

Integrated city-brand management: re-thinking organizational models

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Oslo kommune



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Re-learning city branding: the role of management

CityLogo is a cross-learning itinerary, by and for practitioners, on innovative city brand management, which is thematically organized around four main areas. This reporting note refers to the first of a series of four international thematic workshops, each of them covering one of those main sub-themes, namely: management and new organizational models in integrated city branding; integrated city-brand design: updating city narratives and urban-driven strategies for visual communication; new segmentation strategies; and channels and communication tools, with a special focus on the impact of the digital shift.



In some way, this itinerary is aimed at re-learning the way in which city branding is often addressed. In this sense, as starting point, seven most **common gaps** in place branding have been identified:

- The strategy gap. Branding as a matter of just logo & motto & campaigns, when actually the brand concept should be seen as a metaphor when applied to places, basically meaning building up a competitive local identity and align all the communication efforts (not only ones from the Municipality) around it.
- The community gap. Weak involvement of civil society and related stakeholders in both city-brand building and management.

- The timing gap. The question of circumstantial brands, just related to specific big events or the political cycle. Lack of durability.
- The performance gap. City experience does not match with the expectations created by the "brand". Lack of credibility and authenticity.
- The differentiation gap. Cities in Europe seem to brand themselves on the same topics and qualifications – knowledge, creativity... distinctiveness between them is therefore limited.
- The visual gap. Many local governments, even big cities, still handle poor sets of images. More quality-oriented politics of city representation are needed.
- The budget gap. Many cities are now re-thinking how they are doing and financing city marketing, forced by a context of cuts in public spending.

Out of those gaps, four (strategy, community, timing and budget) are directly connected with the absence or weakness of specific **organization and management models**.

The rise of integrated place branding in modern urban policies, as opposed to the usual divorce between strategies targeting tourists & visitors on the one hand, and business & investors on the other, is demanding new organizational models. The adaptation to a lower public-spending environment and the subsequent social demand for radical innovations and effectiveness in the public sector, are major driving forces as well. Such a *momentum* is also an opportunity to set up more effective patterns for stakeholder involvement – business community, tourist promotion boards, University and the local knowledge system, main urban facilities, etc – which should aim at both co-production of content for the city brand and co-delivery of the communication initiatives, including in terms of financial co-responsibility.

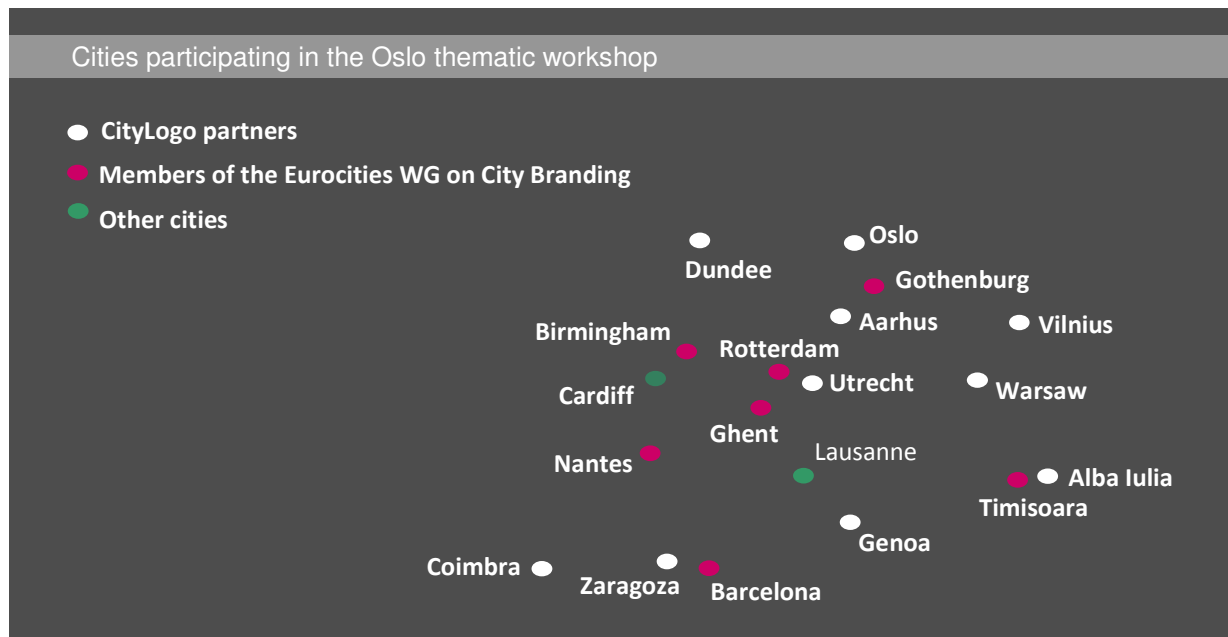
From this assumption, the thematic workshop in Oslo was a unique occasion for in-depth discussion, radically oriented to practice, in the following **topics**:

Management is the answer to the need for keeping the city brand strategy fresh and current, after the initial impact of the starting phase

- Branding and communication within the chain of strategic planning and management.
- Institutionalization of integrated city-branding.
- Local partnerships and platforms for stakeholder engagement and management.
- Flexible collaboration.
- Brand-toolkits usability: getting commitment from local stakeholders and potential users.
- Adaptation to lower public-funding environments: breaking the vicious circle of "no money no action".
- Multi-governance in place branding: local-metropolitan-regional-national articulation.

Main day of the workshop accounted 2.5 hours of critical case study presentations (that is, not telling just about lights but also shadows and failures) as inputs for discussion, plus another 2.5 hours of interwoven debate. The meeting format was very horizontal, with no keynote speakers neither

boundaries between contributors and audience. Everybody around the same table. The event was co-organized with the Eurocities Working Group on City Branding and Attractiveness, since URBACT CityLogo and the Eurocities-WG are synchronizing their transnational events as much as possible, in order to mutually strengthen and increase learning by interacting. As a result, twenty European cities were represented in Oslo, many of them at the frontline as regards innovative city branding.



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Flexible collaboration models for medium-sized urban agglomerations: Dundee, Aarhus, Utrecht

