

“HERE YOU DREAM IT AND BUILD IT”

An unusual sight stood on the Brooklyn Navy Yards grounds this warm late-summer afternoon: a well-trained Secret Service agent scanning the industrial-looking surroundings for potentially menacing activity.

The occasion was just as unusual: the arrival of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte at the back entrance of Building 22, an old factory that the Dutch startup accelerator B.NewYorkCity uses as a temporary space.

Mr. Rutte had come to this part of New York City Sept. 21 to launch the Partners for International Business (PIB) “Halve Maen,” which will serve as a network for Dutch startups in tech and creative industries that want to enter the US market as well as for American companies with European intentions.

The three-year public-private partnership is named after the famous ship that Henry Hudson in 1609 sailed up the river that now carries his name.

After stating his love for New York and its “entrepreneurial spirit and energy,” Mr. Rutte continued his remarks by allowing that his beloved city not only offers opportunities, but also challenges.

“We want to ensure that Dutch innovative startups can succeed,” he said, “and one critical way to do that is to integrate Dutch and New York startup ecosystems.”

During a roundtable session, ideas, aspirations and experiences were shared with the Prime Minister about the startups’ first steps in New York and the soft landing services B.NewYorkCity offers them, such as its mentor network and visa services.

Bas Offers, the COO and co-founder of digital media company ReviMedia, said it was humbling to find his way in the New York market without such services. “I had to figure out everything by myself and it wasn’t always easy,” he said.

By now he has more than 10 years of experience in performance marketing and customer acquisition technology, experience that he plans to share as a coach in B.NewYorkCity’s mentor network.

Offers' words prompted B.NewYorkCity's CEO, Ricardo van Loenen, to say that his "big ambitious goal is to accelerate innovation."

This ambition to innovate goes hand in hand with a willingness to try new things, and occasionally fail.

"As B.NewYorkCity, we are constantly making startup mistakes that we learn from," said van Loenen. The biggest one? "Accepting that the costs of doing business in this city are incomparable to doing business in Amsterdam."

But then there is only one New York, offered Jerry Hultin, chairman and co-founder of the Global Futures Group, a consulting, media, and financial advisory firm that aims to improve the lives of urban citizens around the world.

"We are the best city for tech startups. We have the best health care, the best marketing, the best finance and the best universities in the world," Hultin said. "As a startup, you tap into all that talent and free research. Here you dream it and build it."

Hultin expanded his pitch for New York as startup hub for tech companies to cities in general. "The biggest issue cities deal with is congestion. Cities look at tech for solutions."

European tech companies are well-suited to deal with congestion. "Europe has a pretty good tradition in understanding how people live together and solve density issues," he said.

That doesn't necessarily mean that the US is ready for a European startup accelerator like B.NewYorkCity, warned Victoria Foster, the co-founder of the US branch of Better Future, a global leadership consultancy firm.

"But I want to make it work. Americans are very transactional in their business approach, whereas the Dutch first want to make a connection," she said. "We can learn from that. I want business people to get out of their towers in Manhattan and connect to real people."

Van Loenen couldn't agree more. "Inclusion is important. We want as many people as possible to be part of the innovation scene."

Read more on the opening of the Halve Maen on NLintheUSA.com.

HalveMaennewsroom