

Oslo International Advisory Board

Report from meeting February 16th-17th, 2023

1. Introduction

The Oslo IAB first established by Oslo Region Alliance and Oslo Business Region in 2014 in connection with the organisations' task of writing the Oslo Region Brand Management Strategy. The strategy for promoting the Oslo brand was formally adopted in 2015. The board was re-established in 2019, to help guide Oslo Region Alliance in their work to implement the strategy. In 2023, the Oslo Region Alliance invited Oslo Business Region and VisitOSLO to take part in the meeting in Oslo on the 16th and 17th February.

The members of the **Oslo International Advisory Board (IAB)** are:

- **Geerte Udo** is CEO of Amsterdam & Partners and is known as being a decisive connector with vision and a creative spirit. Amsterdam & Partners focusses on one mayor goal: to ensure that the Amsterdam Area remains liveable and prosperous for residents, conventions, business, and visitors. The company uses data, new technologies and storytelling to build a sustainable reputation of Amsterdam Area. And they guide residents, companies, conferences and visitors to familiar and less familiar places and contributes to reducing nuisance.
- **Mateu Hernandez**, an expert and practitioner on economic, cultural and local development who has led public and private institutions in Barcelona such as its economic development agency Barcelona Activa, or served as CEO for economic development of the city of Barcelona, and more recently created and developed Barcelona Global as a private non for profit civic platform aiming to make Barcelona one of the best cities in the world for talent, and engaging more than 1000 private members on that mission.
- **Martin Boisen** is Director and Owner of For the Love of Place, an advisory specialised in the application of marketing and branding to urban and regional governance. Martin has extensive experience from working with more than 150 cities and regions throughout (mainly) Europe – including the development of the Oslo Region Brand Management Strategy.
- **Prof Greg Clark** is a globally renowned urbanist who has worked with 300 cities (including Oslo) on long term strategy, positioning, and leadership, He is author of 10 books and 100 reports on cities, branding, investment, and innovation. He hosts a podcast series called 'The DNA of Cities'.

Oslo Region Alliance, Oslo Business Region and VisitOSLO are together building the 'Team Oslo' work programme with the City of Oslo, the wider members of the Oslo Regional Alliance and with businesses, institutions, venues, and other who wish to help promote Oslo.

2. Feb 2023 Session of the Oslo IAB

The Oslo IAB met on 16 and 17 Feb 2023 in Oslo.

The agenda of the meeting was:

- The competitive situation of Cities and Regions after COVID.
- Progress of the Oslo brand strategy.
- Evolution of Team Oslo
- Key priorities for future success

- Meeting with Vice Mayor Rina Mariann Hansen to review progress.

The meeting was productive and timely because it addressed the new visible trends in city & regional positioning post pandemic and was able to focus on the new opportunity agenda for Oslo how Oslo is already facing new forms of competition.

3. Meeting notes.

3.1 Competitive Situation.

The competitive situation for cities/regions in Europe is more intense since the pandemic:

- i. The pandemic changed previously settled patterns of cross-border tourism, study, trade, migration, investment, and has created the need to build a new offer and position for cities/regions all over the world to address the new demand profile, which includes revised activity profiles within cities & regions.
- ii. At the same time the impact of the 'lock down' and other associated measures over time have changed the way that people use their city and its districts and neighbourhoods. There are opportunities to create new urban and regional experiences and a need to 'win back' trust and confidence in gathering places and urban amenities/systems. A key promotional task is to promote the city/region to its own residents and businesses, and pre-requisite for attracting visitors, students, events, investors again. How far the regional community uses its own city has a key impact on external interest.
- iii. The rapid development, and appetite, of cities in both established regions and faster growing regions (eg Middle East, South East Asia, South and East China) is adding competitive pressure from additional locations (eg for international talent, high skilled jobs, tourism, and students). This competitive pressure is now fierce, especially for talent and workers. So, strategic communication that drives and informs demand is more important than pre-pandemic.

