Benchmarking
The Hague

2026 refresh and review

The Business of Cities

Benchmarking The Hague

Summary

The Business of Cities

About this 2026 update

- A 2026 update of The Hague's key strengths and challenges in global city benchmarks
- Based on updated facts, data and analysis of The Hague in a context of potential competitors and comparators
- A whole-city perspective on how The Hague is doing and what has changed and why
- Includes assessments of visibility, performance and perception

What it is designed to do:

- ✓ Learn how the world sees The Hague in 2026 and guide positioning and monitoring efforts
- ✓ Suggest ways for The Hague to improve visibility and performance
- ✓ Inform decision making in The Hague about distinctive niches it can develop
- ✓ Guide decisions for marketing, promotion and strategic ambitions

What it is not:

- ✗ Not an evaluation of The Hague's brand campaigns to date
- ✗ Not a comprehensive competitiveness analysis of The Hague
- ✗ Not an assessment of The Hague's governance, strategies, fiscal or policy models
- ✗ Not a recommendation of new policies that The Hague should adopt

Why benchmark The Hague?

Cities around the world, from Oslo to Vancouver to Adelaide, continue to see the analytical and strategic value of benchmarking

How The Hague can act on what benchmarking shows

1. **Promote what the city has long been good at**
   Build on established strengths in international institutions and quality of life.
2. **Correct enduring doubts or misperceptions**
   Address gaps where the city is read less favourably than it performs.
3. **Show the world where The Hague stands out**
   Surface the specialised niches that broad indices tend to flatten.
4. **Demonstrate what makes the city distinctive**
   Move beyond all-round liveability stories into a sharper identity.
5. **Choose how to grow, stand out and work with neighbours**
   Make deliberate decisions about positioning within the Randstad.

What benchmarking provides for The Hague

1. **A reference source of international insight**
   A consolidated read on how external observers see the city.
2. **More visibility and better all-round performance**
   Tracking presence in the rankings is a precondition for moving up them.
3. **Recognition in specific niches**
   Being read as a top-tier peace and justice city, not just an all-round one.
4. **Progress monitoring and gap closure**
   An evidence base for whether interventions are landing.
5. **Confronting the difficult choices**
   Where to compete, where to specialise, where to defer to the Randstad.

Reading benchmarks for The Hague

What benchmarks show, what they miss, and what they mean for The Hague.

What benchmarks are

- **Compare The Hague to other cities**
  Drawing on the publicly available studies in use
- **Mix objective indicators with perception**
  Combine objective measures with user surveys
- **Highlight strengths and gaps**
  Surface where the city is doing well, and where the field is ahead
- **Shape decisions of outside audiences**
  Influence on investor, talent and visitor impressions.

What they cannot tell you

- **Data coverage is uneven**
  Some issues that matter to the city are not measured yet
- **Time lag**
  Real improvements typically take a year or more to show in the rankings
- **Drivers outside the city**
  Market demand and national factors sit beyond the City's direct control
- **Whole-city scope**
  The benchmarks measure the whole city, not only what the City Hall does

How to read The Hague's scores

What to keep in mind while reading

- **The reading is relative**
  The Hague can improve and still slip if peers improve faster
- **Breadth versus depth**
  Smaller cities tend to be read lower on all-round indices, higher on specialised ones
- **Scale matters**
  Most studies read The Hague stand-alone, while the city benefits from the Randstad's scale
- **Perception is not performance**
  Low scores can reflect awareness rather than reality.

The bottom line

Read them together

No single ranking is the truth. Patterns across many benchmarks are more reliable.

Mind the scale lens

Compare The Hague to peers of its size and credit the Randstad where scale matters.

Be clear on the implications

Some gaps point to performance work, others to perception work; treat them differently.

Understanding city benchmarks

Benchmarks compare cities using publicly available studies of **performance** and **perception.**

Together these can inform the choices of: **Businesses** **Investors** **Talent** **Visitors**

Objective

Performance

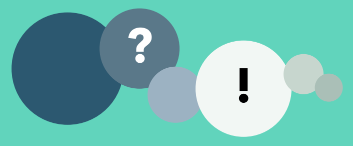
What the city actually does measured directly.

Reflects the whole city, not just how the government itself is performing. Picks up the city economy, environment, infrastructure and outcomes together.

Subjective

Perception

What people think the city is, surveyed and asked.



Who is asked matters. Each survey reaches a particular audience, and the city's reading shifts with it.

Expats · Visitors · Students · Investors · Global experts

The range of benchmarks changes

The balance of things that are measured changes, and this can favour some cities in some cycles and others in others. Trends

Perception lags performance

Performance moves

today

Perception follows

years on

A real improvement can take years to register externally. The result is often **a lack of awareness, or a lack of choices that include The Hague.**

It's all relative

A city can improve and still fall behind if others improve faster.

Data lags reality

Real improvements often take more than a year to register in the next benchmark cycle.

Coverage gaps

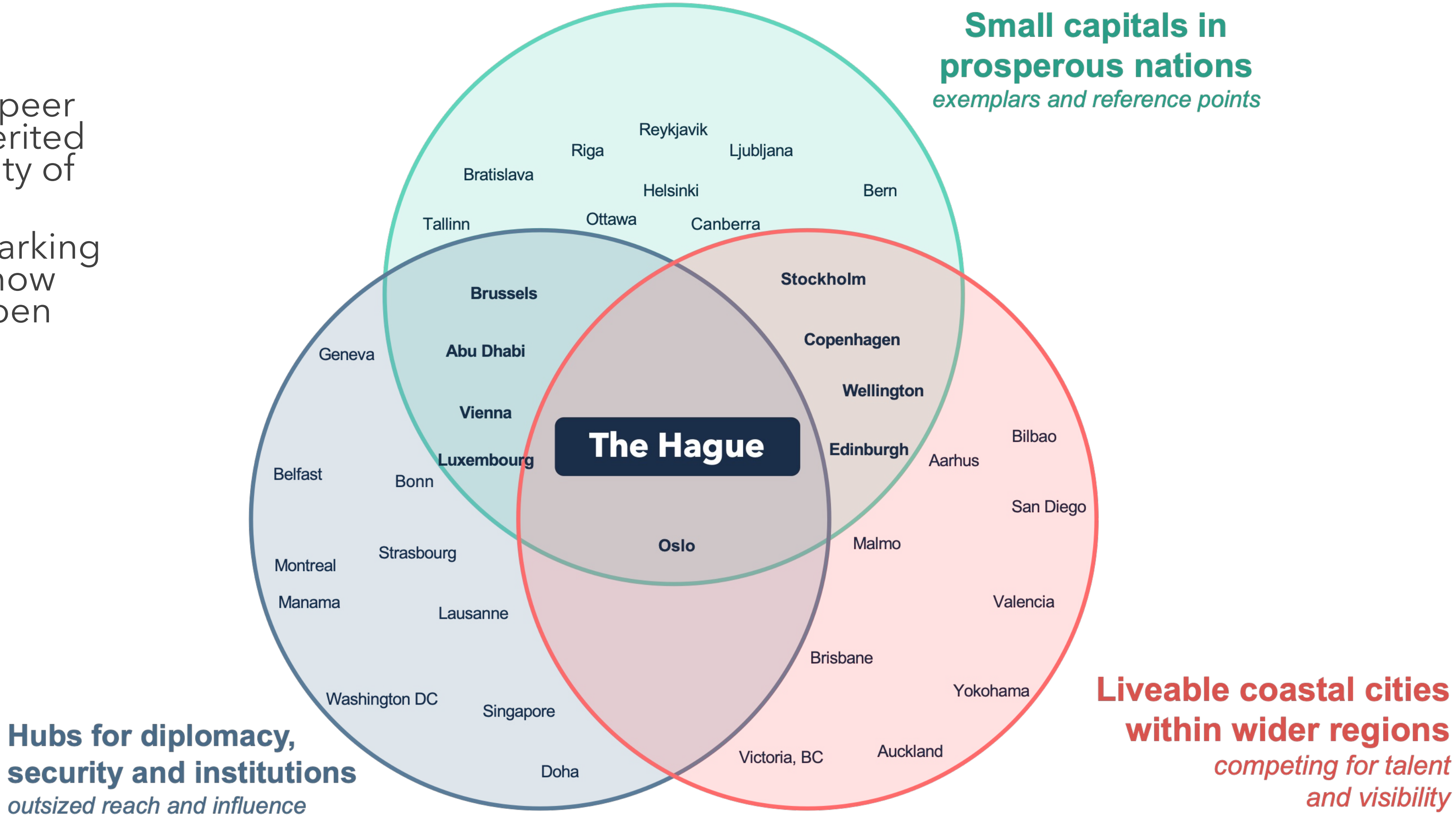
Not every theme The Hague cares about is yet covered by international data.

Beyond city control

Many results are shaped by national policy and market forces, not by city action alone.

The Hague in its peer context: a global frame for the city's position

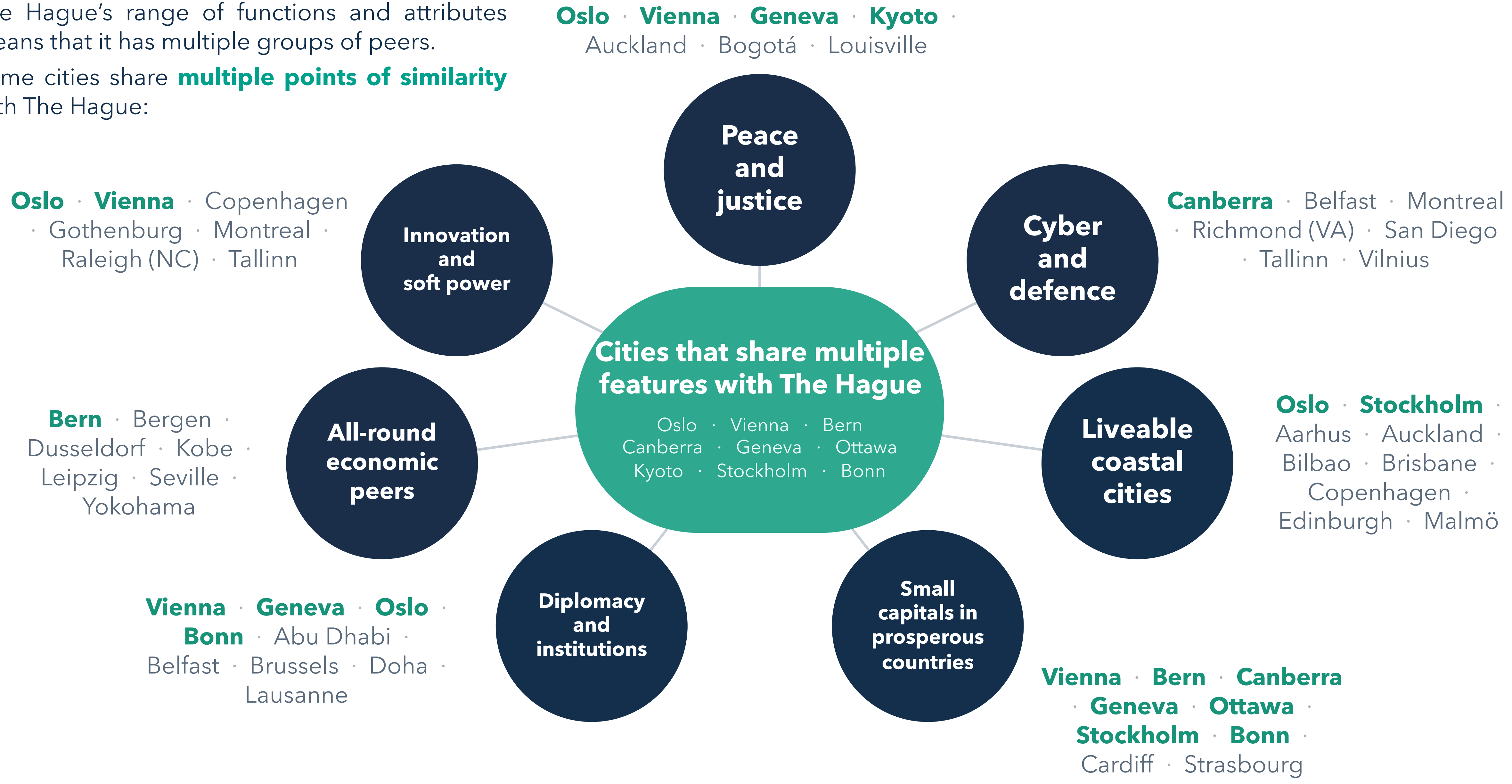
- Benchmarking The Hague requires a global frame for assessing the city's position, performance and reputation.
- At the same time, The Hague is also understood through a more selective peer lens: cities that share comparable inherited assets, international functions, or quality of life propositions.
- This study adds to the global benchmarking with some analysis of peer cities and how some of them are responding to sharpen their brands and attract opportunity.



