

Rotterdam
voorbij discriminatie

Building equity

Anti discrimination agenda for Rotterdam

The Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination project was initiated by:



vóór gelijke behandeling
tegen discriminatie



Gemeente
Rotterdam



Rotterdam beyond discrimination

Introduction

In the period from October 2021 to January 2023, people from the Black, Jewish and Islamic communities¹ in Rotterdam engaged in 18 group discussions about their experiences with discrimination and racism². They discussed these initially within their own community (bonding) and then together with those involved from the other two communities (bridging). By doing so, they wanted to strengthen their social capital (to what extent does one have networks that can provide support and help or that can help them get ahead in life?). Then as ambassadors of "Rotterdam beyond discrimination" they engaged in a dialogue with managers and professionals from institutions in Rotterdam in the field of local administration, education, media and the (socio)cultural domain about their experiences and interests (linking).

The experiences of these ambassadors with discrimination and racism are pervasive and affect human dignity and the right to safety. The United Nations defined Human Security in 2005 as: the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from fear, free from want and free from humiliation. In Rotterdam, this is not secured for these three communities.

Experiences of discrimination and racism occur on a daily basis throughout the city and have great impact on the victims and their communities. They are experiences that lead to ongoing stress and to loss of self-esteem and autonomy. They tear people and communities apart and put them in a situation of structural volatility of existence that is sickening and leads to conflict, disadvantage, poverty and marginalization. Prejudice leads to othering: people considered as 'others' are seen only as deviant and threatening. This erodes social cohesion of the city.

More than 150 inhabitants of Rotterdam participated in the meetings. They were part of the project 'Rotterdam beyond discrimination' by RADAR, Art.1 and the municipality of Rotterdam, with financial support from the European Union. Based on their discussions, the ambassadors drew up an action agenda to address discrimination and racism in four domains.

1. A recognizable and approachable local administration

This part of the agenda focuses on the municipality and the police force: the ambassadors want authorities that are representative and recognizable, and accessible and approachable for all inhabitants of Rotterdam. They ask for a continuous dialogue and to resolutely tackle the systems and defences within the municipal organization that perpetuate institutional discrimination. They experience this form of discrimination as the most burdensome and persistent. They set two agenda items:

¹ Here "community" is written in the awareness that these communities are not necessarily uniform, but can consist of several smaller connected groups.

² 'Discrimination and racism' is used here to refer to all experiences of anti-Black racism, Muslim hatred and anti-Semitism that have been discussed. These have been extensively reported in other documents of this project (see www.radar.nl).

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- i. Diversity and recognisability.*

Ensure that municipality and police in all layers of hierarchy are a reflection of society. Diversity leads to better recognition of discrimination and racism and leads to more effective policies. This should be part of a new culture and structure of the administration in which professionals are aware of their implicit biases.
- ii. Accessibility*

Take concrete measures to improve accessibility of municipal counters, assistance for victims of racism and discrimination, legal aid and of support and report services (police and RADAR). Also protect the position of whistle-blowers, in order to make it safe to report abuse within the organisation.

2. Images in the media

The "traditional" media (film, television, press and photography) and the 'new' (social) media spread images and messages about Black, Jewish and Muslim people that are stigmatizing. Ambassadors indicate that this is often done via micro-aggressions³ of which people are not always aware. This leads to affirmation of prejudice and to reinforcement of the inequality that the ambassadors see and experience. In the current changing media landscape, actual journalistic standards and rules of the game do not offer enough reference and guidance. The ambassadors want to discuss this with the editors, in order to develop more sensitivity for each other's positions. The ambassadors came up with three agenda items:

- i. Enhance accessible and respectful use of language and images*

Provide accessible and inclusive communication at B1 and A2 level that also shares positive images of Black, Jewish and Muslim people and avoids the use of stigmatizing words and images. For example, do not show only women wearing headscarves when searching for 'Muslim woman' in an image database⁴. Ambassadors want to help with this. A deep reading project, in which they review and discuss media coverage during a period of time with editors, could help them become more sensitive to this.
- ii. Break the editorial bubble*

Editorial boards need to break out of their "bubble," to become more diverse in terms of their composition and better connect to their readers' perceptions, especially young inhabitants of Rotterdam. Bring the themes that interest them such as discrimination and anti-colonialism more often and better.
- iii. Make space for diversity and young creators*

The ambassadors want young creators to be given a solid platform and to be trained in media use: offer young creators without a diploma apprenticeships in which they can show their value and can develop themselves. They would like to see a Rotterdam 48-

³ Micro-aggression is common offensive and discriminatory behavior - for example, a belittling question, remark or joke - that can be dismissed as harmless, but has the effect of being put away negatively. This functions as a status reminder.

⁴ Research confirms that the photos in the ANP's image database are one-sided and stereotypical and confirm the cliché image of the Muslim woman: Yüksel, C., & Butter, E. (2020). 'Moslima' Een onderzoek naar de representatie van moslima's in de beeldbank van het ANP. Amsterdam: Democracy and Media Foundation / S.P.E.A.K.

hour film project and Filmapalooza⁵, in which they can show their image of living in the city.

