Tapping water

“’The Netherlands are too diverse to summarize them in one cliché. ’’The Dutchman’’ does not exist. As a consolation I can tell you that ’’the Argentine’’ does not exist either.’’” This well-known citation of Queen Maxima argues that the Dutch identity cannot be described in one solid term and may even does not exist in the contemporary society. Talking about Dutch identity I feel same. You can’t describe it in one solid term, there are a lot of aspects related to the Dutch identity, but the collection of these aspects is different for everyone.

The writers of the book Discovering the Dutch: On culture and society of the Netherlands, wrote about these aspects the following: “Yet Dutch national identity cannot be captured in such anthropological observations or examples of folklore and traditions, even if they offer a rich source for emotional identification – or differentiation. Nor can a demarcation be drawn around ’’Dutchness’’ that represents it as a sheltering haven against the modern forces of globalization, Eurocentrism, individualism or multiculturalism. If nothing else, the Netherlands is a highly modern, densely populated country that is interconnected with the world by a myriad of trade relationships, migratory movements, cultural exchanges, international networks and collaborations. As a result, Dutch national identity is not static, but rather the outcome of a continuous process of identification, negotiation and exploration.” “And this process of identification, negotiation and exploration is influenced by the society today and the history we have all in common. That background also shaped the Dutch identity. Out of these processes there are a lot of aspects which have a strong connection with the Dutch identity. In the book, The Netherlands: practical guide for the foreigner and a mirror for the Dutch, foreign people who lived in the Netherlands wrote about typical aspects of the Dutch culture. On the next page there is a collection of the most striking words found. These words, or you could say aspects, are related with the Dutch identity in a way, connected neither by the history we have in common nor they are part of the contemporary society we are in. The view of foreign people on the Dutch culture is refreshing, because they reflect different aspects on their own culture. The collection made on the second page doesn’t describe the Dutch identity as whole. The Dutch identity is a collection of different terms, and this collection is for everyone different. This collection describes what’s most striking to me about the identity.
Some striking words about the Dutch identity found in *The Netherlands: practical guide for the foreigner and a mirror for the Dutch*:

Sober, practical and fugal…;
Bone and hard;
Multicultural, sometimes forced kindness?
‘Doodpot’;
What happened to the notion of retaliation?
Dutch people live in a happy comfortable snooze…;
Consensus;
Bureaucratic;
Open-minded;
Unpopular weather;
‘Don’t mind he is from Barcelona.’;
A lot of people from Barcelona living in the Netherlands;
Birthdays;
Culture of consensus;
Directly;
‘Degelijkheid’
Feels sometimes bone and hard;
You can buy everything there;
Dutch student independent spirit;
Skill-based education;
Making appointments;
‘How a small country still can be great’;
Not spontaneous;
Tolerance?
Not so discrete, directly;
Arrogance is crime
‘Doe maar normaal dan doe je als gek genoeg’;
Assertively;
Cold and wet;
‘Gefeliciteerd’;
Anyone can criticize anyone;
‘Zuinig’ but big charity givers.
Since Dutch identity cannot be described in one solid term and a lot of aspects are related to it, for designing a Dutch gift it’s about what you personally want to emphasize of the Dutch identity. Mark Kranenburg stated the following about the Dutch culture, in The Netherlands: practical guide for the foreigner and a mirror for the Dutch: “...without compromise and consensus, it would be impossible for the Dutch to live together on a small strip of land that is largely below sea level.” iv For me personally he captured a very important aspect of the Dutch culture, the culture of consensus. In one way this culture of consensus is related to the Dutch history in for example the ‘poldermodel’, the history we all have in common. On the other hand, it also says something about the contemporary problems of the Netherlands we live in nowadays and the need of this culture of consensus in our contemporary multicultural society. Furthermore, a lot of other aspects are related to the Dutch identity and also have a connection with this culture of consensus, like for example open-minded, directly, assertive, tolerant, etc.

The design of the Dutch promotional gift is based on the quote mentioned above, in the appearance of a water jug. As water plays an important role in the Netherlands. In positive ways, for instance recreational and the exceptional clean tapping water we’ve got. On the other hand it also shows the vulnerability of the Netherlands with the water above the flat surface. Where the law of communicating vessels, which represent the culture of consensus, makes the tapping work. A lot of cultures living together, they are different, but within a certain structure, as there is no strict image of the Dutch identity. That’s why the gift exist out of different bottles, they can be all different but structured in a way, making use of qualities that were already there. The object makes you think about how it works, and thereby a connection with the Netherlands is made.

This is my personal way of expressing Dutch identity into a promotional Dutch gift. Conceptually the design of an Dutch embassy or a Dutch gift are related to each other, it’s about what you personally want to translate of the Dutch identity into a design. The design of the promotional gift, refers to my view on the Dutch culture, to design an embassy the translation of the Dutch identity should be linked to the goals of the embassy itself, in order to achieve an optimal result in representing a nation.

ii Emmeline Besemusca and Jaap Verheul, Discovering the Dutch: On culture and society of the Netherlands (Amsterdam: University Press, 2010), 12.

iii Sam Garret, Remy Chavannes, John Kroon (Ed.), The Netherlands: practical guide for the foreigner and a mirror for the Dutch, (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2001), different pages.

iv Mark Kranenburg, ‘‘The political wing of the Polder Model’’ in The Netherlands: practical guide for the foreigner and a mirror for the Dutch, by Sam Garret, Remy Chavannes, John Kroon (Ed.) (Amsterdam : Prometheus, 2001), pag 39.