The Hague in its peer context: shared attributes of The Hague across cohorts

The Hague's range of functions and attributes means that it has multiple groups of peers.

Some cities share **multiple points of similarity** with The Hague:



The world of indices and the world of cities

The benchmarking world of cities has grown. There are more indices, and far more cities per index. As the universe of cities gaining competitive appraisal grow, established cities have to adapt.

The city as place to live and experience is a more dominant axis of city benchmarking. There is much more attention on cities in terms of being environmentally credible and socially well balanced, and more scrutiny on their happiness and affordability.

The innovative and business friendly city currently comprises a smaller share of the global conversation. There is less focus on raw GDP, productivity, top talent and inward investment. This is partly as studies have gone private or behind paywalls. And partly because some studies have become the dominant lenses through which their market reads cities.

More survey, satellite and sensor-derived indices. These increasingly challenge composites and focus on cities in real time. They also point to issues and impressions beyond cities' administrative boundaries that affect how cities perform.

More soft factors and less on hard factors. This reflects the fact talent, residents, students and investors look at cities as places to live and consume, and that more soft factors are measurable.

2022/3

2025/6

Changes in the mix put different cities in the limelight. e.g. the rise in Experience and Place studies favours small, higher quality cities like the Hague when and where they are featured

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Impacts on The Hague

- ❑ **More chances for The Hague to stand out** but a wider groundswell of competition.
- ❑ **Many cities are gaining ground as competitors or alternatives** including in Europe mid sized cities such as Dresden, Turin, Bristol, and improvers such as secondary Chinese cities, Gulf capitals, Southeast Asian cities.
- ❑ **More opportunity to convey** and communicate lived experience advantages.
- ❑ **The Hague's institutional credentials are underweighted** because so few cities possess them.
- ❑ **Weaknesses or declines are now more reputational and harder to ignore** - especially around housing, affordability, decarbonisation and citizen engagement
- ❑ **Fewer routes for The Hague to generate visibility as a business or impact hub** through benchmarking - more of a need to stand out through individual areas of high achievement

Findings

The Hague is a stronger city as the bar for attention gets higher

- The Hague's substantive urban functioning has improved. The Hague's aggregate position has risen approximately 10 places globally which is an impressive jump given the competition.
- Some of The Hague's strengths register without resonating widely. Cycling, for example, sits at the top of dedicated indices but rarely surfaces in the broader European city conversation. Overall the city is not appearing as often in the online dialogue about cities as its strengths would imply.
- Expert ratings – where The Hague traditionally does well – make up a smaller share of indices, and puts a ceiling on high value exposure. Indices have also grown larger and more crowded, so The Hague is looked at more but seen less.

World-class strengths sit alongside the costs of success

- The Hague now carries a striking mix of extreme highs and significant lows. It reads as a global exemplar on lived experience, but also a city with dysfunctions that come with success and demand. This polarised profile can create a blurred picture and a need to manage the narrative proactively and communicate how The Hague offers the best of both worlds.
- The Hague's top rating in Numbeo, held since 2023 remains remarkable. Other cities placed similarly high for liveability tend to carry even steeper housing, congestion or pollution problems.

Specialist credentials, loose grip on the narrative

- The Hague is gaining some more recognition as a specialist diplomatic and institutional hub. The cyber and security economy is also becoming more legible.
- The Hague's specialist skillset does not gain as many independent top scores. More indices tend not to stick to administrative city boundaries, either because their audiences look at whole markets or because the data looks at functions more than borders. This means The Hague shares the credit with others and is often read against measurements it cannot fully control.

Winning hearts and minds

- Educated internationally mobile populations have high global expectations in areas such as amenity, affordability and services, and The Hague is not always acknowledged or acclaimed by this audience. This suggests meeting their standards and recruiting them as advocates and amplifiers will be important.
- Recorded appraisals of The Hague from experts and the global public are less common. Audiences unfamiliar with the city depend on other channels to update their perceptions.

Findings

Striking facts about The Hague

- The Hague has held the world #1 spot for crowdsourced resident quality of life every year since 2023, the longest stretch any city has held this position on record (Numbeo)
- The Hague-Rotterdam is rated top 20 in Europe for cybersecurity, with the cyber sector's outperforming its overall innovation economy by greater margin than in London, Munich, Zurich, or Helsinki (Dealroom)
- Europe's 9th highest share of foreign-born founders, ahead of Copenhagen (Startup Heatmap)
- The Hague is among the top 1% of cities for protected bike lanes (ITDP)
- The Hague is currently one of only 9 mid-sized European cities to combine low heat stress with low cooling and heating demand (OECD)
- The Hague is in the top 3% for residential greenhouse-gas emissions reduction trajectory. (GHSL)
- The Hague is rated in the top 4% of European cities for formal early-years childcare coverage (Eurostat)
- The Hague's aggregate benchmark performance has improved 10 places globally since 2023

Surprises or omissions for The Hague

- Resident perceptions of housing affordability have fallen by 50 places since 2023 (IMD)
- The Hague is outside the top 50 cities for where founders say they would consider basing a startup (Startup Heatmap Europe)
- The Hague's congestion trend since the pandemic has worsened faster than 70% of measured cities (Inrix)
- Career prospects is rated the weakest area of the Hague's offer among international expats (Internations)
- The Hague has slipped 34 places among the world's most connected business cities (GaWC)
- NO_2 air quality exposure currently places The Hague last among 50 top European cities, dragging down its quality of life scores (OECD)
- The Hague is still absent from five of the world's most influential city rankings

Implications

- The Hague has an opportunity to present itself as a leading exponent of good city-making and a laboratory for good governance at a global level - a city that gives to the world. It is one of the very few cities to combine these roles effectively.
- The Hague should make more of its stand-out advantages. The Hague has the hallmarks of a genuine leader in urban quality but these appear as isolated 'scores' rather than attached to a broader story or ethos.
- The Hague's visibility and performance in benchmarks increasingly are shaped by growth management challenges beyond its borders. The Hague can define more clearly how it belongs to the Randstad and what the network of places borrow from each other. The cities share a model, a labour market, and complementary specialisations.

Action Agendas

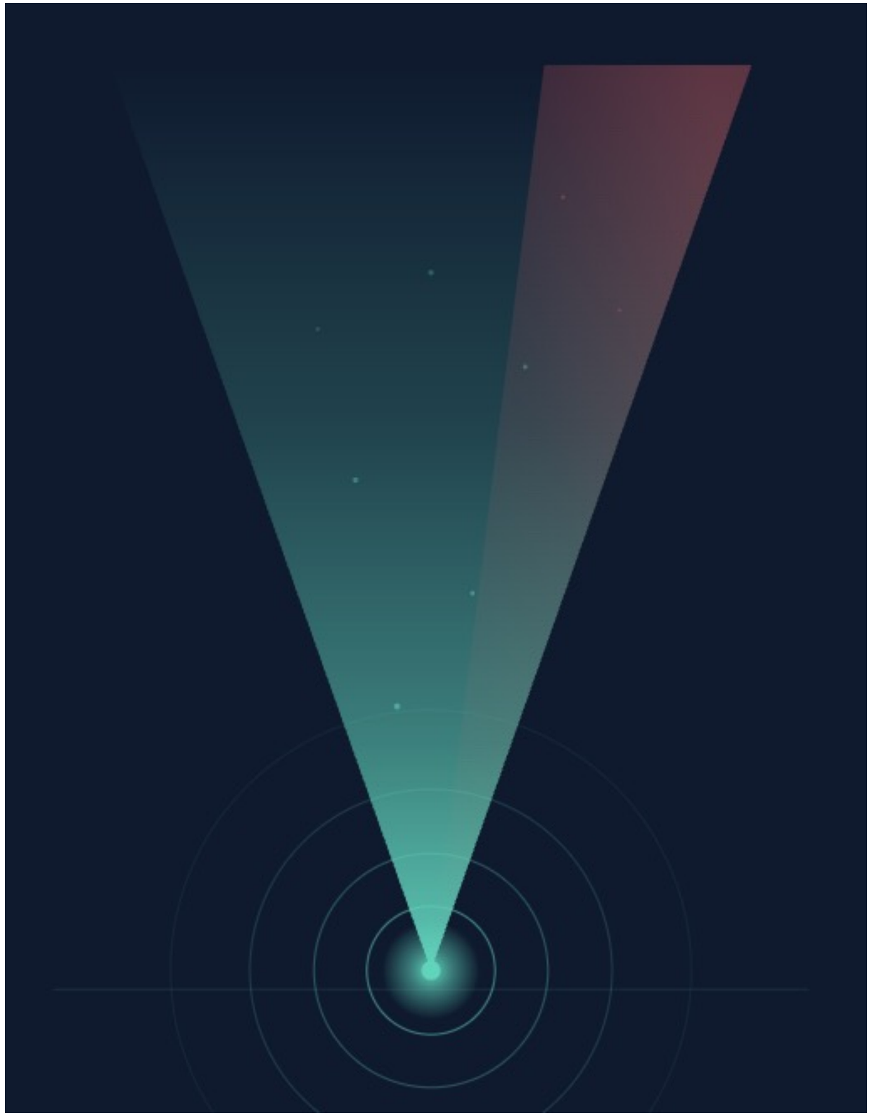
- Deepen the identity beyond peace and justice. Explore ways for the brand to amplify rather than stifle The Hague's underlying personality, assets and capabilities.
- Demonstrate that The Hague can commit to the social contract, and belongs in the conversation of forward-looking and fast-moving vanguard of European cities.
- Keep the business brand beyond cyber and focused on the combinations of technology, financial and decision-making strengths.
- Develop a more positive and magnetic story of 'security' that is about trust, resilience, and building a durable operating system for the global community.
- Boldly assert The Hague's strengths and assets in a noisy geopolitical world

The Hague's visibility and performance in 2026

Factors shaping The Hague's benchmark visibility in 2026

What drives The Hague's visibility up	
Administrative capital	There is more focus on cities with capital city functions that look at e.g. convening power, policy leadership, good governance.
Specialist functions and niches	More appraisal of cities presumed to be leaders in policy, technology adoption, institutional roles or professional services
Focus on people-focused cities	More interest in affordability, cohesion and experience sees focus on aggregated sentiment of city experience, which other index providers draw on, creating snowball effect.

