

Key elements from speech Hilde van der Meer – AMS Infoday 25 April 2013

Good afternoon. I'm Hilde van der Meer and I'm the director of Amsterdam in business and in charge of attracting foreign investment to the Amsterdam metropolitan area. As of today, there are about 2,000 international companies in the area, good for about 160,000 jobs. That's about 17 percent of the total workforce. I think that Amsterdam has huge potential to further internationalise.

I started at Schiphol Airport in 1995 and that was the time when the vision came of having two main ports, Schiphol as a main port and the port of Rotterdam. At the same time the EU increasingly became a unity with no borders. This in turn attracted many Japanese and American companies to Amsterdam, which set up huge distribution centres, together with their headquarters. That was the beginning of a new phase of internationalisation for the Amsterdam area. Then once those big, huge warehouses were in place, IT came up at the beginning of 2000. With IT, a whole new phase started with internationalisation and globalisation of the world. Where companies initially would be very much in charge of their own products, their own distribution and so forth, globalization brought about a whole new phenomenon called outsourcing. Companies started to outsource everything you can think of, for instance their tax administration, their accounting assignments, their marketing processes and so on.

Around 2000, what one could see in Amsterdam was that the business sector started growing rapidly. Growth took place in the IT sector, the creative sector, but also in the accountancy and the financial sector. Throughout the 2000s Amsterdam continued to grow and was able to develop real estate. However, in 2008 the economic crisis hit us and that marked a very important moment. Before that time, almost all cities in the world were growing, booming and doing well. I remember we attracted about a 100 companies a year in the period before 2008. Due to the crisis I expected I needed to put this number down and estimated that we would attract around 50 to 75 companies. To my surprise the number remained 100, and even went up to 120. Last year we attracted 126 new companies. How can it be that Amsterdam continues to attract these amounts of new companies? It's simple: Amsterdam has the basics, and these basics are in order. Basics in the form of Europe's best airport, Europe's largest seaport and Europe's largest internet hub. We're connected, and very well connected at that.

Another element is the services sector which is very strong and oriented towards Europe. The Netherlands is a small country, hence every company that's here is always looking abroad. When you are an international company, it doesn't matter where and it doesn't matter what business you are in, you're very easily serviced here by companies who can facilitate doing your business internationally. Additionally, if Amsterdam is benchmarked with other hubs in the world, price quality wise we're doing very well. That does not only go for housing and offices, but it has also to do with the prices of labour and the service sector.

Quality is, if you look in the past 20 years, becoming more and more important in people's lives. What you see here is that talent is really becoming the next step in internationalisation. When I was in my twenties I went to Japan for two years. That wasn't a thing people did. If we look nowadays, everyone is going abroad, all students and everyone

wants to travel and want to work abroad. If you look at what's happening in the past years in Amsterdam, why this internationalisation is still taking place during times of crisis, it is because people no longer just bring goods to the European market. They also look at cities and analyze what cities can do for them and for their business. If I speak for Amsterdam I notice that in the last couple of years we are attracting in some fields, in some niches, some very interesting new businesses.

A good example is the advertising business; a couple of American advertising companies here found out that it's easy to hire many different nationalities. That's very useful for making worldwide campaigns. Hence Nike and Coca-Cola to name a few did many of their campaigns from Amsterdam.

Another example is the jeans sector, which is really coming up in Amsterdam. Somehow, Dutch people wear more jeans than any other people in the world. Consequently we started attracting international jeans companies and we're now called jeans capital of the world.

In the aerospace industry, Fokker left Amsterdam a long time ago. The capacity for education however remained. Nowadays you can see companies coming from all over the world doing maintenance and overhaul here at Schiphol airport.

In the ICT sector, Appsterdam was started two years ago, providing common ground for App makers. App makers who really like to live in Amsterdam, who like to be inspired all the time and who like to combine that with work.

Clearly I can go on and on about these kind of initiatives. If I look at my quest at getting Amsterdam more international than it is, I think the AMS initiative fits perfectly in this next step to attract international talent. Talent can be attracted to find metropolitan solutions, for creating a 'spill-over' effect of the AMS institute, or for specific knowledge which is required or available in Amsterdam.

I'm very happy that we as a government stimulate these kind of initiatives. What you see in the world is that people go to places where they are inspired and where they can do business. People want to be educated and governments want to facilitate this. Amsterdam is good at all three and we can become even better. I hope that you will work on that in your consortium. Thank you.