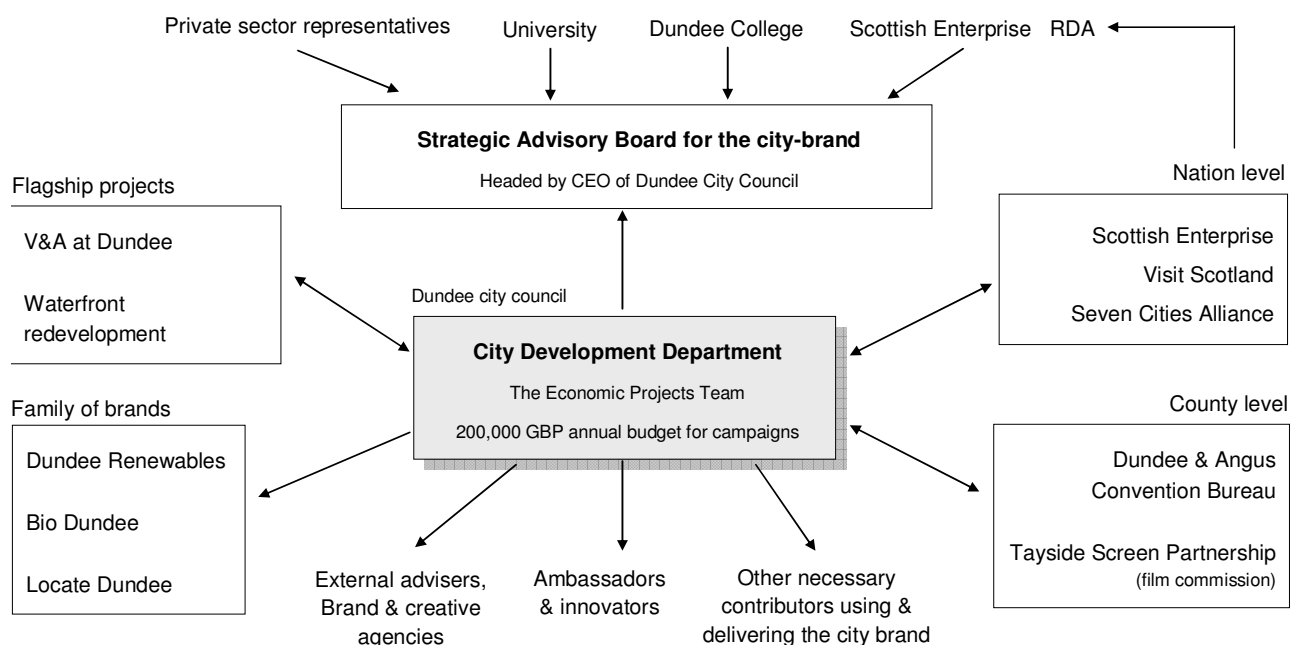
Dan Diaconu, deputy Mayor of Timisoara, chaired first session focused on flexible collaboration as governing model particularly suitable for medium-sized urban agglomerations, taken the cases of Dundee in the UK, Aarhus in Denmark and Utrecht in the Netherlands as food for discussion.

As they see themselves as a “competent, underestimated city in transition”, Dundee (142,000 inhabitants and just 100 Km North of Edinburgh) was embarked in 2010 in a systematic re-branding process aimed at producing a new comprehensive narrative under the tag “one city, many discoveries”, <http://www.dundee.com/>. At the same time, as Diane Milne from Dundee City Development Department commented, an ad-hoc **relational model** started to be woven trying to involve as much local stakeholders as possible. In such a “Dundee way” of city brand management several elements can be highlighted:

- A **strategic advisory board for the city brand** was established as non-constituted group, taking advantage of the local tradition of flexible partnering, like the “Dundee Partnership”, which is not based on any legal body or specific staff, but enough to ensure some consultation from a

number of relevant stakeholders. Representatives in the advisory board are top decision-makers in their respective organizations. However, a challenge for the near future will be to get deeper engagement and articulation from/with relevant local partners, beyond consultation. That is, in terms of co-management of concrete work plans, including financial co-responsibility.

- Use of **ambassadors** and **local innovators** to spread city's core messages. According to Diane Milne, "Dundee's ambassadors are inspirational individuals who represent Dundee's many faces, and who share a passion and a pride in the city", while innovators are people that have or continue "to pioneer extraordinary developments". In this respect, it is not much clear what is the kind of commitment and workplan for both figures beyond putting a face to campaigns.
- **Multi-level governance.** In the field of city branding, articulation with the national level is made through Visit Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and the so called Seven Cities Alliance, an initiative recently launched to reinforce the role of cities within the regional development model for Scotland. At county level, the existing convention bureau and the film commission are both under the municipal influence.
- **Articulation with communication strategies of flagship projects.** Like V&A at Dundee (first venue outside London of Victoria & Albert museum) and Dundee waterfront redevelopment, whose specific communication policy "Discover Dundee waterfront" and web-based communication resources, <http://www.dundeewaterfront.com/>, are perfectly assembled to the overall city-brand toolkit.
- **Family of brands.** That is, creating cohesion and permanent link between new integrated city brand and other sectoral ones already existing, but useful and functional for working with very specific target groups, e.g. Dundee Renewables, with a key focus on offshore wind and marine developments.



City branding at Dundee, UK: the collaboration model. Source: Miguel Rivas

At the core of that relational system it is a small team within the so called City Development Department, with a clear mandate for conducting an integrated branding and marketing strategy for the city. Indeed, Dundee has articulated a strategic communication policy by weaving a web of relationships, sometimes in a formal way, sometimes informally, that is working well in the sense they are changing an outdated perceived image of the Scottish city in the UK, and increasing attractiveness towards visitors, business and residents.

With a population of 315,000, Aarhus is Denmark’s second largest city and the fastest growing in the country. A strong University makes Aarhus a driver for growth to the entire region, with 50,000 students. The University, along with the waterfront and the Latin Quarter, gives the city a young and vibrant feel. The city is home to strong innovation hubs covering cleantech, food, ICT, healthcare and architecture and design. Four years ago, they launched a very consistent integrated city brand, <http://www.withaarhus.com/>, with little resources, in terms of manpower and budget. Line Gerstrand Knive and Lotte Kofod, two of the staff involved in the process, underlined in Oslo a number of achievements and pending challenges related to their management model.

What they call the “**open-source city brand**” is a real innovation for increasing usability of the brand toolkit (the set of storytelling, core messages, images and synthetic sign-slogan) and the sense of ownership as regards the city brand from local stakeholders and potential users. It simply consists on a statement (“with Aarhus, Danish for Progress”), with no logo, that local users can freely customize and adapt to their own messages and visual identities. To that aim, even a DIY logo generator can be found at the web-based toolkit for the Aarhus brand <http://www.citybrandaarhus.dk>.



An invitation to “open-source city branding”

The communication team in the Mayor's Department has the main responsibility for the city branding strategy, which is a guarantee of political backing. And one of the team's tasks is to support the work of the **Aarhus Marketing Alliance**, a platform with no legal form, created to engage the range of related local stakeholders. Nevertheless, further to participation, it is being not easy to convert the Alliance in an effective platform for co-decision making, with a precise roadmap at the operational level. In other words, that is the recurrent question of how to better articulate integrated place branding with marketing initiatives and entities targeting specific groups.

Other current challenges in Aarhus are the following:

- Stronger alignment with the industry and firms located in the region, and also with the University as probably the main strength of the city.
- Re-thinking and invigorating the formula of ambassadors, attracting more local people and shaping for them clearer objectives and tasks.
- Concerning multi-governance, more effective articulation with nation-branding strategy and initiatives have to be encouraged in order to re-balance the weight of Copenhagen.
- Maximizing synergies between integrated city branding and the next large-scale event in Aarhus, the European Capital of Culture in 2017.

The case of **Utrecht** is different since the Dutch city is now embarked in setting a new integrated branding strategy. The number of the city assets is really impressive: they rank at the first position in the EU regional competitiveness index for 2013, ahead of London and Paris regions, and it is still a growing local economy; it's a University town with 70,000 students in higher education; central location at the heart of Holland; very lively historic city centre; and several big urban projects are now in progress like the Utrecht station area, Utrecht science park and the new district of Leidsche Rijn, the largest housing and industrial development site now in the Netherlands. Thus, a key challenge is to articulate coherently those assets into a more cohesive, distinctive and single narrative, taking inspiration from the statement "city of knowledge and culture".