What drives The Hague's visibility down	
Scale	There is more focus on metropolitan scale of cities, which often means The Hague is subsumed within the Randstad or South Holland.
Wider system cities	As the 3rd city in Netherlands, The Hague is often overlooked from benchmarks that pick only 1-2 largest cities per country, and is not given the chance to differentiate.
Business and investor priorities	More commercially-focused indices focus on smaller baskets of larger markets, or filter primarily for scale.



The Hague's appearances in global indices

There are more indices but a larger proportion do not include The Hague than in 2023.

The Hague features in 13% of indexes focused on European cities, down from 25% in the last edition.

After Amsterdam, Rotterdam is the next Dutch city to be featured when indexes expand. (BCW, EIU)

Indices have expanded to more competitor cities in areas that The Hague has done well in (expat destination choices, green cities)

The Hague's visibility is being diluted amid a faster-growing field of cities being appraised. There are more chances to appraise The Hague, but also more competitors.

The Hague remains consistently appraised in the most-watched benchmarks

- **The Hague appears in nearly half** of the world's current most widely covered indices
- **It is visible in those that cover lifestyle, expat experience and resident perception**, but much less visible in command, capital, education and innovation indices.
- **This creates the strong impression that The Hague is 'high quality, well governed, international and functional'.** It is not as easy to use high-profile indices to generate business, investment, innovation and institutional influence.

Benchmark	What does it measure	Did the Hague feature in '23?	Has it appeared since?	2023	Latest	Change	Performance or perception?
EIU Global Liveability Index	Overall quality of life for expats (20+ inputs)	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
Oxford Economics Global Cities Index	Composite of economic, human capital, quality-of-life, environment & governance scores	-	Yes	-	84th / 1000 2025	-	Performance
Mercer Quality of Living Survey	Living conditions for international assignees: politics, economy, healthcare, education, environment	Yes	Yes	11th / 240	14th / 241 2024	-3	Performance
IMD Smart City Index	Impacts of smart technology on resident well-being	Yes	Yes	43rd / 141	54th / 145 2026	-11	Perception
Numbeo Quality of Life Index	How highly local residents perceive quality of life, based on crowdsourced data.	Yes	Yes	1st / 196	1st / 298 2026	0	Perception
Knight Frank Global Residential Cities Index	Year-on-year growth in house prices	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
fDi Global Cities of the Future (Top 10)	How attractive cities are for foreign direct investments, based on 100+ performance measures	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
QS Best Student Cities	How attractive a city is for students, including university rankings, student numbers and mix.	No	No	-	-	-	Both
Mercer Cost of Living Survey	Overall cost of living, based on PPP prices of a basket of more than 150 items (goods & services)	Yes	Yes	46th / 227 (1st = most expensive)	44th / 227 2024 (1st = most expensive)	+2	Performance
Z-Yen Financial Centres/Green Finance Index	How highly finance sector professionals rate the city's financial competitiveness and maturity of green finance	No	No	-	-	-	Perception
Kearney Global Cities Index	Extent to which a city can attract, retain, and generate global flows of capital, people, and ideas.	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
ICCA Country and City Rankings	Number of international association meetings held in the city	Yes	Yes	164th / 363	148th / 363 2025	+16	Performance
Internations Expat Insider City Ranking	Expat satisfaction with life, work, ease of settling in, finding friends, etc.	Yes	Yes	20th / 49	29th / 52 2024	-9	Perception
Startup Genome Global Startup Ecosystem Report	All-round strength of the innovation ecosystem: funding, market reach, talent base, connectedness, etc.	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
Inrix Traffic Congestion Scorecard	Number of hours lost annually to congestion, impact on productivity	Yes	Yes	880th / 991	886th / 941 2025	-6	Performance
Resonance World's Best Cities	All-round measure of city's destination appeal to residents, businesses and visitors.	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
TomTom Traffic Index	Average travel time, congestion level, time lost in rush hour for the metro area	Yes	Yes	204th / 383	191st / 452 2025	+13	Performance
Institute for Quality of Life Happy City Index	Composite of citizens, governance, environment, mobility & economy	Yes	Yes	30th / 176	65th / 179 2025	-35	Both
Cornell/WIPO Global Innovation Index Top 100 S&T Clusters	Top science & technology clusters by patents, scientific publications and S&T intensity	No	No	-	-	-	Performance
Mori Memorial Global Power City Index	City magnetism: economy, R&D, cultural interaction, liveability, environment & accessibility	No	No	-	-	-	Performance

In aggregate assessment of performance benchmarks, The Hague has improved

Looking across all benchmarks of city performance, The Hague now rates as

- **65th** globally
- **31st** among European cities
- **15th** among mid-sized European cities
- **21st** among all mid-sized cities

This increase in aggregate performance is partly because of absolute improvements, and partly because the mix of things being measured changes **(see slide 10).**

	2026	2023
Position among European cities	31st	83rd

▲ since 2023[1]

Performance 'peers'
Austin, Wellington, Porto, Basel, Manchester

The Hague's performance is powered by more numerous and more positive assessments in:

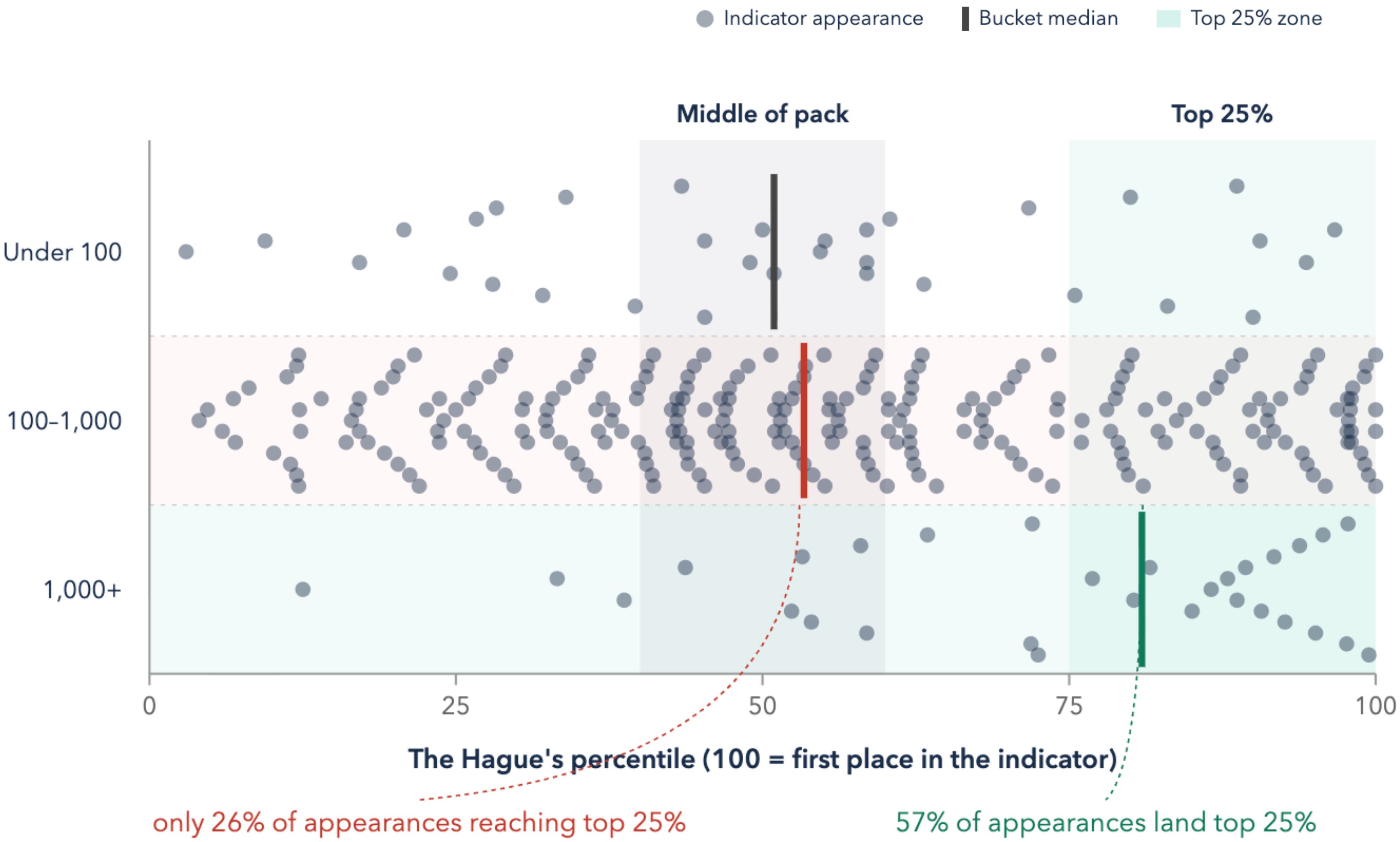
- Quality of life and safety
- All-round economic performance and prosperity
- Connectivity advantages
- Global meeting attraction
- Cycling infrastructure
- Sharing/innovation economy

The Hague is held back or not recently for appraised for

- Global city network status
- Creative and cultural innovation visibility
- Traffic and congestion externalities
- Limited green space compared to lower density cities

The Hague stands out in the wider world of cities more than in curated cohorts

- When The Hague is assessed against a global field of 500 or more cities, it very often places in the top quartile.
- But when it competes against a curated set of advanced cities it tends to be rated near the middle or bottom of the pack often due to scale issues.
- This suggests that The Hague's actual performance is strong, but many of its advantages are often hidden in the 'peloton' of cities



Where The Hague has established an advantage

The Hague is gaining positive recognition for its local and international connections, convenient lifestyle, and more sustainable environmental profile.

Benchmark	Source	Latest	Change since 2023
Accessibility for senior visitors	AllClear	2nd (30) 2026	-
Quality of bike infrastructure among non-US cities	People for Bikes City Ratings	3rd (481) 2025	-2
How connected the city is by air, rail and road	fDi Mid-Sized European Cities of the Future	3rd (10) 2025	-1
Day-to-day living standards for globally mobile professionals	ECA Most Liveable Cities	6th (10) 2025	-
Maturity of the sharing economy	Consumer Choice	7th (60) 2024	-
Everyday safety & security	CEOWorld Safest Cities	8th (288) 2025	-
Average compensation in creative economy	Adobe	11th (41) 2024	-
Usefullness of cycling as active & sustainable transport	Copenhagenize (Usage & Reach)	12th (98) 2025	-
Top destination for international meetings & events	Cvent	19th (25) 2025	-
Significance in global diplomacy	Lowy Institute	23rd (470) 2025	-
All-round economic and social prosperity	Resonance	27th (100) 2025	+2
Residential greenhouse emissions reduction trajectory	GHSL	28th (1201) 2024	-
Overall liveability, vibrancy, and prosperity among European cities	Resonance	43rd (100) 2026	+9

The Hague's opportunities to improve

Expectations of The Hague's amenity and experience are rising, and The Hague sees declining perceptions on cost of living, doing business, shared economic opportunity & prosperity.

