

Irene van Renselaar

Difficulties in Contemporary Heritage Projects: Community Participation and (Re)Presentation of Contemporary Urban Culture.

Museum Rotterdam researches, collects and presents the city of Rotterdam in past and present. It does so from a cultural historical and social scientific perspective, not out of a nostalgic longing for the past or to show the present better than it is.

We can connect this principle to the ideas of David Lowenthal, who distinguishes a history perspective on the past from a heritage perspective. Summarized, a history perspective represents an interpretation of the past that is open for anyone to discuss. Heritage on the other hand, has a nostalgic and present-minded view of the past and stimulates processes of in- and exclusion.

Museum Rotterdam currently redefines its position in society on the background of debates on how cultural historical museums can remain connected to society in the 21st century. This is a topical matter and a fundamental question in a strongly transforming urban environment. The museum tries to do so by actively connecting communities to collecting, interpreting and presenting contemporary Rotterdam heritage. Significance is attributed to the heritage from the perspective of the communities and the museum, and in dialogue between the two. This also means that communities have influence on the ways they are (re)presented in presentations. This can be difficult, when their perspective conflicts with alternative perspectives that exist in society.

Using cases of present and former community participation projects of Museum Rotterdam (e.g. the restructuring of neighborhoods and coping strategies of low-income mothers) we discuss difficulties between community participation and historical (re)presentation of urban culture in Museum Rotterdam.

## CV

Irene van Renselaar is urban curator of Museum Rotterdam. Since 2009 she worked for the project City as Muse, in which the museum develops a new museum model for participatory collecting and presenting. Her main focus is connecting the museum and contemporary communities by researching contemporary urban culture, building a network throughout the city, making heritage acquisition proposals and initializing and contributing to presentations. She worked for other projects of the museum from 2007-2009, always concerning community participation. She has experience in the field of research, education and presentation. Irene holds a master's degree in Cultural Heritage (Universiteit Utrecht) and a bachelor's degree in Cultural Sciences (Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam).

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