In parallel, the City of Utrecht is also **re-thinking its organization model** on integrated city branding and marketing, in a context of public spending cuts and re-organization of some public bodies looking for more efficiency, also at national level. Regarding this, main steps and challenges were presented by Ank Hendriks, Coordinator for City Marketing in Utrecht.

First, favourable conditions inside the Municipality have been created to enable integrated city branding may run smoothly:

- A small city marketing team, comprises of three officials, has been commissioned to work on coordinating and supervising activities (and not with concrete promotion campaigns anymore) under the responsibility of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Affairs.
- That team is also under the responsibility of a "city of knowledge and culture" theme director, a figure that runs a cross-department agenda involving strategy, economy, culture and international affairs among others, within a matrix type of functional organization of the local government. This system tries to bring together, under common communication and marketing guidelines, city officers working in different areas: culture, youth, main urban projects, etc. Each of them maintains direct contact with local stakeholders in their sectors.

Private sector engagement around destination branding, through Tourism Utrecht and the Marketing Utrecht Taskforce, is a work already done ¹, and the experience is being transferred to the cluster of stakeholders, public and private, acting at the knowledge/productive side of the city, resulting by now in the establishment of the Knowledge Utrecht Taskforce, aimed at “organizing the marketing of knowledge” in Ank Hendriks’ words.

Next step is to make bridges, by creating synergies and sharing some decision making, between stakeholders from the culture/tourism side and the ones acting in the knowledge/productive framework. “Connecting knowledge and culture”, that is certainly the main challenge for city branding and marketing in the current transitional period in Utrecht. For tackling such goal, it is expected they will make the most of the Dutch capability for effective and non-rhetoric interaction between stakeholders, in what respect urban governance and local development. The model can be summed up as **flexible coordination, inside and outside the Municipality**, essentially focused on coordination and creating synergies.

03

The challenge of integrated city branding in big cities: Birmingham, Rotterdam, Gothenburg

Promoted by the City Council and enrooted into the British tradition of public-private partnerships, [Marketing Birmingham](#) is a company limited by guarantee that was founded in 2002, searching for a more pro-active and result-oriented activity than its predecessor, the Birmingham Marketing Partnership created in 1982. Today, the company has a staff of 60 FTE’s (full-time employee equivalency) and £8.7 million budget for 2012/13, of which 4.4m come from the Birmingham City Council through specific service level agreement, a significant 2.8 m come from EU-ERDF and 1.5m from commercial incomes.

¹ Tourism Utrecht is a platform involving more than one hundred private operators in the local visitor economy. It manages a budget of around five million per year, 50% coming from income services and one million coming directly from the 50% of the tourist tax paid by visitors. In addition, the Marketing Utrecht Taskforce was established in 2011 in order to further the dialogue with marketers in the cultural and tourist sectors.

Marketing Birmingham’s board of directors reveals the kind of stakeholders’ involvement that is needed in integrated city branding. Out of a total of 16 members, only two represent the City Council, while the chairman is the international airport’s CEO. The rest include representatives from the University, the private sector and four executive members. A formal agreement model with Birmingham City Council guarantees a high degree of independence from the city’s government, an aspect considered as a key condition for success by partners.

In his presentation, Tim Manson, head of operations and policy, underlined that partnership’s major task was to build up an integrated city brand for contemporary Birmingham as a single, updated narrative under the tag “The home of the new industrial revolution”. Such a big narrative is now the main driver for the unifying politics of city representation delivered by MB, basically through a web-based brand toolkit.

<http://birminghamtoolkit.com>.

“We need to create a unifying representation of Birmingham, a framework within which all partners within the region communicate. Where partners can have some form of commonality, even if this is as simple as the font in which the works Birmingham are written”

Tim Manson, head of operations and policy, Marketing Birmingham

MB targets three main groups: tourists and visitors through “Visit Birmingham”, the MICE sector via “Meet Birmingham” and “Business Birmingham” for investment and business. It is the kind of agency created to work on commonalities and synergies among those targeting and interacting with specific groups. Moreover, that ambition for aligning efforts to a more effective communication of Birmingham has been recently extended to the city region.



Robert Nesselaar, brand director of Rotterdam Marketing, started his presentation with the standpoint that “structure (management) follows strategy”. Concerning the latter, after years of work, Rotterdam has determined a shared vision on its branding principles, target groups, economic clusters, visual identity and city branding strategy.

At this point, a key lesson from them is that **uniqueness emerges by combination of different city assets**, e.g. connecting Rotterdam as world port city to Rotterdam as centre of architectural design. That particular ecology of different assets and storytellings, linked by specific crossovers, is what makes a city more distinctive and it fully justifies integrated place branding.



Rotterdam: word port + architectural design

In what respect the collaboration model in city branding, Robert launched a number of key messages taken from the Rotterdam’s experience in the last decade that can be summarized in three principles:

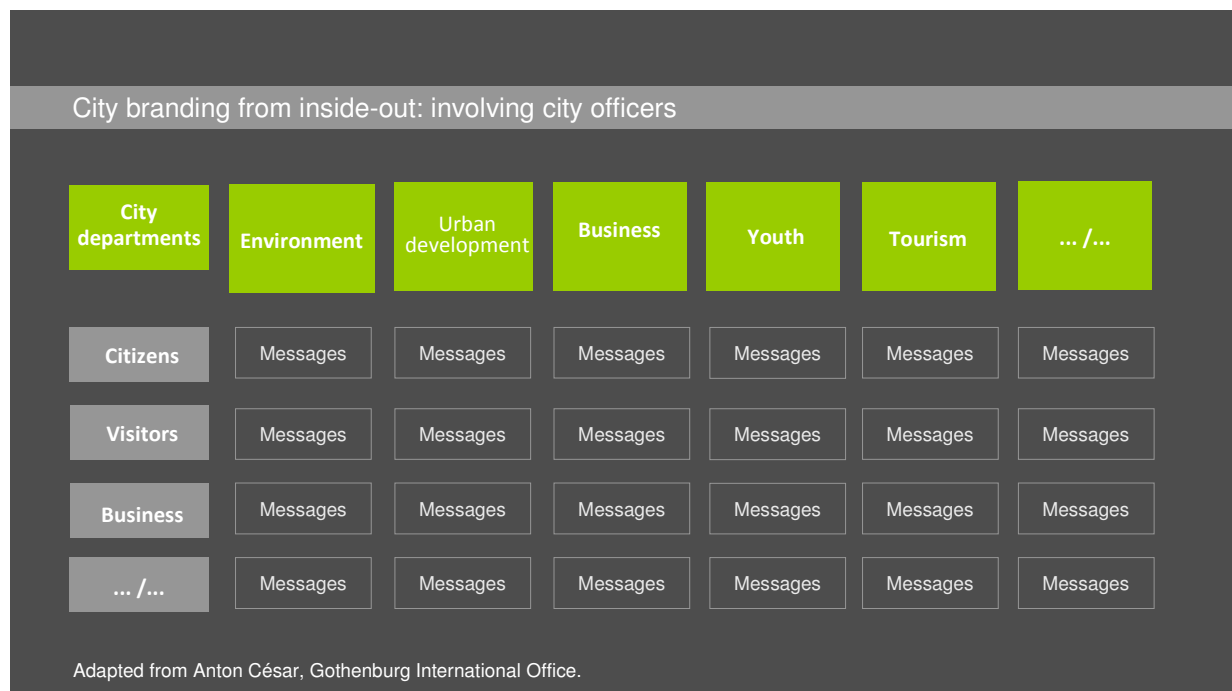
- Principle 1: everybody can play a role. So, a major objective should be to “organize enthusiasm and give inspiration to partners in the city”, with the result that parties involved “should do and feel responsibility for the city brand”.
- Principle 2: investing in partnerships. It requires little or no budget, which suits to the current lower public spending environment. In this sense, it is much better to prospect new ways for strategic communication than compulsive investment in campaigns and advertising.
- Principle 3: clear responsibilities at different levels. Numerous organisations play a role, but the real change is to promote more clear assignments (who should do what), based on accountability, avoiding overlapping and creating synergies and more cohesion.