Benchmark	Source	Latest	Change since 2023
Visibility in online conversations	ING	45th (60) 2025	-
Strength as a global hub for startups	Startupblink	133rd (1000) 2026	+6
Employee and corporate taxes	Higher School of Economics Global Innovation Index (HSE)	154th (200) 2024	-20
Presence of globally leading universities and R&D	HSE	178th (200) 2024	-10
Expat cost of living	Mercer Cost Of Living Survey	183rd (226) 2024	-1
5-year O_3 pollution trajectory	AQICN	295th (304) 2024	-
Green space coverage, access and health	Husqvarna Urban Green Space Index (HUGSI)	322th (516) 2025	-
Traffic congestion trend since pandemic	Inrix	392 (528) 2024	-
Traffic delays and congestion	Inrix	886th (941) 2025	-6

In Europe, The Hague increasingly differentiates on talent and sustainability

Educated & employable

Top 10%
for graduate share with **53%** of working-age residents hold tertiary qualifications (51st of 793 cities)[1]

Top 20%
for share of jobs in professional and scientific services (19% of jobs, 156th of 797)[1]

One of Europe's most service-specialised metropolitan economies
- Top 5% of European cities for share jobs in public administration, education and health.
- Top 8% for professional, scientific and administrative services. (FUA scale)

Top 1/3rd
for 2-yr population growth* (faster than Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Antwerp)[2]

Appeal for talent and events

+16 places
globally for international event demand, overtaking Bremen (ICCA)*

Top 50 in Europe
for all-round attractiveness to business and creative talent, + 55 places since 2023 overtaking Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester and Marseille (HSE)

+9 places
since 2023 for all-round liveability and magnetism, now just outside Europe's top 50 (54th). Now ahead of Bristol, Aarhus, and Bordeaux (Resonance)

Demographics and diversity

The Hague is increasingly among Europe's most internationally rooted cities:

More EU foreigners than **94%** of European cities[1]

4% rise in foreign-born share makes The Hague one of Europe's faster international-population growth cities.

A working-age city with exceptional family infrastructure
- 68% of residents are of working age, a more favourable working-age share than most peer mid-sized capitals.
- Near-universal early-years care, with rate of children aged 0 to 4 in formal daycare in the top 4% of European cities.

Top 10%
of European cities for share of one-person households (49.5%)[1]

Bottom 25%
for share of households with children (21%)[1]

Sustainability credentials

The Hague has the dense, compact form of a much larger city

Bottom 12%
for car ownership rate[1]
with a profile closer to Nordic capitals

Per-capita greenhouse gas emissions have fallen **21% faster** than the European city median[2]

1 of only 9
mid-sized European cities with low heat stress, cooling and heating demand[2]

Top 1/3rd
For apartments as a share of housing stock (75%) and social housing as a share of total housing (19%)[1]

Source: 1 = Eurostat, 2=OECD for the latest available year, indexes in brackets. *2023-2025

The Hague in innovation benchmarks

The Hague has a mission led technology ecosystem, oriented more to public purpose, regulated markets and institutional trust than most cities.

Its firms specialise in practical technologies for organisations managing risk, compliance, infrastructure, health, security, climate, identity and public interest challenges.

The ecosystem shows strengths in radar, medtech, aerospace, water systems, composites, implants, wearables, orthopaedics and clean energy equipment.

Impact is a defining feature. Around 40% of the city's top rated innovative companies have embedded Sustainable Development Goals.

The Hague also benefits from the wider regional knowledge and industrial base, especially in deep tech, life sciences, aerospace, energy and high tech systems.

The Hague supports a metropolitan ecosystem that is:

- 123rd globally and 56th among European cities for tech ecosystem density. ▼ **3** since 2025
- 7th globally for Semiconductors and 3rd among European cities. ▲ **41** since 2025
- 51st globally for Space tech, and 21st among European cities. ▲ **4** since 2025
- 47th globally for Cybersecurity and 19th among European cities, ahead of Berlin, Stockholm and Barcelona. ▲ **25** since 2025
- 84th globally for Energy tech and 45th among European cities. ▼ **1** since 2025

Strong academic ecosystem and alumni pipeline

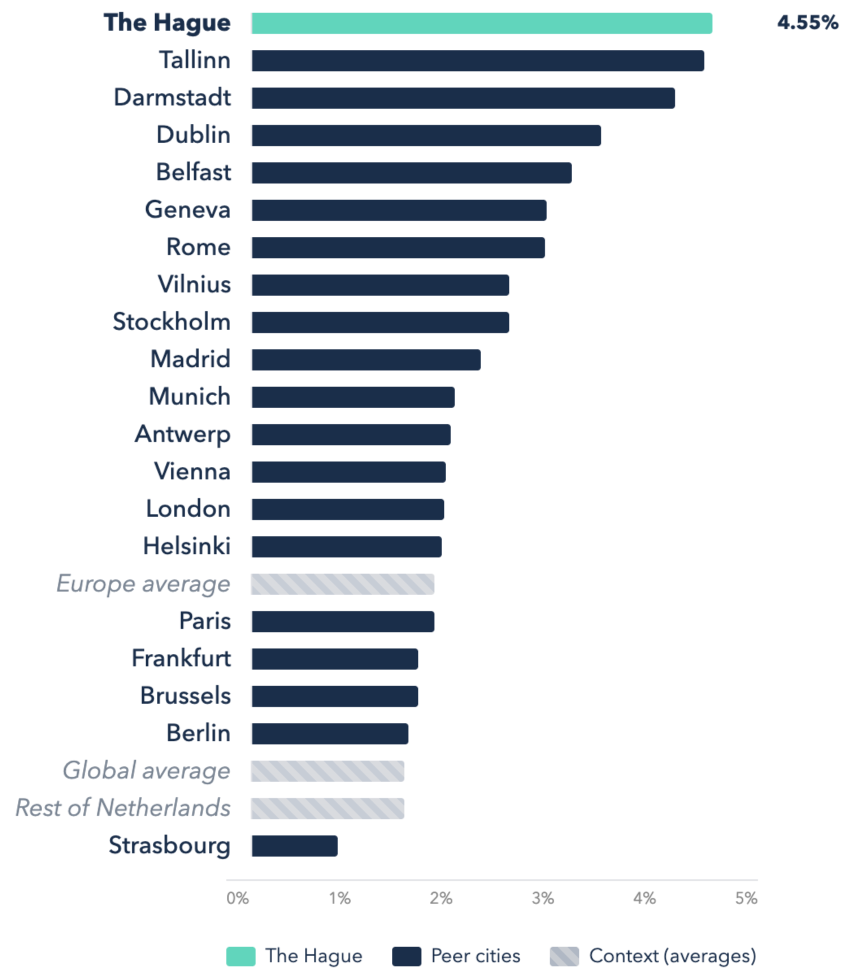
- No. of funded alumni companies from universities is ahead of Helsinki, Edinburgh and Oslo.
- 33 alumni companies that have raised $100M+, ahead of Oslo and Ghent.
- 155 active university spinouts, ahead of Helsinki and Edinburgh.*

- Source: Dealroom (June 2026), based on Rotterdam-The Hague geography. *May 2026

		Latest	Change
Startup Heatmap Europe	Popularity of city as a destination among start-up founders (survey based)	66th / 67 2024	+17
Startupblink Cities	Scale, impact and growth trajectory of start-up ecosystem	133rd / 1000 2026	+6
GaWC World Cities Classification	Extent of advanced producer-services connectivity	295th / 310 2024	-34

The Hague leads Europe on security industry concentration

Share of the city's innovative firm base operating in Security, peer European cities and global / European context.



Based on the Dealroom database of operational and acquired companies geolocated May 2026, considering only cities with more than 50 Security companies in this review.

The Hague's international identity has also fostered local demand and credibility in cyber, identity, legal tech, responsible AI, civic platforms, humanitarian procurement and institutional trust.

The Hague's trust and security capabilities span cyber resilience, digital identity, physical access, responsible disclosure, AI safety, insurance linked protection and public safety systems.

Perceptions of The Hague in 2026

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Perceptions of the Hague

	How visible in benchmarks of each audience type		The Hague's aggregate score in perception benchmarks *…	
Expats	60%	▼	25th	▼
Residents	70%	▲	88th	▼
Global public	<20%	=	57th	▲
Experts	<20%	=	24th	▲

Among those who live & work in The Hague, sentiment has experienced a downturn as the expectations and challenges of growth become apparent in affordability, congestion and other aspects of daily life.

Expats award The Hague high marks for its job opportunities, work culture, and administrative ease.

The Hague is still rarely appraised by studies with a global base of respondents or expert consensus. The Hague remains more overlooked compared to larger neighbours by these studies.

However when it does feature, sentiment is trending more positively.

The Hague is more recognised locally and still regularly among mobile talent, but these groups are also holding it to a higher standard, so The Hague's ratings have fallen in turn.

Appraisals from experts and the global public remain rare, but have trended more positive since 2023.

An emerging perception gap?

As more cities become visible, The Hague's perceptions run behind its demonstrated performance. For perceptions overall it is:

140th globally[1] (vs. 65th for performance)
56th in Europe
25th among European mid-sized cities

The Hague's positive perceptions are powered by

- A high and broad base of quality of life, healthcare, and convenience.
- Strong jobs fundamentals
- Digital services quality and high levels of trust in public systems.

Perceptions of The Hague are held back by

- Cyclical perceptions of costs and affordable housing
- Higher expectations to live up to its promise on urban experience and green space
- Limited online visibility in prominent media and social media

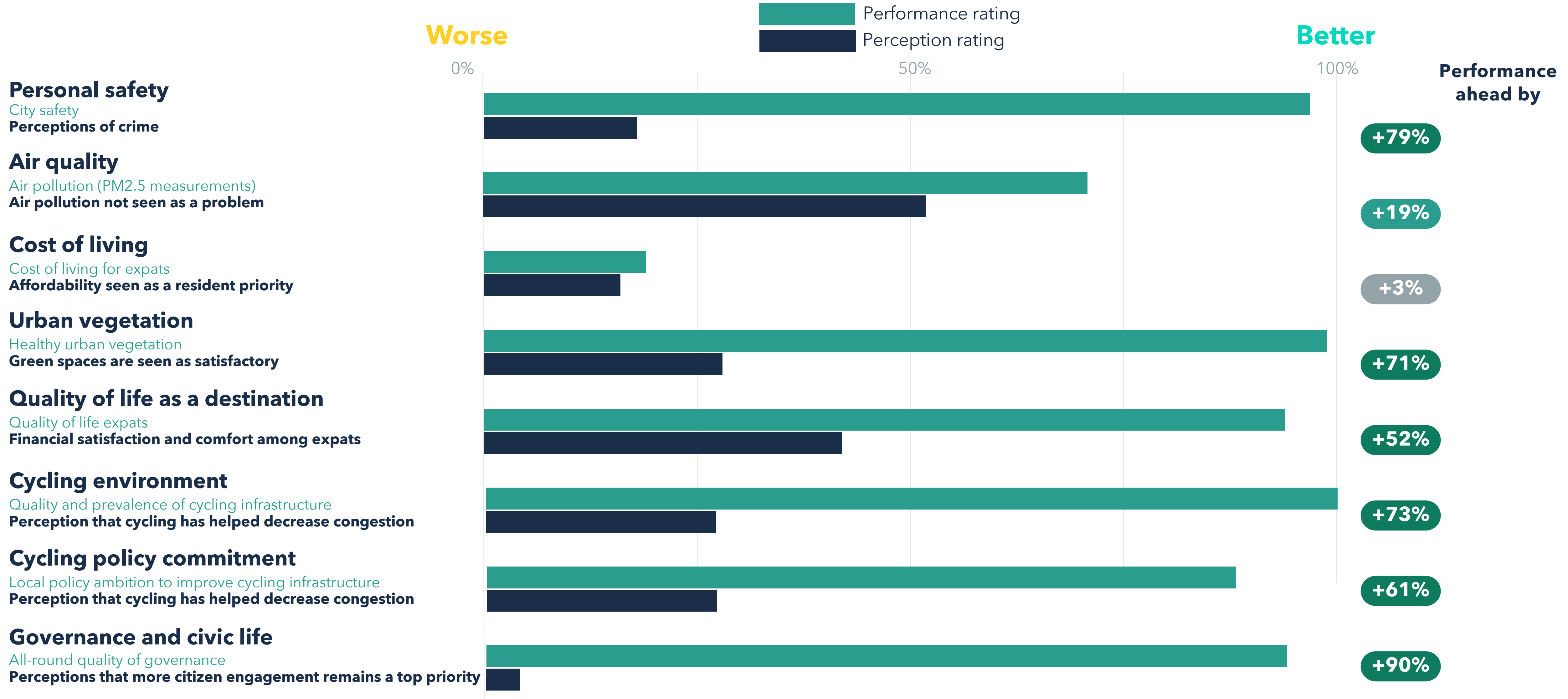
Benchmark	Source	Latest	Change since 2023
How satisfied local people are with quality of life	Numbeo Quality of Life Index	1st (298) 2026	0
How clean people perceive local air to be	Numbeo	4th (322) 2026	+2
How happy expats are with online services access and availability	Internations Expatinsider: Expat Essentials Index	6th (52) 2024	-1
How happy expats are with work culture, job opportunities and job security	InterNations Expat Insider Working Abroad	7th (53) 2024	0
Low perceived corruption among residents	IMD	8th (148) 2026	+13
Low perceived unemployment among residents	IMD	10th (148) 2026	-3
Availability of fulfilling employment	IMD	15th (148) 2026	+65

