amsterdam Canals is the urban development grown in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which is still rare and complete. As we hope for the inscription on the World Heritage List within one month (sheet 13), tourism will flourish even more.

But is there a limit to these streams of tourists? (sheet 14). Is there a moment when too many boats cross the canals, causing traffic jams on the water (sheet 15) and boat accidents do occur? Or is there the invisible hand of self regulation?!

**Second example. The 19 windmills at Kinderdijk** (sheet 16).

Dutch windmills are unique in the world. They symbolize the eternal struggle against the threat of water. Where else in the world are mills built just as a technical machine for water management, and still function as such? Undisputedly, it is one of our national icons, next to our colorful tulips and of course wooden shoes...

This World Heritage site in Kinderdijk attracts 150.000 visitors. (sheet 17). Some of these mills are over 250 years old (sheet 18), still intact, still into operation and also inhabited. These 'machines' require a lot of maintenance. Nevertheless, some of them are on the edge of a breakdown. Therefore our Agency provided last year subsidies for repair and conservation of these unique mills.

Although these mills form a monumental ensemble and a cultural landscape of its own, the total setting is unattractive and disturbed by unnecessary elements. To be true, most touring car tourists from Paris to Amsterdam, only stop in Kinderdijk for a quick pee ... That is a very short experience...

**And finally the third example. The Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht** (sheet 19), a masterpiece designed by furniture maker and architect Gerrit Rietveld. It is a house filled with memories. It is an icon of the medieval city of Utrecht and monument on the World Heritage List. Rietveld has built this modernistic house in 1924 commissioned by mrs. Schröder, his wife-to-be and owner of this house (sheet 20).

The house is the only building ever, to have been realized according to the architectural principles of the art movement De Stijl. A visit is a source of inspiration for lovers of international modernism.

It welcomes only a limited amount of tourists (sheet 21), experts only, just because it is such a small and vulnerable museum. Therefore it can only host guided groups of a maximum of ten persons (sheet 22), so 6 groups per day, only 5 days per week. That is a maximum of 15.000 visitors a year. Not many! Notwithstanding, the cultural historical value of the building is not less than the Canal Zone or the windmills (sheet 23).

I just spoke about the psychical amount of visitors. Beside this classical approach, there is the amount of 'digital' visitors connected online to different sites. That is the modern approach. That is the new experience! For the next three years our Agency aims to be the number one supplier of cultural heritage information, using its own sources and act as an intermediary for sources and databases of others (sheet 24). It wants to digitize and visualize all content available about cultural heritage in the Netherlands. In the project non-digital sources will be digitized, and sources of other organizations active in the field of cultural heritage will be made available to make new combinations. To search all content about cultural heritage, a semantic layer is created, using specific heritage thesauri and terminology.

Digital content enables our Agency and others to present the information in websites, portals, Wikipedia and applications, for let's say iPhone's. Local and central government organizations can use the digital content to inform their civilians better. That is our role: to stimulate and make connections. Private owners of monuments get access to their digital files. Tourists will be offered in-depth information and images.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

So, my main point is that we have to change our mindset, because of the risks of tourism. Therefore, we have to search for an **optimum number of tourists**, not a maximum.

My conclusion is that each monument should get the amount of visitors it can bare. The challenge is to calculate and monitor an optimum number of tourists that each heritage site is able to cope with. To my opinion, it should be a combination of the classical and the modern approach; of psychical and digital visitors. That is the ultimate goal to experience heritage!

Thank you very much for your attention (sheet 25).