In fact, this last question has not been clearly solved yet. Rotterdam Marketing has played a relevant role in strengthening the Rotterdam brand by providing a brand toolkit under the tag *World Port World City*, and a platform for exchanging information and inspiration to all real and potential partners <http://rotterdamworldbrand.nl/> - not only big companies and organizations but also small organizations and professionals. But its capacity for governing the overall strategic communication of the city is still

very limited, resulting that moving from strategy (integrated city brand strategy) to concrete actions is not an easy question in big cities. The idea of bringing together Rotterdam Marketing with Rotterdam Investment Agency and Economic Development Board Rotterdam was under consideration, but no decision has been made so far.

Anton César´s presentation, from Gothenburg international office in Sweden (one million inhabitants in the metropolitan area), also highlighted the importance of defining an umbrella brand, whose distinctiveness will come out from melting city assets and emerging processes from different fields into a unifying and competitive narrative. In creating such a "mosaic", César stressed the role of the different departments within the Municipality (environment, urban development, business, housing, tourism, youth, research & education...) in order to produce core messages to each of the city target groups (citizens, visitors, business, etc), resulting in a matrix of different pieces of storytelling for then building up one single, comprehensive city narrative.

That is what he calls "**branding from inside-out**", that certainly requires setting many city officers in a "communication mode", at least for a while.



04

Private sector mobilization (Barcelona) and metropolitan coordination (Nantes)

Barcelona ranks at top positions for many global indicators related to both business and visitor attraction. The city is a magnet for 35,000 foreign students each year and is one of the most preferred destinations for expatriates. Despite economic stagnation, which is hitting hard its regional hinterland, the city keeps its renowned vitality alive. In this context, a civic association called **Barcelona Global** <http://www.barcelonaglobal.com/>, comprised of business leaders and professionals, has emerged with the idea of playing an active role communicating the city as business place. Although its impulse is to be found in the public-led initiative of Barcelona's strategic metropolitan plan of 2010, the association lays on a model of **individual/corporate fee-based membership**. Being a member of Barcelona Global (currently around 250 between individuals and firms) is considered a gesture of commitment to the city and of corporate social responsibility.

The organization is governed by a general assembly, a board of 40 members which delegates to an executive committee and a CEO. A working agenda is defined every year. Another particularity is that actions of Barcelona Global are not carried out by a specific staff, but by the very members of the association. For each initiative, a member is assigned to manage it (usually through collaboration with other members) and responds to the assembly. Among the on-going initiatives it is worth mentioning the project to develop a network of Barcelona-native executives established abroad, with the mission to act as Barcelona's promoters as well as observers of their locations' business climate.

In Oslo, Mateu Hernández, CEO of Barcelona Global, introduced the initiative not as an exclusive club but a platform open to any stakeholder who want to contribute for branding Barcelona as business place. In any case, the initiative can show new paths for engaging the private sector and civic society in city branding, as well as **invigorating the ambassador formula** by means of more effective commitments. The presentation also led to an interesting debate about should the city brand be managed by the public or private sector.

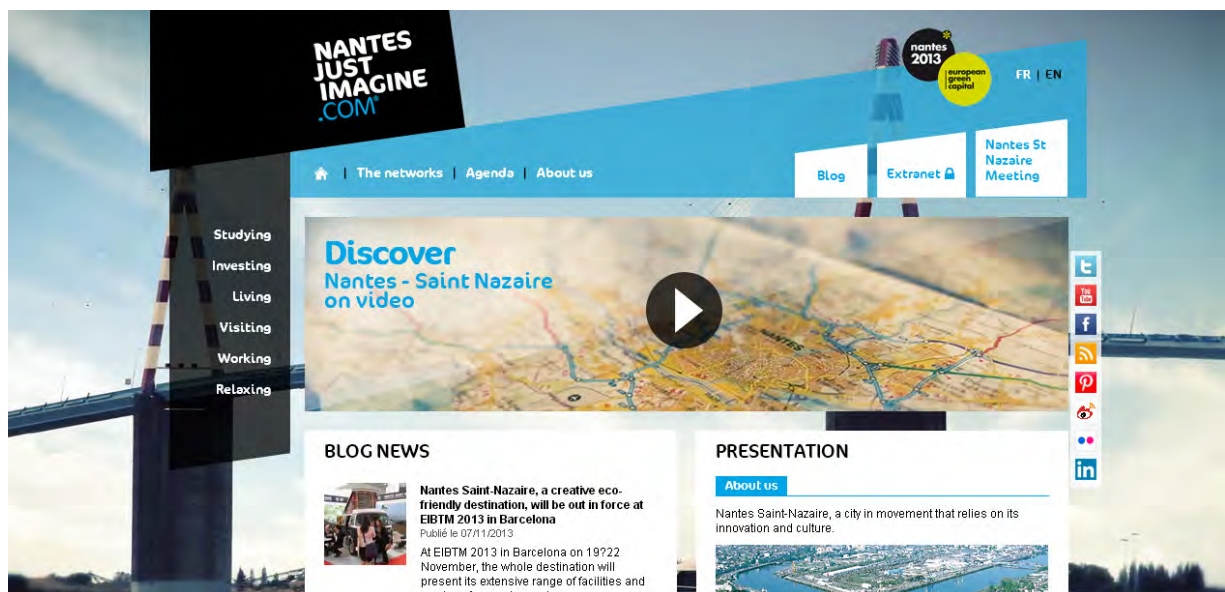


Barcelona Global

A last input, from a practitioner view, came from Christophe le Bret, general manager of **Nantes Saint-Nazaire International Agency**. Three years ago, local policy decision-makers felt the need of working on a multi-target international profile of the 6th urban agglomeration in France. Thus, within the French context very favourable to inter-municipal cooperation and metropolitan governance, a partnership between Nantes Métropole (a *communauté urbaine* of 24 municipalities and 590,000 inhabitants) and the *communauté d'agglomération* of Saint-Nazaire (10 municipalities and 118,000 residents) was created in 2011 to jointly market both areas internationally, also with the concurrence of the chamber of commerce.

Among the first steps of the new agency it was to produce an updated and unifying city proposition for a varied international audience of investors and business leaders, tourists, students and researchers, under the claim "Nantes, Just Imagine". Such comprehensive storytelling, along with related imagery and other resources, is delivered and kept current through a devoted website <http://www.nantes-just-imagine.com>, which also includes a blog area.