Benchmark	Source	Latest	Change since 2023
How happy expats are with the local leisure options on offer	Internations Expatinsider Expat City Ranking: Quality Of Urban Living Index	39th (53) 2024	-3
How highly visitors rate the cultural, food and entertainment scene	Resonance Europe's Best Cities	54th (100) 2025	+16
Visibility among European cities in online conversations	ING	59th (70) 2025	-
Perceived social mobility among residents	IMD	90th (148) 2026	+23
Perceived accessibility of cultural activities	IMD	112th (148) 2026	-41
Perceived opportunities for lifelong learning	IMD	119th (148) 2026	-53
Perceived availability of affordable housing among residents	IMD	131st (148) 2026	-50

[1]Based on updated Elo algorithm methodology. The Hague's indicative performance over the 2020-2023 period would be 142nd overall.

Where The Hague's performance runs ahead of perception

The Hague has better ratings when its performance is directly measured than when it is judged on perception and reputation for the same topic.



1. CEOWorld Magazine Safest Cities Ranking 2025 (May 2025), 300 cities; The Hague 8th.
2. IMD Smart City Index 2026 priority on safety, 148 cities; The Hague 121st.
3. AQICN Inner-city Pollution PM2.5 Median 2025, 441 cities; The Hague 127th.
4. IMD Smart City Index 2026 satisfaction on air pollution, 145 cities; The Hague 70th.
5. Mercer Cost of Living June 2024, 226 cities; The Hague 183rd (lower rank = less expensive).
6. IMD Smart City Index 2025 priority on affordability, 146 cities; The Hague 122nd.
7. Husqvarna Urban Green Space Index (HUGSI) Urban Health of Vegetation 2025, 516 cities; Hague…
8. IMD Smart City Index 2026 satisfaction on green spaces, 145 cities; The Hague 104th.
9. Mercer Quality of Living 2024, 241 cities; The Hague 14th.
10. Internations Expat City Ranking Personal Finance 2024, 53 cities; The Hague 30th.
11. People for Bikes City Ratings 2024, 920 cities; The Hague 1st.
12. IMD Smart City Index 2026 satisfaction on bike hiring, 148 cities; The Hague 108th.
13. Copenhagenize Index 2025, 100 cities; The Hague 12th.
14. Oxford Economics Global Cities Index Governance 2025, 1,000 cities; The Hague 63rd.
15. IMD Smart City Index 2026 priority on citizen engagement, 148 cities; The Hague 142nd.

Local perceptions pose warning signs

The Hague's robust reputation in crowdsourced assessments reflects its accrued good reputation among activated expats

- **Quality of life** #1 since 2023
- **Pollution** from 6th to 4th 2023-2025
- **Healthcare quality & availability** 6th since 2023

However in targeted surveys, The Hague is more susceptible to criticism in areas where internationally mobile populations expect excellence.

On average across 15 priority survey indicators, The Hague has declined by 13 places since 2023; 10 of the 15 areas declined, with the biggest moves on perceptions of healthcare, housing, citizen engagement, and air pollution

• **In the bottom 25**	for perceptions of affordable housing	(-50 places)
• **Outside top 75**	for perceptions of adequate green spaces	(-13 places)
• **Outside top 50%**	for perceptions of local democratic engagement	(-41 places)
• **Outside top 50%**	for perceptions of basic sanitation	(-34 places)
• **Outside top 50%**	for perceptions of public safety	(-34 places)
• **Outside top 70**	for perceptions of air pollution	(-49 places)

Living up to #1 remains important.
Some of the highest performing cities often have some of the most negative local sentiment.
Perceptions can be driven as much by the internal culture of a city's engaged citizens as by objective reality.

Increasing competition for attention among mid-sized European cities

More competition to be

Affordable, healthy and inclusive: perceptions of health, housing, education, and environment

Sustainable and more efficient than the larger hubs: traffic & congestion have driven where The Hague has fallen behind cities like Antwerp, Rotterdam, Gothenburg.

Zooming out

Three groups of European cities present an increased competitive threat to The Hague in 2026

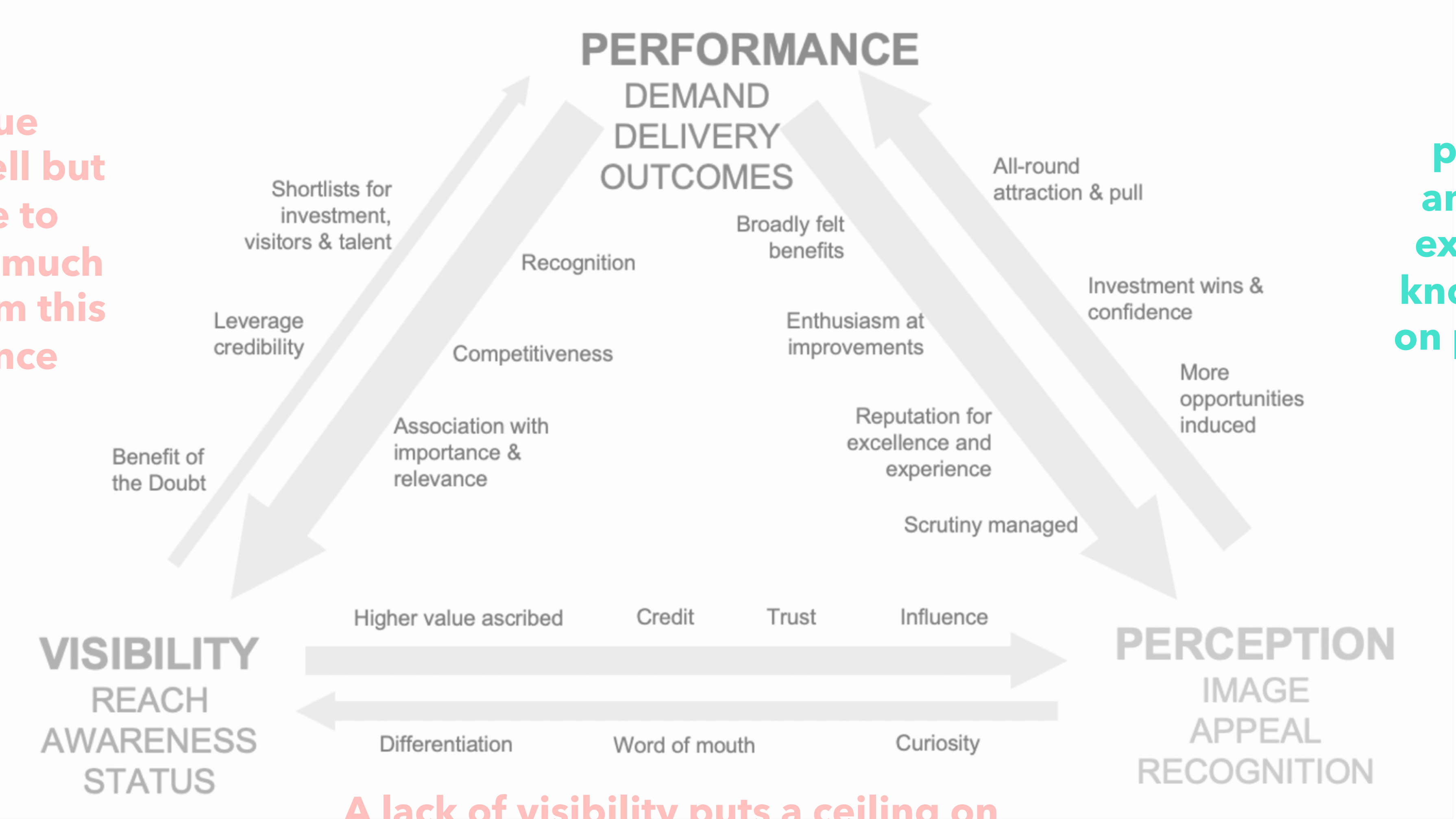
- **Compact European peers** (Vienna, Copenhagen, Helsinki) for liveability, safety, and green space.
- **Traditional neighbours** (Rotterdam, Brussels, Amsterdam, Antwerp) for quality of life, education, and congestion.
- **A rising group of Eastern European cities** (Bucharest, Riga, Krakow, Prague) for digital services, affordability, and cost.

Since 2023, The Hague has been most likely to be overtaken by cities in Europe for:

- City and metro traffic congestion
- Citizen amenity and engagement
- Locally perceived health + education
- Air quality
- Locally perceived rental affordability
- Digital and technology services
- Expat experience and magnetism

The effects of the perception gap

The Hague performs well but is not able to generate as much visibility from this performance



Strong perceptions among many expats have a knock on effect on performance

A lack of visibility puts a ceiling on positive perceptions of the Hague among non-familiar audiences.

The Hague's strategic priorities

Relevant benchmarks for The Hague

Quality of Life remains The Hague's strongest focus: top 1–2% globally on liveability fundamentals and safety, and a leading performer among peers like Porto, Oslo and Stuttgart.

- The opportunity is to convert a lead into a more emotional, distinctive lifestyle brand, while addressing affordability, housing and citizen-facing digital services where the city now sits in the bottom quartile.

Attractive Business Destination is the focus with more untapped potential. The Hague already rates in the global top 10 for digital life and ease of doing business, with a top-30 European human capital base and a distinctive concentration of B. Corps and decision-making networks.

- There are still hidden clusters (cyber, legal, responsible business), which pose the opportunity to tell a sharper specialisation and cost vs. value story versus similar mid-sized competitors.