3. Combating discrimination and exclusion through educational innovation

In Rotterdam, diversity is insufficiently seen as a value and part of the social capital of the city. Education reinforces inequality, instead of working towards equal opportunities and equal citizenship for everyone. The ambassadors do see many good initiatives, but they see stagnant and unsupportive policies. They see that innovation comes about bottom-up and want it to be stimulated and secured from above. The municipality should encourage knowledge sharing and cooperation of classes and schools more actively.

Ambassadors and professionals want to continue their conversation. They want to continue to take inventory of experiences and encourage innovation. The ambassadors propose four ideas to address this:

- i. Bring in new knowledge and skills*
Ensure diversity within teacher teams, equal opportunities in application procedures and an inclusive organizational culture. Within this, professionals with new competences are needed who are role models, have the courage to be vulnerable and can assist the student as a tutor. Teachers must have basic knowledge about the problems and challenges of modern metropolitan city life. They should actively involve students and their parents.
- ii. Develop a representative curriculum.*
Provide education that accommodates different perspectives, has an eye for current events, and does not trap history in a Eurocentric narrative. Ensure that people learn about each other's (personal) history. Introduce a world citizenship course and a Rotterdam World Day within the entire Rotterdam educational system. In addition, it is necessary to work towards equal accessibility to art and cultural education for all students (not just white students) and it is necessary to work on the development of social and cultural capital of students. Students must learn to speak up if they are being excluded and learn to behave as a critical consumer of (social) media.
- iii. Accessible internships and labour market*
Everyone has the right to an appropriate internship and good preparation for the labour market. Ensure that companies that discriminate based on race or ethnicity are put on a black list and that good examples are given a hallmark, as 'Partner of the City of Rotterdam'. Invest in internship brokers and mediators and in involvement of parents/social network, also for older students.
- iv. Prevent dropout*
Support initiatives in the city that prevent student dropout or promote an appropriate access to the labour market. Two of these stand out:
 - a. Extended selection procedures accessing secondary education: Unequal treatment begins in primary education. Encourage a pilot for an extended selection procedure

⁵ Filmapalooza is an international film festival that serves as the finale for the 48 Hour Film Project, in which filmmakers are challenged to make a film within 48 hours.

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so that children from migrant communities can be involved in the development of their own cultural capital, make better choices and can be assessed more fairly.

- b. School is relevant to the learning and living environment: Problems that students and students experience arise in a context of difficulties in multiple areas of life. Make it possible for school to play a role to reverse negative influences as a network organization with an integrated approach not only in the learning but also in the living environment of students.

4. Identity as a distinctive and binding force

One's own community, the experience one shares with those who are familiar, and the memory of one's origin, provide a sense of belonging in a hyper-diverse city. Many community centres, neighbourhood centres and self-organizations in Rotterdam, where one could find connection have been cut in recent years.

The ambassadors want to restore these safe spaces and make space for the beautiful sides of their own culture. By celebrating them with others they create a better understanding and recognition. This strengthens cohesion in society and the city's role as a shared meeting space. There are two action items:

- i. *Restore safe spaces.*

Restore safe spaces in which people can meet, share experiences and be themselves, based on a shared identity. A safe space provides space that is non-violent (non-racist, not anti-Semitic or Islamophobic) and one cares for the other. The 48 "houses of the neighbourhood," in Rotterdam or places of worship could function as such.

- ii. *Increase space for celebrating identity*

Create more space to celebrate one's own festivals (e.g. by exchanging days off) create an informative and inclusive holiday calendar, and make space for small celebrations and rituals, such as celebrating the Yara night by inhabitants of Rotterdam of Iranian origin or celebrating Hanukkah with the Jewish community. By doing this in the neighbourhoods it will stimulate people to get out of their bubble. Experiencing or doing this together (sports, art and culture, eating together) is supportive.

Rotterdam, April 2023

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In summary

- 1. Provide a recognizable and approachable municipality**

The municipality and police have a role as guardian of equality. To do that well, they themselves must become more diverse and more approachable, and remain in constant dialogue with citizens who experience discrimination and racism.
- 2. No prejudice in the media**

Editors of newspapers, television, radio and social media channels in Rotterdam are insufficiently aware that they are reinforcing negative images about the Black, Jewish and Islamic communities. They need to learn to express themselves respectfully, understandably and recognizably, and become more aware of their own prejudices. To do this, it is necessary for editors to break out of their white bubble and become more accessible to young creators.
- 3. Equality in education**

Education is important for the cohesion of Rotterdam with all its diverse population. Children should learn at school about topics that are also important from their point of view. Teachers must understand the difficulties of the big city, which students and parents face every day. They must be able to be an example for their students, ensure that those students can do internships without experiencing discrimination and ensure together with those students and their parents a drop in school dropouts.
- 4. Welcome every identity**

The experience that people share with their community and the memory of where they come from, is important to everyone in Rotterdam. In order to be able to feel and celebrate that, it is necessary to have a safe place where people can meet and be themselves. It can also be the place to celebrate festivals and other important events of every community and invite other people.



This project is supported financially by The program Rights, Equality and Citizenship (2014-2020) of the European Union by grant agreement 963797.

This publication reflects the sole responsibility of the author; the Commission cannot be held liable for the use of the information in it.