In what respect the organizational model, the new agency sees herself as a "**federation of related actors**" in the city-region. Outside, they have set up a number of Nantes' correspondents in Tokyo, Shanghai, Quebec and Montreal and promoted "clubs of the Nantes diaspora".



Nantes' presentation posed the question of **scale in place branding**, notably horizontal **multi-governance** in urban agglomerations and metropolitan contexts as the right way for strategic communication and international interaction. The question of **vertical multi-governance** was also raised, that is local-metropolitan-regional-national articulation. In this respect, many participants claimed more room for cities in shaping nation branding strategies, e.g. non capital cities demanding more visibility, like Aarhus, to some extent hidden behind the strong connection Denmark-Copenhagen.

According to Robert Nesselhaar cities are in a special position for co-branding, and in fact recent experiences of **cross-border co-branding** have been mostly undertaken by cities. That is the case of the [ONE BSR project](#), by which a number of capitals such as Helsinki, Hamburg, Riga, Stockholm, Warsaw and St. Petersburg are prospecting to pool resources for jointly branding and marketing the Baltic Sea Region.

05

Conclusions and remarks

Why integrated city branding?

Erik Braun, from Erasmus University Rotterdam, is one of the few scholars who is paying specific attention to the governance of city branding and marketing². In Oslo, he defined a place brand as “a network of associations in the consumer’s mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and the overall place design”. The question of “integration” seems, therefore, crucial for communicating a complex reality like a city. But, when can one speak of successful integration? How can integration be determined? What’s the level of integration a city should strive for?

From a **content perspective**, the question of integration is about building up a unifying, comprehensive and updated narrative of the contemporary city. That means, in essence, the concept of brand when applied to cities and places. A narrative then filtered through communication codes in order to produce a coherent set of core messages and storytelling (textual pieces) together with a related imagery (visual pieces).

Of course, place-based marketers working at the operational level, over the ground, can produce more precise storytelling, adapted to specific target groups if necessary, but preserving a common core, a sort of “big narrative” of the city. So, integrated place branding is much more than marketing. It is also, or even basically, about building up urban identities and keeping them alive and current.

For this task, we should not manipulate our particular mix of assets and expectations in a tricky manner, for attracting whatever. In this work we should “stay close to ourselves as city” as it was stated by Robert Nesselaar from Rotterdam Marketing. That’s the way to enable authenticity and differentiation can emerge. It does not matter not to have a total command of our city speech, even it is not desirable at all, since underground “sub”-cultures or simply non-mainstream views of the city will always exist fortunately. What is important is to be credible to the eyes of our citizens and target groups (real and potentials) and not falling into the simplicity of importing the ultimate trend on place branding, e.g. creativity, passion, lively streets everywhere...

From a **governance perspective**, integrated city branding is about creating, up waters, a shared working area for the diverse entities in the city targeting and interacting with different groups: visitors, investors, knowledge... and also residents. It is about activating synergies between the different city assets to build up a unifying narrative resulting in a clearer positioning. It is also a response to the current need of a more comprehensive and strategic communication of the city, inside and outside. In

² Braun, E. (2008) City marketing: Towards an Integrated Approach. ERIM PhD Series in Research and Management, 142, Erasmus Research Institute of Management, Rotterdam. It is a very interesting (and rare) sound exercise of comparative policy analysis in the field of city brand management. <http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/13694/EPS2008142ORG9058921802Braun.pdf>

Tim Manson's words, from Marketing Birmingham, integrated place branding is "the glue between different assets for different target groups (business, visitors, residents...)"

From the organization point of view that is a big challenge, since such as common working area, up waters, should lay upon a collaboration model, involving at least those local stakeholders with a more relevant role in the international dimension of the city. There is no other way.

Of course, in what respect the city-brand proposition and the city branding strategy the organizational model should follow content. "Structure follows strategy" (R. Nesselaar). But it does not diminish the importance of starting to build up the collaboration model from the very beginning, since, in a way, integrated city branding is aimed at "organizing enthusiasm and give inspiration to partners in the city" (R. Nesselaar) or introducing a "behavioural change" to those with a responsibility in the international dimension of cities (T. Manson). In facing that challenge, innovation and leadership will be certainly required.

Priority action areas for branding Dublin:

Engage with the people of Dublin

Develop the collaboration model

Agree the vision

Engage in the regular monitoring of our international position

Build upon Dublin's assets and address the challenges

Effectively communicate the brand

Enhance the tourism product

Engage in internationalisation

Seek international events and designations

Design the Dublin brand

Creative Dublin Alliance (2012) A Roadmap for Branding Dublin, discussion paper.

Creating internal conditions within the local government

Addressing both sides of integrated city branding, content and governance, is a collective work that, at some extent, has to be conducted by the Municipality as democratic expression of the community too. However, as said before, a mix of maturity and innovation in local governance is needed for taking the lead on this matter. In this sense, not every city is ready for integrated city branding, and the following internal conditions might be promoted in some way:

First condition is to remove, as far as possible, most **common misunderstandings** on the meaning and scope of city branding, especially between politicians key policy decision makers. Adopting the brand concept directly as it comes from the business and marketing schools is heavily damaging the field, and it wrongly places the production of logos and claims and PR campaigns at the peak of the process. This often explains the lack of smooth integration of place branding within urban governance, even the total absence of integrated city branding & marketing as an explicit local policy, sustainable in time.

Another condition is **leadership** from the local government to promote the collaboration model in city branding, that is, "flexible collaboration with flexible partners". The city marketing team within the municipality must be legitimated enough to take the lead, at least at the initial phase of the process, and it means precise assignment of responsibilities and clear political backing. At this point, it is usual to find contradictions between public declarations on the relevance of integrated city branding and the real institutional weigh of the units in charge of city branding within the local governments.

Jan Schmidt-Sørensen, one of the three leading discussants in the Oslo workshop and director of business development in Aarhus, said that “powerful leadership is essential in the ongoing implementation” and many times it is only a matter to appoint a “communicator-in-chief and some dedicated high-ranked people to follow”.

A third facilitating factor would be a better alignment of energies and efforts through **effective inter-department cooperation** within the local government, since integrated city branding has a strong cross-sector profile. The Utrecht’s way of synchronizing different working agendas into a common city branding roadmap can be a benchmark, as well as Anton César’s concept of “branding from inside-out”, above mentioned. In any case, it can be helpful some dose of awareness and capacity building between city officers about the role of strategic communication and marketing for the city.

“Be as clear as possible on terminology and goals of city marketing and branding”

Robert Nesselaar
Brand Director of Rotterdam Marketing

Institutionalizing city branding: one direction, many formulas

There is no one single formula to success in organizing and managing integrated city branding, but dedicated marketing-oriented agencies, shaped as public-private partnerships and covering several target groups, seemingly used to work in big cities above 400-500,000 inhabitants, while more flexible ways of stakeholder engagement, that is, with no need of constituted bodies, runs more frequently in medium-sized urban agglomerations. Regarding the latter a small team (highly skilled and with a strong relational capacity) must be appointed in any case for conducting both the strategy and concrete actions.