Trust & Resilience is a distinctive long-term positioning opportunity. The Hague is already a top 20 global centre for rule of law and governance and a credible European cybersecurity hub, with growing strength in sustainable and responsible business.

- The gap to close is visibility: building international recognition for The Hague Security Delta, improving GovTech delivery, and leveraging the city's convening power on cyber, AI governance and rule of law to lead a category in which few others can credibly compete.

Focus Area 1: **Quality of Life**

Out of all cities, how is The Hague positioned?

69th globally ▼

35th in Europe ▼

33rd among small-mid cities ▼

Arrows represent a general trend since 2023 in a changing field of cities, indicators, and studies.

What does this tell us?

- The Hague saw a modest decrease in relative position, in a widening field that included many more European cities measured this cycle
- It remains in a top tier of European cities for QoL

Who are The Hague's comparators?

- Porto
- Warsaw
- Oslo
- Stuttgart
- Gothenburg

Top performing small-mid cities

- Valencia
- Copenhagen
- Helsinki
- Dresden
- Vienna

Key Insights

✓ Residents still rate The Hague more positively than others do on the daily fundamentals of safety, environment and health.

✓ Crowdsourced and expert indices places The Hague prominently at or near the global summit in consecutive editions.

✗ The lead over peer European secondary cities has narrowed, with Swiss and Nordic cities progressing fast.

✗ Cost of living, housing and congestion are now a consistent drag.

Based on an Elo algorithm aggregate score across focus area benchmarks

Focus Area 1: **Quality of Life**

Out of all cities, how is The Hague positioned?

Top 15% globally

Top 30% in Europe

Top 25% among small-mid cities

▼ -7% overall since 2023

What does this tell us?

- The Hague saw a modest decrease in relative position, in a widening field that included many more European cities measured this cycle
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Focus Area 1: **Quality of Life**

Clear advantages

Quality of life fundamentals & safety. The Hague is rated in the top 1-2% consistently across crowdsourced and expert studies across everyday factors of daily life, signaling a core of recognition for the city's top tier status (Numbeo, IQL). It is rated 8th for every day safety (CEOWorld)

Still among the leaders for work culture and daily administration. The Hague is rated 4th for satisfaction with the local work culture, 14th for salary and job security, 7th for all-round factors. The Hague is 10th for ease of administrative essentials (Internations).

Other cities are ahead for:

Cost and affordability. The Hague is rated in the bottom 8% for cost satisfaction (Internations), bottom 19% for expat cost of living, and bottom 16% for resident-perceived cost (IMD).

Affordable housing perception. Residents place The Hague in the bottom 10% for perceptions of affordable housing perception (IMD)

High expectations on services. Residents' experience day-to-day has not kept pace with the city's overall liveability standing. The Hague is currently rated by residents in the bottom 2% for citizen engagement, the bottom 10% for many digital services (IMD).

Emotional and lifestyle pull. The Hague is mid-pack on lovability and lifestyle (Resonance), behind Bern, Aarhus and a cluster of Spanish coastal cities. Functional excellence has not yet translated into a distinctive emotional magnetism for visitors and global audiences.

Opportunities

- **Tell the story of Hague's consistent quality** of life lead more boldly and creatively.
- **Make affordability a visible policy story,** working with national and regional partners on housing and packaging the value-for-money case for residents and movers
- **Translate functional excellence into emotional brand,** building a distinctive Hague lifestyle narrative (coast, culture, calm, internationalism) that can register internationally
- **Defend the quality-of-life premium proactively,** tracking the everyday life and safety scores that underpin The Hague's top-tier status
- **Ensure the daily civic experience** and convenience is Europe-leading.

Focus Area 2: **Attractive business destination**

Out of all cities, how is The Hague positioned?

134th globally ▲

44th in Europe ▲

50th among small-mid cities ▲

Arrows represent a general trend since 2023 in a changing field of cities, indicators, and studies.

What does this tell us?

- The Hague sees increases in 2026 for talent experience, welcome, employment, niche life-sciences/sharing economy
- U.S. and East Asian cities were appraised more this cycle, limiting The Hague's upside

Who are The Hague's comparators?

- Dublin
- Hannover
- Sacramento
- Memphis
- Perth

Top performing small-mid cities

- San Jose
- Baltimore
- Kyoto
- Kobe
- Panama City

Key Insights

✓ Resident readings of employment, work-life and welcome conditions have lifted The Hague's position quietly but consistently since 2023.

✓ Sharing economy presence and the life sciences cluster have started showing up on expert radars.

✗ Amsterdam absorbs business visibility and Dublin, Stockholm, Hamburg absorb more talent flows. The Hague is not easily noticed for its specialised flows and appeal.

✗ The Hague is not as widely recognised as a place to scale ideas and businesses.

✗ Many other cities are becoming more cost competitive and more capable in a wider range of markets (eg business tourism).

Based on an Elo algorithm aggregate score across focus area benchmarks.

Focus Area 2: **Attractive business destination**

Out of all cities, how is The Hague positioned?

Top 30% globally

Top 40% in Europe

Top 40% among small-mid cities

▲8% overall since 2023

What does this tell us?

- The Hague sees increases in 2026 for talent experience, welcome, employment, niche life-sciences/sharing economy
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Based on an Elo algorithm aggregate score across focus area benchmarks.

Focus Area 2: **Attractive business destination**

Clear advantages

- **Efficient and easy.** The Hague is rated an impressive 6th of 52 cities for Digital Life (and 5th in Europe) and 10th for ease of Admin Topics. The Hague is rated top half in Europe among business destinations for Local Friendliness (7th of 29) and Welcome (13th of 29) (Internations).
- **Specialist centre of talent.** The Hague is one of the top 30 European cities for human capital (Oxford Economics), and rated 3rd among mid sized cities for the connectivity enablers of specialisation (fDi Intelligence)
- **More established as a centre of decision making and networks.** The Hague is rated 19th of top meeting destination in Europe and for association-congress hosting volume, it is 87th in Europe (ICCA). On global diplomatic ties density the Hague is rated 23rd globally and 2nd among mid-sized European cities, behind only Geneva (Lowy Institute).
- **Attractive to responsible businesses.** The Hague is an impressive 39th and top 10% globally for rate of B Corp companies, with top 20% European growth rate since 2023 (B.Corp).

Other cities are ahead for:

- **Global reach.** The Hague is down to 295th for global network reach among advanced services industries (GaWC), and for internationalisation scale the Hague is not currently in the top 20 mid-sized European cities. (HSE). The Hague is not among the top 200 cities worldwide for share of internationally visible workforce in IT and Engineering, (LinkedIn), and does not appear in regular tech and cybersecurity talent surveys (CBRE, BCG)
- **Being on founders' radar.** The Hague was last rated only 66th among European cities of places founders actively name as where they would consider basing a startup (Startup Heatmap Europe). This is partly linked to lower innovation outputs relative to potential, compared to cities such as Cambridge and Aarhus (HSE).
- **Cost.** The Hague is rated in the bottom 25% of European cities for costs of doing business that include national frameworks, behind the likes of Tallinn, Reykjavik, Helsinki (HSE).
- **Presence in prominent arenas.** The Hague is not rated in prominent measures of influence – such as Information Exchange and Cultural Interaction (ATK, Mori)

Opportunities

- **Reposition The Hague on the global business map** by surfacing the international firms, advanced activity and cyber/legal clusters that many methodologies miss.
- **Make the business cost-and-value story more explicit**, working with region and national partners on the drivers The Hague cannot fix alone
- **Get The Hague onto founders' shortlists**, building a visible, narratable startup proposition around the city's distinctive niches
- **Amplify the responsible business edge** as a distinctive positioning for sustainable FDI, finance and impact economy headquarters.

Focus Area 3: **Trust & Resilience**

Out of all cities, how is The Hague positioned?

34th globally

15th in Europe

11th among small-mid cities

- The Hague provides among the strongest foundations for trust & resilience of any city through safety, institutional presence, and perceptions for institutional quality – governance & low corruption

Who are The Hague's comparators?

- Quebec City
- Copenhagen
- Canberra

Top performing small-mid cities

- Singapore
- London
- Lausanne

Key Insights

✓ Diplomatic and institutional presence is a structural marker that very few cities can replicate.

✓ Objective security & safety is in the top tier globally.

✓ Many cities with enabling factors for trust and resilience are not yet competing for this external perception.

✗ Competition from European cities on safety, governance and rule-of-law means The Hague falls farther behind in this cohort

Based on an Elo algorithm aggregate score across focus area benchmarks

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Based on an Elo algorithm aggregate score across focus area benchmarks

Focus area 3: **Trust & Resilience**

Clear advantages

- **A leading centre for rule of law and governance.** The Hague is regarded as the 18th of 146 globally (and 12th in Europe) for few people viewing "corruption as a priority area" (IMD). It is top 10% in most governance measures (Oxford Economics). Resident-rated quality of governance is in Europe's top tier - 14th in Europe and top 10 among mid sized European cities, (IQoL). It is close to the established Nordic capitals in this regard.

- **A credible European cybersecurity hub.** The Hague-Rotterdam is rated top 20 in Europe for cybersecurity specialisation, with the cyber sector running ahead of its overall innovation economy by more than in London, Munich, Zurich, or Helsinki (Dealroom)
- One of fewer than 35 cities inside the global top 100 for defence tech (Dealroom)

- **An emerging hub for responsible and sustainable business.** The Hague is rated top 25 for B Corps among mid-sized European cities, 3rd of 15 European cities for absolute number of sustainability jobs, behind only Copenhagen and Helsinki (The Social Hub Greenest Cities 2024).

Other cities are ahead for:

- **Govtech enablers.** The Hague sits in the bottom decile of European peer cities on some perception digital-public-service indicators: online documents. And it does not appear in the UN E-Government Index where many others do.

- **Internationally visible governance rankings overlook the Hague.** The Hague Security Delta cluster is not yet visible in international cyber benchmarks, or for Fair Rule of Law, Economic and Social Freedom or maritime cities. (e.g. Menon, Xinhua). As such it cannot easily promote its governance and institutional profile.

Opportunities

- **Market rule of law as an institutional brand:** package the justice ecosystem and top-tier governance scores for investors and ESG capital

- **Target recognition for defense and security attributes:** focus outreach so the cyber and defence-tech cluster registers in cyber, rule-of-law and maritime indices

- **Fill the the GovTech delivery gap:** digital public services improvements so daily experience matches the city's institutional reputation

- **Lead the "responsible business capital" position,** leaning into B Corp density and the sustainability jobs lead to attract impact investors and mission driven HQs.

