



DIRECTEUR BIBLIOTHEEK EINDHOVEN: ALBERT KIVITS

NOT EVERYONE IS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE ‘FAR-ENGLISHISATION’ OF OUR LANGUAGE

‘Sorry, don’t speak Dutch’

The Eindhoven region welcomes many new inhabitants. We notice this not only in the tight housing market and congestion on the roads, but especially in the language on the streets. Not infrequently, English is the language most heard; in cafés and restaurants, customers are addressed in English. Not all residents are that enthusiastic about this development. **And wouldn’t internationals be better off learning Dutch to promote their social integration?**

TEKST: HANS MATHEEUWSEN | FOTO: EDDIE MOL

A few years ago, Rabobank investigated 'brede welvaart' in Brainport Eindhoven and noted dissatisfaction and latent contradiction. It turned out that residents are relatively dissatisfied with their lives. One in five gives his or her life an unsatisfactory rating. Despite all the economic success, we have not become happier. Everyone agrees that the COVID pandemic has had a further negative impact on that. This also applies to the ensuing energy crisis and increased inflation due to the war in the Ukraine. Housing satisfaction is declining because of a housing shortage, increasing rents and more expensive mortgages due to, among other things, rising interest rates. The researchers thought it was time for a broad prosperity agenda. We are now working hard on this via 'Brainport voor elkaar', the social counterpart of the economic success formula. In other words: there is just as much cooperation here to allow all people to benefit from prosperity.

In residential areas, neighbours understand each other less and less

difficulties switch between the languages. She understands that it is not always that easy to learn the language of the country. But even in residential areas, neighbours understand each other less and less. In addition to cultural differences, the language barrier stands in the way of spontaneous contact between the new neighbours. This not only seriously hampers social integration but can also be a source of misunderstanding and distrust. It turns out that the neighbourhood is not waiting for the community centre to be taken over by foreigners who sometimes want to celebrate their party here often.

We are not just talking about knowledge workers, but also migrant workers and status holders. At Vrijwillige Hulpdienst Eindhoven, they have noticed that language can be a barrier and that city residents are irritated by the 'Englishness' of the contact. They no longer feel at home in their own environment. A record number of asylum seekers is expected this year. The government does not yet have an answer to this, while the pressure on facilities and housing is increasing. It has been found that this leads to dissatisfaction, irritation, and anger. People do not feel taken seriously by their own government. There is fear of social unrest in the long term.

GET SET!

Every reason to promote integration and thus understanding of each other. Brainport Development has even developed an online game for that purpose: Get Set! especially for international students.

Via www.getsetinbrainport.nl, they can get to know the Netherlands, its inhabitants and their culture. The challenge is to get as much Dutch as possible. 'Willem' guides the participant. And yes, he can be a bit aloof in the beginning. Willem advocates for a local friend who will show the way in society. Besides

getting acquainted with Brainport and its identity, the game starts with a favourite part of student life, especially in Brabant: drinks! And of course the informal goodbye 'houdoe' is part of the vocabulary. As is the regional delicacy 'frites'. Essential is the shared 'bakske koffie'. And we know the soft 'g' here. And so internationals are playfully introduced to our language, culture and peculiarities.

FEELING AT HOME

Albert Kivits, director of the Eindhoven Public Library, also has concerns about the language gap between foreigners and natives. According to Rabobank research, the inequality between highly educated knowledge workers and people from lower socio-economic classes is only increasing, partly as a result. Low literacy is growing, people with a lower education are relatively uninvolved in their further development, and the information and media literacy of both older and younger people increasingly leaves much to be desired. He believes the new 'Dutch' should learn our language. "Many internationals have a language and therefore communication problem. They do not learn Dutch sufficiently, which means they have less contact with their neighbours. In the long run, this can lead to loneliness et cetera. So the problem of low literacy is much more complex than we initially think."

Language connects and makes you feel more at home

Language connects and makes people more likely to feel at home in a new place. As a developer of people, the library sees an important role for itself to counter inequality. "We welcome new Eindhoven residents and make them feel at home. Language development and enjoyment are central to this, because language connects and enlarges your world. This is how we connect people who have traditionally lived in Eindhoven and new Eindhoven residents, so they'll have more understanding for each other, understand more and learn more from each other." ■

Praat Nederlands met me/ Speak Dutch with me:

Holland Expat Centre is giving away free badges, helping expats integrate into the region by speaking the language. Are you willing to help? Get one of these badges at **Holland Expat Centre!**

Who wants to learn a new language, can take on a course at **STE Languages** (www.ste.nl).

The **Eindhoven Public Library** is situated in the city centre, the De Witte Dame building at Emmasingel 22, and has a wide range of books in English. Also children's books in many other languages including Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian. For more information, see: www.bibliotheekeindhoven.nl/Joining-the-library/english

One-third of Eindhoven's population is of overseas origin. One-fifth of the residents have a non-Western background. The rapid internationalisation of (the region of) Eindhoven is not only greeted with approval. There is increasing criticism of the inescapable fact that we are addressed in English. When ordering a meal or drink it may occur the responding of the waitress or waiter on duty: 'Sorry, I don't speak Dutch', so we automatically have to appeal to our language skills and ability to improvise.

Columnist Petra Bies of the Eindhovens Dagblad recently called it irritating that she is constantly addressed in English in the hospitality industry. It surprises her every time, she reflects on her own oping, considering herself a woman of the world. She experiences