Anyway, to keep in mind a “**collaboration model**” should be the main driver when addressing a governing system for the city brand. “Promote to attract, collaborate to promote”, as was said by Fredrik Winther of Oslo Teknopol. And since we are talking about co-management and not just about consultation, the collaborative model have to be negotiated with the government itself, business and entities and even people, as stated by Erik Braun. Such a **negotiation**³ requires leadership and a clear roadmap. It demands a more relational and horizontal way of performing local political power nowadays, which is actually a main source of **social innovation**.

Effective involvement implies a result-oriented behaviour and getting feedbacks for continuous improvement. As numerous parties play a role in marketing the city, a major challenge in a context of systematic city branding is to clarify about responsibility⁴ and subsequent **accountability**.

At the level of specific partnerships and agencies, a pro-active attitude of the board members is also important, further to a mere role as controllers. Those Boards should be properly led and facilitated by a highly motivating chief executive as well. In this sense, Sicco van Gelder, founder of Placebrands, in a recent collective work on city branding listed ten principles for effective city brand partnerships: “inclusive and representative; long-term commitment; shared vision; sharing responsibility; trusting

³ Negotiation to clarify roles but also to minimize the potential conflict that is inherent to all process of city brand building and governance.

⁴ Even financial co-responsibility when necessary, since for many, city promotion activities should not be financed any longer only by the local government.

each other; aligned and engaged; communicating as one; taking “on-brand” decisions and actions; making “on-brand” investments; and willingness to evaluate impact and effectiveness”⁵.



URBACT Local Support Group: promoting the collaboration model in city branding. Zaragoza, June 2013

Another recommendation extracted from the discussions in Oslo is that one should not wait too long for getting an optimal model for the city brand governance. What is important is to act, organizing integrated city marketing in such a way that the city can profit from the principle “many small actions, big difference” (R. Nesselaar). Certainly, in some environments, it is really difficult to arrange, in the short term, one single collaborative platform embracing partners working with different big targets - usually tourists & visitors on the one hand and on the other business & investors. Here, we can take inspiration of the Utrecht’s way, which first has organized and consolidated two networks for collaboration, one in the culture/tourism area and the other in the knowledge/productive side of its city brand. The next step, still to be taken, will be to bridge among both.

In fact, a city can attempt comprehensive platforms (partnerships, agencies, alliances...) for governing an integrated city brand strategy in a collaborative manner, but probably it will work only as mechanism for participation and networking, at least in a first phase. It is difficult to engage local stakeholders only with discussion at the strategic level. “Overall strategic effort does not engage, concrete events with concrete targets groups do” (J. Schmidt-Sørensen). That is a key message came out from the Aarhus Marketing Alliance, which is undergoing a difficult **transition from a participation mechanism to a platform for co-management**.

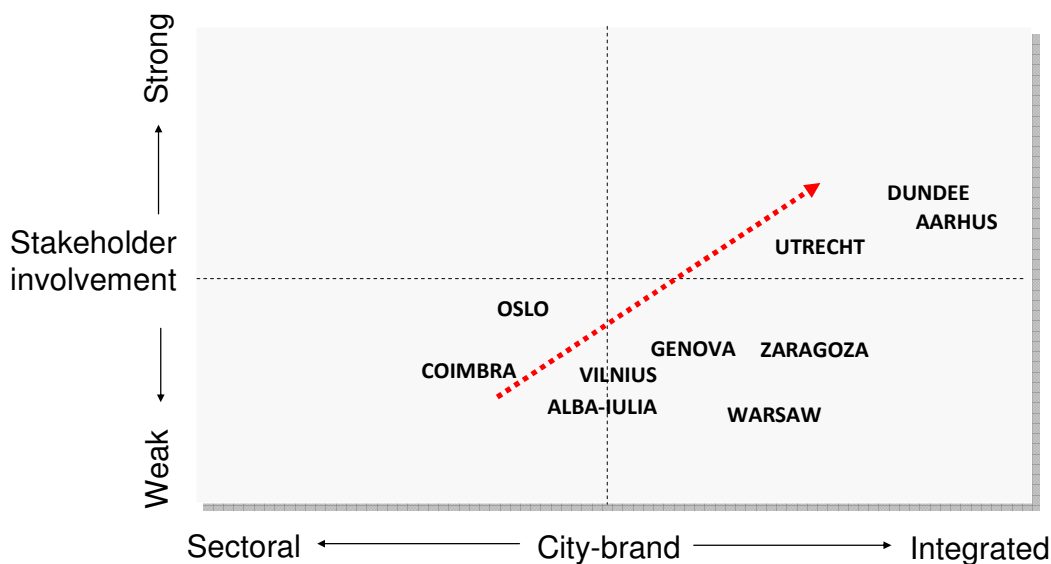
At this point, it has to be reminded the leading role of the local government in conducting the building of a competitive and comprehensive city proposition, usually through an appointed technical office. Moreover, such a small team within the local government should be directly in charge of targeting the

⁵ Gelder, S. van (2011). City Brand Partnerships. In Dinnie, K. Editor. City Branding. Theory and Cases. Palgrave Macmillan.

local population, as main category along with visitors and business, which is often missed at the operational level in many city branding strategies.

Finally, pooling assets and resources to improve visibility and the capacity for interaction at a global scale, should be a key driver when setting a city brand management model. It deals with both horizontal and vertical **multi-level governance**, as a way to approach different situations: metropolitan and city-region coordination for place branding and marketing; articulation between nation branding policies and city branding; or transnational alliances for co-branding cross-border macro-regions.

The collaborative model: one direction many formulas



Paradoxically, integrated city branding needs effective sector-focused branding and marketing

City branding requires central coordination. But once said this, specific city-based marketing initiatives that target different groups demand detailed storytelling and tools, since “one size hardly fits all”. It is common sense “implementation does not need to be centralized” (Erik Braun). Facing the hypothetical dilemma of what is better for the city, specialized marketing organisations (investment and tourism agencies) versus organisations with a more holistic approach across different target groups, Robert Nesselaar, from Rotterdam, says both.

While integrated city branding must be driven by Nesselaar’s statement “stay close to ourselves as city”, at the operational level “marketing activities should be designed, planned and implemented as closely as possible to your customer groups” (Kotler and Achrol, 1999, cited in Oslo by Erik Braun).

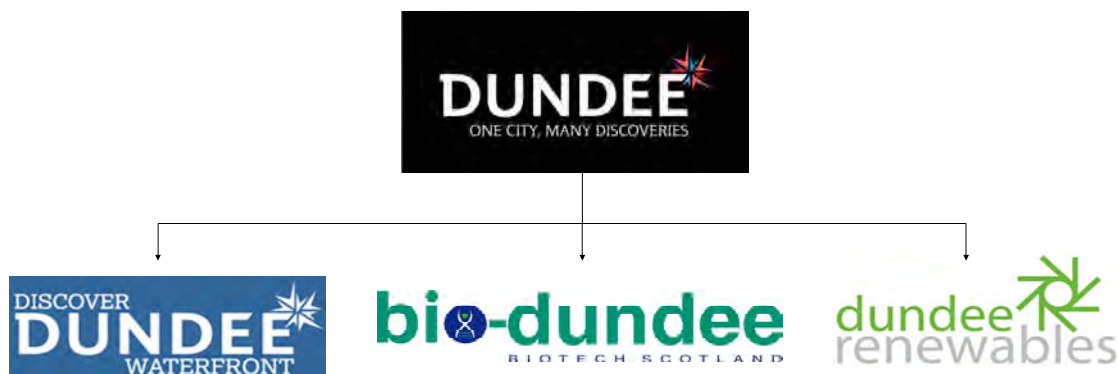
Therefore, existing platforms or specialized marketing organizations targeting specific groups (the type of “Invest in X” or “Visit X” agencies) can certainly keep a relevant role, but now promoting and negotiating with selected stakeholders new action plans, since those stakeholders (technology parks,

universities, business centres, hotel associations, big companies, ports and airports...) join a precious know-how for communicating the city on a day to day basis.