- **Convening power is a growth platform:** host the agenda-setting forums on cyber, AI governance and rule of law that anchor the city's authority

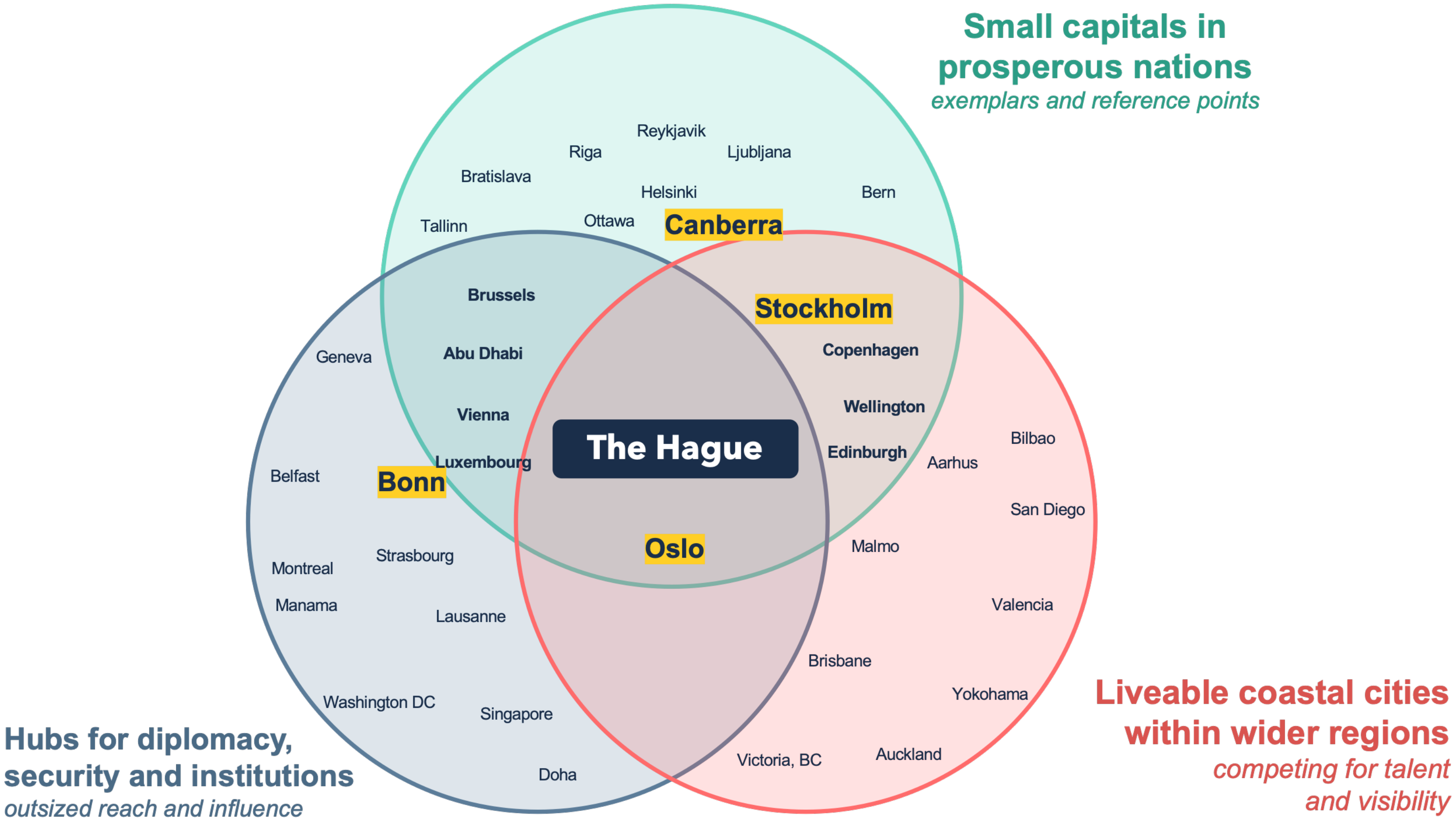
What next?
Actions & opportunities

Learning from The Hague's peers

To inform how The Hague responds to its performance and perception profile, it may be useful to understand approaches taken by peers.

In this section we look at four peers that span different kinds of attribute The Hague possesses.

- Close peer of Oslo
- Institutional hub of Bonn
- Smaller capital of Canberra
- Stockholm, competing on liveability and innovation



Peer city learnings: **Oslo**

A mid-sized, values-led capital next to larger neighbours - has rebuilt its promotion model around a single narrative and evidence base all partners can draw on.

Key ideas

- **Differentiation:** "refreshingly different" in mindset, pace, offer.
- **Umbrella narrative** that speaks to liveability, trust, green transition and startups.
- **Democratic values treated more boldly** as competitive advantage.
- **Moving against logos and towards narrative,** evidence base and shared library used by everyone (including a banned-words list: sustainable, innovative, vibrant, green).
- **Engaging B2B and key stakeholders first** (universities, clusters, companies, culture).

How

- **Recognition of a previous lack** of coordination, shared narrative and scale.
- **Broader mandate from the City of Oslo:** Oslo Business Region becomes Oslo&Co - place branding, Invest in Oslo, visitor and talent services under one roof. Built with 50 public and private stakeholders.
- **Toolkits free** for any city or regional promoter.

Example campaigns

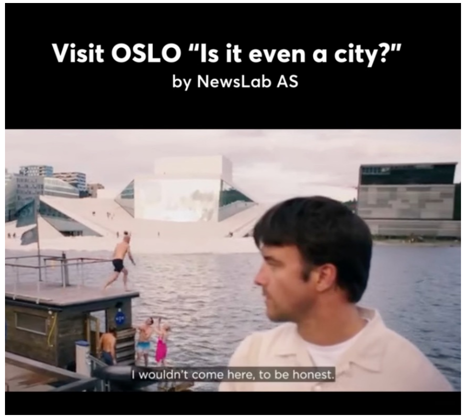
"Is it even a city?" - self-irony YouTube and social series fronted by a deadpan local - 15m+ organic views, flight searches up 17% in five weeks. "I think a city should feel a little hard to get."

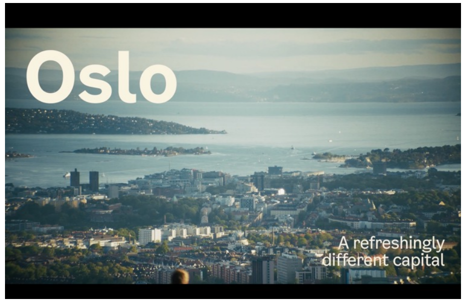
Link between values and benefits - "A city where bold ideas move fast." "Invest in the future." "Never trying too hard."

Brand toolbox - brand film plus digital cuts, downloadable photo library, presentation templates, fact cards - 13 verified insights, each with sources and a "use this when" note.

Paid digital recruitment - targeting professionals in London, Paris and Berlin - "purpose-driven careers", "professionals seeking meaning", "lifestyle rooted in balance and nature" - paired with welcome events and a spouse programme.

Oslo Innovation Week - turns the ecosystem into the promotional channel - 250 partner organisations build the events. "Real Action. Real Impact. Real Oslo."





Why Oslo?

Oslo is a city built on trust and driven by progress. We combine global ambition with a deep commitment to the green transition and sustainable value creation.

A shared resource, powered by the City of Oslo.

01
Read the narrative
Start with the Oslo positioning and how we talk about Oslo: the tone of voice and the words we use and avoid. This is the foundation. Use the language directly in your own communications.

02
Download what you need
Take the film, the images or the presentation templates. Everything is ready to use and free to download, as long as it is used to promote Oslo.

Peer city learnings: **Canberra**

An administrative capital tackling the 'only known for one thing' problem head on, via a resident-sourced parallel story and an open brand toolkit

Key ideas

- **"Develop a parallel story":** the national purpose stays as an asset for investment attraction, while a second story tells of the city that is home to 450,000 people.
- **Personality over panoramas:** "Canberra needs a face", real locals with humour instead of "sweeping landscapes, romantic sunsets and happy couples."
- **Open-source brand:** a free toolkit so any resident or business markets Canberra alongside their own brand.
- **Narrative built from resident listening first,** then deployed across tourism, talent, investment and education.
- **Missions, not sector brochures:** "a city that continues to give you back time."

How

- **Government integration:** Brand Canberra, VisitCanberra and Invest Canberra all sit inside state government.
- **Story unearthed with residents before broadcast:** "Listen to the people who have committed to the city in the biggest way possible."
- **Regional coordination** through a tourism boundary agreement with wider tourism/promotion agencies

Example campaigns

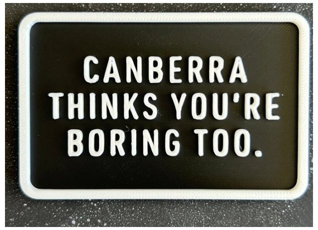
"There's more than they're telling us" - humble locals deliberately keeping Canberra secret, fronted by real tourism operators - outdoor, streaming TV and social in larger neighbouring cities

The Canberra Toolkit - free imagery, CBR logos, brand guides and The Canberra Story: "For much of Canberra's history, others have tried to tell us who we are… What is it about Canberra that's true for this city and nowhere else?"

"Canberran and Proud" - residents as distribution: "start sharing more of your Canberran story today"

"Canberra. A different kind of capital" - international awareness geo-targeted to Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore.

CBR2030 investor pitch that "concepts go from pilot to proven more quickly here than anywhere else" and privileged access to decision-makers.



A city that gives you back time

A climate ready city, leading Australia's net zero future

Peer city learnings: **Bonn**

An institutional city in a complex urban region, Bonn has recently fused its UN identity with an emerging cybersecurity economy under one umbrella.

Key ideas

- **Values as the bridge between pillars:** "trust, security and reliability" carries the UN identity and the cyber sector.
- **Bilingual phrases** that speak to the needs of companies, talent and investors.
- **Sell the concentration:** "a density of cybersecurity competence unmatched anywhere in Europe."
- **Targeted wins from multilateral disruption:** recruiting UN agencies from New York
- **Making the institutional city more tangible** to residents and visitors, modelled on Vienna and Geneva.

How

- **City economic development agency given more licence to lead:** the cyber brand is layered over the persistent civic umbrella "Freude. Joy. Joie. Bonn."
- **Multiple levels of government pledge** to further develop the German headquarters of the United Nations in Bonn.
- **Regional reach** through joint Region Köln/Bonn stands and NRW.Global Business.

Example campaigns

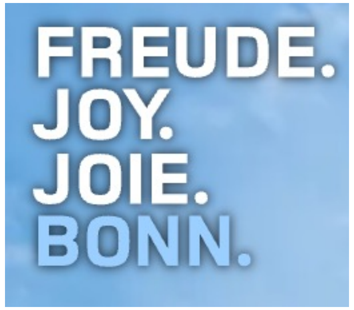
"Bonn for sure" launch - brand hub with talent and company sub-pages, #BonnForSure social rollout, and an audio brand mantra. Focus on selling hard wins as proof of competence

Trade fair debut - joint stand with the Cyber Security Cluster Bonn (100+ members) at international IT fairs.

Visible city leadership - the mayor's promise to UN staff led to UNDP relocating up to 300 HQ staff, UN Women global office.

Inside the UN tours - public access to the otherwise closed UN Campus so that more people see it, enter it and feel connected to it.

Economic diplomacy - Estonia partnership to borrow cyber credibility from a recognised leader.



Bonn: An international city for international professionals

work, live, enjoy

EUROPE'S HEARTBEAT

Europe's model region for successful structural change

Peer city learnings: **Stockholm**

A capital selling the whole experience, capable of speaking to liveability, innovation and trust, backed by deep machinery of City collaborating with neighbours.

Key ideas

- **Sell the whole package:** the conditions (openness, trust, nature, education) that produces both the liveability and the unicorns.
- **Beyond innovation**. Having built the 'unicorn factory' idea Stockholm now wishes it show it is an all-rounder
- **Revealing new layers:** a new platform sits under the long-running 'Capital of Scandinavia' B2B umbrella, to sell the region in a different way.
- **Companies and cities share brand.** Spotify, Klarna and others lean in to Stockholm story to differentiate.
- **Product-led earned media:** build something real, then win the lists – no longer buying premium advertising space.
- **One platform for four audiences:** visitors, investors, talent and media addressed by the same story.

