

ROTTERDAM: POWERED BY THE NIGHT



Rotterdam is a city of music and nightlife. Always has been. A seedbed for creativity and the cradle of thriving music scenes. I discovered that on my first forays into our city's nightlife in 2008, at places like the Waterfront, Watt, Bootleg and the Hollywood Music Hall. There, I encountered punks, skaters, hip-hop heads, Rastafarians and techno freaks. I admired their clothes, listened to their music and talked to these groups about how they saw the world. I learnt a lot about these subcultures and the people in them, but, looking back, above all about who I want to be and who I want to be with.

I was captivated by the power of the night. Every weekend, I plunged back into that thrilling world. When it came time to write a thesis for my BA in Arts and Culture Studies and MA in Cultural Entrepreneurship and Economics at Erasmus University Rotterdam, it was only natural to focus on the social and cultural value of nightlife music scenes. In the course of that research I learned that a well-organised night scene adds value by creating wide-ranging opportunities for self-exploration, in both self-expression and talent-cultivation, for jobs, for social cohesion and for making an area, city or region appealing.

Through my work for Rotterdam's independent night council, N8W8, I learned that the city's nightlife sector is facing big challenges. Digitalisation, festivalisation, government Covid assistance repayment obligations, soaring inflation that's leaving youth more cash-strapped than ever and massive urban densification are all making it hard to open nightspots and keep them open. But our city can't just allow its after-hours culture to go up in smoke. Rotterdam after all has long boasted the biggest entertainment scene of any city in the Netherlands, bar none. It is time to see and to support the value of what we've got: nightlife that attracts, awes, inspires, connects and has a multitude of payoffs. Support in the form of allocating a percentage of well-being and cultural funding to cultural nightlife producers, zoning nightlife areas into area development plans for places like the M4H and Oostflank, and investing in night-time security and mobility.

Earlier, the creation of a creative cluster in the Schiekadeblok offered a solution to the problem of urban vacancy in a central zone. Now that this area is being redeveloped, there will no longer be enough room for all those creative enterprises and meeting spaces to return. This is a terrible shame, but also the reality in a capitalist Western city where making money seems to be the holy grail for some. Still, the municipal government and property developers could very well deploy the ambition, experience, knowledge and creativity being displaced from the Schiekadeblok to bring vitality, facilities and interest to another part of the city. But only in a way that is also sustainable for businesses, as otherwise they could lose faith in the value of pioneering in the very city that has traditionally been a haven for trailblazers, creatives, music lovers and night owls.



Thys Boer is the coordinator and spokesperson of N8W8 R'dam, Rotterdam's independent night council. Established in 2019, N8W8 advises and advocates in the sector and municipality for a vibrant, safe and accessible nightlife in Rotterdam. Other members of the night council are Epifania Queta (inclusion & diversity), Kim Nguyen (urban development), Yasmin Ben Azouz (research & development) and Aniek de Rooij (talent development & funding).