Real mobilization and commitment, not just participation of the usual must-to-invite organizations from the local establishment. This was underlined as fundamental by the whole group of cities and experts gathered in Oslo. For instance, when referring to the widespread figure of local ambassadors, Jan Schmidt-Sørensen, director of business development in Aarhus, stressed this idea for new, non rhetoric, **local pacts around city branding**: “it is essential to understand what the value for our ambassadors are in using the brand logo and narrative; we have to have "sales talk" where we can prove what is in it for our ambassadors; what does it take to move from a network of ambassadors listening polite to a network of hard working and committed ambassadors”.

The concept of **family of brands** (place-based brands for specific business clusters and big urban projects and events) in combination with an **umbrella place brand** was widely advocated as very helpful in the articulation between integrated city branding and sector-focused marketing strategies. Most of CityLogo partners have undertaken or are still dealing with huge waterfront re-development projects, new avant-garde cultural facilities or big-scale events like European capital of Europe, each of them with their own communication strategy. The challenge here is not only to find equilibrium between the specific communication strategies in progress at city level, but also mutually reinforce them. Even more, a challenge is also to avoid the risk that a long-term integrated city brand strategy can be cannibalized by the big resources to communication, concentrated in a short period of time, devoted to these flagship urban projects.

Umbrella branding is not just about creating a brand as logo & motto, but some commonalities to empower the work targeting specific groups



Dundee’s family of brands

Summarizing, that small team or more developed platform conducting an integrated city brand strategy, should adopt, in any case, a double profile:

- as **brand manager**, leading and conducting commonalities, building up a unifying content for the integrated/umbrella brand (that is, one single powerful narrative), creating synergies between the

different sector-focused marketing strategies and addressing directly the local population as target group;

- as **brand facilitator**, supporting and interacting to/with those partners and entities with a responsibility in marketing the city over the ground to specific target groups, and more broadly promoting the city-brand toolkit's usability between a wide range of stakeholders and potential users.

06

What's going on in Oslo

The workshop was magnificently hosted and backed, at the highest level, by the Oslo Municipality. From the organization work of Liss Steinbakk and her team, the opening words by Erna Ansnes from the International Office, and Hallstein Bjercke, Vice-Mayor for culture affairs and business development to Stian Berger Røsland, Governing Mayor, who offered a reception at the impressive City Hall and saluted personally to each of the delegates at the workshop.

After one day fully devoted to the workshop's main theme, the day after in the morning was dedicated to learn and discuss about what's going on in Oslo, one of the partners of CityLogo. First, delegates experienced the "fjord city" concept through a boat tour to the bay area. That concept actually embraces the two simultaneous waterfront re-development projects, both almost completed, Tjuvholmen in the west side and Bjørvika district in the East part, around the new opera house, what shows the current dynamism and strength of the Norwegian capital. The following in-door sessions were in charge of Jan Fredrik Lockert, from the City of Oslo and Julian Stubbs, a renowned international brand strategist based in Stockholm who is now supporting the city. The first made an introduction about the situation in Oslo - 600,000 inhabitants and 2 million living in the 57 municipalities of the Oslo Regional Alliance.

The city hosts a growing economy that is largely based on five clusters, maritime and bio-marine industries, energy and environment (comprising oil and gas industry and renewables, mainly hydropower), telecom and ICT, life sciences and creative industries. Oslo is among the world's most eco-friendly cities. It is an open and tolerant society, playing a world-class role in the peace work. As the whole country, the capital ranks very high at many international indexes related to education, innovation, wealth and quality of living.

Nevertheless many of the city qualities are still unknown to a broader international public, "Oslo is attractive but invisible" (Jan Fredrik Lockert). But, overall, the city lacks of a cohesive narrative where local values, assets, emerging realities – productive and social ones- and expectations can be smartly aligned and then communicated.

According to some city officials, the main current challenge regarding branding is that actions are carried out on many different levels and by different stakeholders, without sufficient coordination or an overarching responsibility. The result is a fragmented image. In general, the collaboration model is running well for the destination brand, around the work of Visit Oslo, but it is not organized in an

effective way for the business-knowledge side yet. In addition, in a city where about 25% of the population was not born there, social cohesion could be also addressed from an integrated place brand strategy, targeting the residents.

Oslo is now embarked in a process of brand building, and in our view the city should carefully avoid another conventional process, like in many cities unfortunately, that takes as its peak and main output a more or less brilliant logo & motto. What the city basically needs in the very short term is a powerful, unifying and updated narrative of contemporary Oslo and its hinterland, where a big proportion of the local population can also feel recognized, as well as a specific governance and management model for such integrated city brand strategy.



Jan Fredrik Lockert introducing the branding strategy for Oslo

Julian Stubbs facilitated an entertaining peer-review session on the perceived image of Oslo, using some serious games he had just applied in his work with stakeholders and people in the city or in the past supporting city brand building in Stockholm. North, Sea, Nature, Peace, Egalitarianism, No-code Society... were some of the city values that were raised during the session.

Stubbs also took the opportunity to introduce his way of approaching a process of city brand building. What he calls the BASE-UP™ method: Brief, briefing session; Audit, external and internal research, benchmarking and workshops with stakeholders; Strategy, brand strategy, positioning, brand platform; Execution, creative elements and approach, brand engagement ("internal brand education sessions"), external roll-out including PR and digital; and Follow UP, continuous assessment, adjustment and reporting.

THEMATIC WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Thursday 18 April

MATHALLEN

Inaugurated in 2012, Mathallen is the Oslo's new food market and has the ambition to become the centre for Norwegian food culture. Mathallen is located in Vulkan, a creative city development project emerging at the once industry-heavy west bank of the Akerselva river. Innovative architecture defines the area, bringing together a multitude of people and enterprises. When completed, the area will comprise hotels, schools, Oslo's first food hall, office spaces, culture centres, restaurants and apartments. Vulkan will be an inspiring site for our workshop.

Maridalsveien 17, 0175 Oslo

08.45 - 09.15

REGISTRATION

09.15 - 10.00

OPENING SESSION: INTEGRATED CITY-BRAND MANAGEMENT, RE-THINKING ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

Chair: Liss Steinbakk, Oslo Kommune.

Opening words: *Hallstein Bjercke, Vice-Mayor for culture affairs and business development, Oslo Kommune.*

Introduction to Eurocities Working Group on City Branding: *Cesare Torre, chairman of the Eurocities-WG and director of city promotion in Genoa.*

Introduction to Urbact-CityLogo: *Haye Folkertsma, CityLogo project coordinator, City of Utrecht.*

Introductory note on the workshop theme: *Miguel Rivas, lead expert for CityLogo.*

SESSION 01

MANAGING NEW AMBITIONS FROM MEDIUM-SIZED URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS

Chair: Dan Diaconu, Deputy Mayor of Timisoara.