How

- **One integrated company:** Visit Stockholm and Invest Stockholm dissolved into Stockholm Business Region.
- **Region Alliance:** 54 municipalities under the "Capital of Scandinavia" flag, with a joint communication foundation for the region's international brand.
- **Business recruited** with Chamber of Commerce and key partners now buying in to the need for the Stockholm DNA.
- **Active coordination with Visit Sweden** so national and city campaigns reinforce each other.

Example campaigns

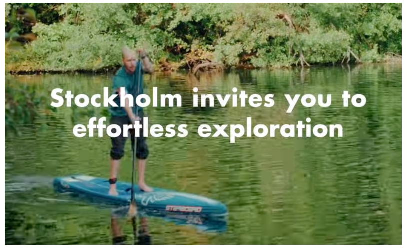
"30,014 Islands of Possibilities" - hero film plus partner kit so businesses amplify the story - "When people thrive, ideas thrive. When ideas thrive, businesses grow".

Live & Work appeal - always-on talent editorial: "We are always looking for talent like you" - locals' first-person stories plus placed thought leadership.

Stockholm Wellbeing Index - a quarterly index to frame wellbeing as competitiveness evidence.

Stockholm Archipelago Trail - 270 km across 20 islands - earned NatGeo Best of the World and TIME World's Greatest Places.

Alliance campaigns - member municipalities buy shared sales films, presentation kits and trade fair presence targeting 200+ investment opportunities and 20 realised investments.



How the peer cities are adapting: Common themes and trends

The proposition

- **More emotional, identity-based.** Functional benefit lists are giving way to belonging and self-expression
- **Metaphors and ideas that hold the whole story together.** Structural realities that are distinctive and defensible.
- **A shared narrative, even if doors are separate.** Visitors, investors, talent and media experience same underlying story.
- **Values/ethos converted into competitive advantage.** Trust, democracy, safety and reliability repositioned from civic virtues into economic assets.
- **Engage with contested narratives, rather than ignore them.** The doubts (expensive, boring, one-dimensional) are namechecked and answered
- **Honesty, understatement and self-irony -** be unlike the global hubs.

The proof

- **Demonstrate hard credibility.** Global calibre presence and investor-grade numbers.
- **Ownable proof points.** Verified, sourced, copy-ready facts that almost no competitor can claim, tied to geography or institutional position rather than to rankings.
- **Borrowed credibility.** Endorsement assembled via partnerships, flagship companies, trusted third parties.
- **Earned media.** Let lists, awards and coverage do the work.

The messengers

- **Residents as first audience**, proof point and early warning system. Pride activated deliberately, satisfaction tracked as a hard indicator.
- **Demonstrate that individual ambition can get an international stage.** Real, named people front the brand, and their trajectories offer evidence
- **Talent attraction as organising audience**, influencing target locations and support offered(landing, integration, family, etc)
- **The ecosystem as the channel.** Owned events and festivals mobilise partner organisations into the campaign
- **React quickly in media.** Geopolitical and institutional shifts treated as recruitment windows.

The machinery

- **Brand as shared infrastructure.** Open toolkits, evidence bases and asset banks, on the logic that a story told by many voices carries more reach and credibility.
- **Consolidation with a broader mandate.** Visit, invest and talent functions with single or coordinated stewards, choosing a handful of larger initiatives
- **The region as multiplier.** Formalised alliances with shared sales assets, joint targets and sequenced national coordination.

The bottom line

The scoreboard

- **The Hague's aggregate performance has risen.** This means that in a turbulent world The Hague should be confident that on balance it is heading in the right direction, and it also gives the city more collateral to promote its strengths.
- **The resident quality of life edge is remarkable despite a downtick.** Robust scores in QoL metrics and a world No.1 in a cited index sees The Hague hold a major advantage
- **The Hague is gradually gaining specialised recognition as a diplomatic and institutional hub.** This offers more routes for the city to lead, differentiate and achieve more than just incremental gains.

The performance perception paradox

- **Many of The Hague's strengths don't capture attention.** It cannot rely on being found, it has to choose where it wants to be seen and be attached to a wider story.
- **The Hague's supporter base may be drowned out.** The audiences who know the city best have been cooling, and some of the channels that carry The Hague's reputation are losing share to crowdsourced and social ones. This requires proactive attention
- **With the field of competitors expanding and catching up,** there is risk the Hague's proposition may be diluted.

Low-key advantages to build on

- **The Hague has big-city form with small-city scale.** The Hague needs to reverse the prevailing narrative of a small city with big-city problems. In most areas its form is an advantage.
- **In its global division, The Hague's value for money is probably under-rated.** Salaries minus housing, minus commute time, minus childcare is a contest The Hague still wins over many rivals.
- **There is a talent perception gap that needs bridging.** Work culture and job security are advantages, but career prospects are under-rated. The Hague can do more to show its labour market dynamism and the ability to change jobs while not changing cities.

Opportunities

An integrated narrative

- **Pursue a single narrative umbrella** in which Peace, Justice, Security can comfortably co-exist and flourish. Otherwise the sub-brands may start to dilute each other.
- **Make more of The Hague's raw material.** The underlying offer is unusually good: the quality, the mix, what the city gives to the world, and a seat-of-government capital on the beach.
- **Make the geography clearer and more interesting.** In some cases The Hague is generating visibility through its Rotterdam or Randstad connections. Codify more confidently what the city and region offer each other.

Institutional hearts and minds

- **The Hague may be destined to be associated with defence** for the next cycle much like the Paris Agreement and the Schengen Agreement, if the NATO Summit commitments hold. Working creatively to make this work for the city's ends rather than to crowd out other aspects of The Hague's identity.
- **Fusing an institutional identity with a security economy.** Peer practice suggests it will be possible for The Hague's trust values to carry the institutions and the growth sectors under one umbrella.
- **Identify and win the next wave of institutions.** AI governance, cyber mechanisms, climate liability adjudication: the institutions of the next decade do not have addresses yet.

The home front

- **Close the say-do gap** around the areas citizens are most concerned about.
- **Build up the resident pride and the expat fan club,** not least because local sentiment does load-bearing work for the city.
- **Address absences of people from the storytelling or the impression.** Named residents, champions, founders and institution builders give the city a clearer face.
- **Churn seeds ambassadors.** The Hague systematically exports thousands of senior, globally networked people who spent formative years here. This may arguably be the most credentialled ambassador network of any mid-sized city in the world.

The reach

- **Some deliberate stewardship of the 'No.1' ranking.** Track and defend the title rather than passively holding it. Lend high profile results a clever media strategy.
- **Use the convening calendar as a broadcast channel.** Summits and forums are the moments the world is already watching the city.
- **The Hague needs more power by association.** Who should the world understand the city belongs with? Build up the cohort of cities The Hague should be in currency with.
- **Explore the value of more creative and catchy brand initiatives**
  - **Eg The Hague's name origins: 'The Hedge'.** As protection. As habitat. As where boundaries are settled peacefully. As where the world manages risk. As a dense interdependent ecosystem. As modesty. 'From enclosure to commons'.
  - **Eg "See you in The Hague."** Reworking the global shorthand - for accountability, equity, experience, etc.

The evidence engine

- **Optimise for salience with a strong Hague evidence product and shared insight library.** A corpus of well-sourced claims will pay dividends in the AI era. What AI platforms say about The Hague is an important part of the next visibility battleground. Verified, sourced, copy-ready claims can also help partners lift aligned content into their own pitches.
- **Reveal The Hague's hidden excellence on governance.** Seed a definitive international benchmark for trust and institutional quality.

Appendix

Top Appearances for The Hague

Area	Global or European	Index	What does the index measure?	Rank (number of cities assessed)	Rank among European cities	Previous rank (cities assessed)	Change in rank since previous edition
Quality of life	Global	**Numbeo Quality of Life Index**	All round factors for good quality of life, incl. safety, healthcare, climate, pollution and traffic	1st (304)	1st (93)	1st (279) · 2025	– 0
	Global	**Numbeo Pollution Index**	Perceptions of environment quality (air, greenspace, noise)	4th (337)	4th (86)	4th (325) · 2025	– 0
	Global	**Internations Expatinsider**	Expats' satisfaction with local work culture	4th (53)	3rd (31)	7th (49) · 2023	▲ 3
	Global	**Institute for Quality of Life**	Resident-rated wellbeing across mobility, environment, governance and health	5th (200)	5th (104)	–	–
	Global	**Internations Expatinsider**	Expat access and ease to digital services	6th (53)	5th (31)	5th (49) · 2023	▼ 1
	Global	**ECA Most Liveable Cities**	International-employee living standards	6th (10)	6th (10)	*First edition*	–
	Global	**Numbeo Healthcare Index**	Resident ratings of healthcare quality, accessibility and cost	7th (321)	3rd (99)	8th (314) · 2025	▲ 1
	Global	**Sharing Economy Index**	Sharing and platform economy presence	7th (60)	4th (37)	6th (60) · 2023	▼ 1
	Global	**Internations Expatinsider: Urban Work-Life Index**	Overall expat work-life experience	7th (53)	4th (31)	7th (49) · 2023	– 0
	European	**Mercer Quality of Living Survey**	Composite measure of liveability for international employees	14th (241)	10th (53)	11th (231) · 2023	▼ 3
	European	**IMD Smart City Index**	Residents' satisfaction with local medical services	48th (142)	11th (56)	48th (146) · 2025	–
Attractive business destination	Global	**Internations Expatinsider**	Overall expat work-life experience	7th (53)	4th (31)	7th (49) · 2023	– 0
	Global	**Preply Best Cities in the World for Expats**	Composite of factors important for expat life	8th (20)	8th (15)	22nd (30) · 2022	▲ 14
	Global	**Internations Expatinsider**	Admin friendliness for expats	10th (53)	4th (31)	9th (49) · 2023	▼ 1
	Global	**IMD Smart City Index**	Residents' rating of unemployment as a city challenge	10th (148)	5th (56)	16th (146) · 2023	▲ 6
	European	**Higher School of Economics Global Cities Innovation Index**	Safety foundation for an innovative ecosystem	30th (199)	7th (87)	–	–
	European	**Internations Expatinsider**	Ease of language for expats	25th (53)	8th (31)	23rd (49) · 2023	▼ 2
	European	**Mercer Quality of Living Survey**	Composite measure of liveability for international employees	14th (241)	9th (53)	11th (231) · 2023	▼ 3
	European	**Internations Expatinsider**	Salary and job security for expats	14th (53)	9th (31)	11th (49) · 2023	▼ 3
	European	**Internations Expatinsider**	Local friendliness to expats	27th (53)	9th (31)	21st (49) · 2023	▼ 6
	European	**IMD Smart City Index**	Resident-rated quality of employment opportunities	15th (148)	7th (146)	7th (146) · 2025	▼ 8
Trust and resilience	Global	**IMD Smart City Index**	Residents' perception of low corruption	8th (148)	4th (55)	18th (146) · 2025	▲ 10
	Global	**CEOWorld Safest Cities**	All round city safety based on crime rates	8th (300)	1st (118)	8th (300) · 2024	– 0
	Global	**Numbeo Safety Index**	Resident perceptions of crime and safety, day and night	9th (400)	1st (135)	9th (385) · 2025	– 0
	European	**Lowy Diplomacy Index**	Diplomatic network scale and reach	23rd (701)	8th (124)	23rd (712) · 2024	– 0