10.00 - 10.15

Organizational model for city branding in Dundee

Diane Milne, City Development Department, Dundee City Council.

10.15 - 10.30

Open-source city branding: madness or pragmatism? Managing the "Aarhus, Danish for progress"

Line Gerstrand Knive and Lotte Kofod Ludvigsen, Communication Consultants, Mayor's Department, city of Aarhus.

10.30 - 10.45

Utrecht: re-thinking local organization in city branding

Ank Hendriks, Coordinator City Marketing, city of Utrecht.

10.45 - 11.30

General discussion

Lead discussant: Jan Beyer Schmidt-Sørensen, Director of Business Development, city of Aarhus.

11.30 - 12.00 Coffee-break.

SESSION 02 STRATEGIES FOR INSTITUTIONALIZING INTEGRATED CITY BRANDING

Chair: Maria Schicht, Deputy Director Promotion Department, city of Warsaw.

12.00 - 12.15 **Growing the Birmingham Brand**
Tim Manson, Operations & Policy Director, Marketing Birmingham.

12.15 - 12.30 **The institutionalization of integrated city branding: a comparative perspective**
Eric Braun, Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

12.30 - 12.45 **Umbrella branding or communicating specific strengths? The curse of city-brand mosaic. A perspective from Gothenburg and Sweden**
Anton César, International Office, Gothenburg.

12.45 - 13.30 **General discussion.**
Lead discussant: Robbert Nesselaar, Brand Director, Rotterdam Marketing

13.30 - 14.45 Lunch at Vulkan Food Hall

SESSION 03 DEVELOPMENTS IN PROGRESS ON CITY-BRAND MANAGEMENT

Chair: Lorena Calvo, Head of International Relations, Zaragoza.

14.45 - 15.00 **Barcelona Global: committed influential individuals joining forces for city positioning**
Mateu Hernández, Director, Barcelona Global.

15.00 - 15.15 **Organising responsibilities in city branding: the case of Rotterdam**
Robbert Nesselaar, Brand Director, Rotterdam Marketing.

15.15 - 15.30 **Branding the city-region: the unique case in France of Nantes-Saint Nazaire international agency**
Christophe le Bret, General Manager, Nantes Saint-Nazaire International Agency.

15.30 - 16.15 **General discussion.**
Lead discussant: Eric Braun, Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

16.15 - 16.30 Coffee-break

16.30 - 17.00 CONCLUSIONS AND OVERALL REMARKS

Miguel Rivas, lead expert for CityLogo

19.30 – 20.00

Reception at Oslo City Hall

A guide will be available for all who are interested in some history about the Oslo City Hall, a landmark in the city

20.00 – 22.00

Dinner at Oslo City Hall

Welcome speech by Stian Berger Røssland, Governing Mayor of Oslo

Friday 19 April

THE THIEF

The Thief is located in Tjuvholmen, the city district which was once home to criminals and shady dealings, and now a centre for contemporary art and good city living at the water's edge. International-calibre restaurants, cosy eateries and high-quality galleries sit side by side in pedestrians streets and squares. The Astrup Fearnley Museum designed by Renzo Piano, is the hotel's nearest neighbour

<http://thethief.com>

SESSION 04 WHAT'S GOING ON IN OSLO

09.00 - 10.00

Oslo waterfront: boat tour

Departing from City Hall sea side and ending up at Tjuvholmen - 5 min. walk to The Thief. The classic Oslo fjord sightseeing, passing the new Opera House, is the best way to learn on the "fjord city" concept, in fact two parallel urban redevelopment projects at Tjuvholmen and Bjørvika districts.

10.30 - 11.00

A branding strategy for Oslo: challenges and expectations

Jan Fredrik Lockert, Assistant Director General, Section for Business Development, Diversity and Integration, Oslo Kommune.

11.00 - 13.00

Peer-review and discussion on the Oslo case

Key introduction and facilitator: Julian Stubbs, international brand strategist.

13.00 - 14.00

Lunch and farewell at the Thief



URBACT CITYLOGO

CityLogo is a partnership within the framework of the [URBACT programme](#), led by the city of Utrecht and including Zaragoza, Genoa, Aarhus, Dundee, Warsaw, Oslo, Vilnius, Coimbra and Alba Iulia. It is a network on Innovative Place-Brand Management, launched as a reaction to the most common gaps in the way cities address branding and marketing. The rationale is that city-branding should be embedded in broader and participatory processes of re-thinking urban identities to be then filtered by urban-driven communication codes, resulting in more powerful brand-toolkits. In addition, more effective formulas for stakeholder involvement and management, also in terms of financial co-responsibility, should be widely promoted.

During the period 2012-2015, CityLogo will work at two levels: locally, shaping specific platforms for stakeholder involvement and management in each of the participating cities, with the mission to strengthen a strategy on integrated city branding; at network level, CityLogo will display a range of transnational activities, including thematic workshops, study visits, peer-reviews and reports. Initiatives at network level are also open to other interest cities and third parties

Such “learning by interacting” itinerary will cover a range of key topics grouped into four main sub-themes, namely: integrated city brand management: re-thinking organizational models; integrated city brand building: beyond the marketing approach; channels & communication tools revisited: the impact of the digital shift; and new segmentation strategies: visitors, business, talent, locals.

Lead partner contact, city of Utrecht: Haye Folkerstma h.folkertsma@utrecht.nl

Lead expert for CityLogo: Miguel Rivas mrivas@grupotaso.com

EUROCITIES WORKING GROUP ON CITY BRANDING AND ATTRACTIVENESS

Members of the group are: Aarhus - Antwerp - Athens - Bakirkoy - Barcelona - Bergen - Bologna - Bonn - Bratislava - Brighton & Hove - Bristol - Brno - Budapest - Bursa - Copenhagen - Dublin - Dusseldorf - Edinburgh - Florence - Genoa - Ghent - Glasgow - Gothenburg - Grenoble - Hamburg - Helsinki - Heraklion - IBM - Izmir - Karlstad - Katowice - Kharkov - Linkoping - Liverpool - London - Lublin - Lyon - Madrid - Malmo - Manchester - Munich - Nantes - Netwerkstad Twente - Oslo - Oulu - Palermo - Parkstad Limburg - Rennes Metropole - Rotterdam - Sintra - Sofia - Stockholm - Strasbourg - Sunderland - Tampere - Tbilisi - Timisoara - Turku - Utrecht - Vienna - Vilnius - Warsaw - Zaragoza – Zurich.

The working group on City Branding and Attractiveness has been recently included inside the Eurocities Economic Development Forum. Such a choice was due to the need of reinforcing the plans for growth by attracting both new investments and visitors.

Chairman of the Eurocities-WG on City Branding: Cesare Torre, director of city promotion in Genoa ctorre@comune.genova.it

URBACT CITYLOGO

Thematic workshop 01
Management and new
organizational models

Thematic workshop 02
Brand toolkits: urban semiotics
and politics of city representation

Thematic workshop 03
Channels & communication tools:
the digital shift

Thematic workshop 4
Segmentation strategies: visitors,
business, talent, locals

2 key study visits

Peer review

Case study

Final conference

A Local Action Plan in each of the participating cities