For Oslo, there was substantial progress prior to the pandemic in positioning the city and region. However, one additional impact of COVID is that there is a clear global 'memory loss' that makes it important to position and promote Oslo again.

In Norway there are some drivers and factors that might lead to challenges in delivering Oslo's potential unless intentional action is taken:

- Strength of Oil/Gas economy might reduce urgency to build Oslo's knowledge and experience intensive sectors.
- Difficulties in attracting, settling and retaining international students, and other talent, caused by processes and protocols.
- Difficulties to retain successful firms in the region if there is a squeeze on talent.
- So far the activities to promote Oslo have been led by a small number of expert public sector led bodies. A broader alliance will be needed to mobilise the assets and advantages of the region.

3.2 Core propositions

Core propositions:

- i. City/Region promotion is very important at the start of new cycles, that is when new competition enters, and the terms of competition are set for a 10-15 year period. This means that many cities are now refreshing their brand and story and seeking to align with the opportunities in the new post-pandemic cycle.
- ii. City/Region promotion can be led by City and Regional Governments, but it should always actively involve an alliance of all local organisations that are:
 - iconic and highly visible (e.g., museums, galleries, sport teams, airlines, major firms HQ'd in region).
 - carry the name of the city or region (eg Universities, Ports, Airports, Sport Teams, Major Venues)
 - are involved in marketing a product, service, or experience that is linked to the unique features of region (eg real estate, utilities, food, music, fashion, film/tv, design).
- iii. These organisations are deeply involved in direct and indirect promotion of the city/region. They carry its brand and its stories. If they are actively involved in the promotion effort their energies and assets can be leveraged on behalf of the region. If they are not directly engaged, they can unintentionally produce an unhelpful mix of fragmented and non-aligned messages and ideas about the city/region.
- iv. Therefore city / region branding is an activity where the City Council and its regional neighbours should lead by facilitation of a much larger cross-sector alliance. Local Government is best places to convene this alliance and to provide with common tools and resources, building a shared strategy and joint venture between the partners. This is probably best supported by creating a membership group such as an Oslo Brand Alliance (or Team Oslo).

How cities can lead by facilitating a larger multi-sector alliance.

Martin Boisen.

Why: It begins with five realisations:

- i. Places don't need brands, they are brands – at least in terms of how they work in our minds.
- ii. The brand of Oslo is Oslo's reputation, Oslo's image, and the shared associations people have with Oslo (both in Oslo, Norway, Scandinavia/Nordics, Europe and the rest of the world).
- iii. The brand is influenced by everybody that communicates extensively about 'Oslo'.
- iv. The brand of Oslo belongs to the commons. As a public good, it has no owner.
- v. The responsibility for managing the brand lays with the public institutions, but a broad coalition of stakeholders is needed to gain and keep traction.

What: Place brand management through coalition-building.

It follows from the above that effective place brand management becomes a continuous exercise in which the public institutions facilitate shifting and broad coalitions of the willing to align their actions, stories, propositions, and promotion to communicate a recognisable 'Oslo' in all of that. It is about

establishing and nourishing momentum to keep working on the brand through cohesive long-term efforts as well as through short-term projects and activities.

How: Building the team approach.

The continuous efforts need to be given a steady foundation on which to stand. 'Place brand management' needs to be established as a task, with a professional team responsible for the efforts of managing the brand (not for the outcomes, since these are created by a multitude of actors in and around Oslo). This team needs to be put in a position to carry out the task of monitoring the development of the image of Oslo, advising on how the image could be influenced, advising on how initiatives and projects may influence the image of Oslo, and facilitating shifting coalitions of public and private stakeholders to work on common projects *and* to apply the brand strategy in their own organisations and activities. This includes the public institutions themselves, their own policies, their own projects, the built environment, the institutions and how they operate. Remember that everything communicates, whether it is deliberately designed to or not.

Who does this well and what does it look like?: First-movers like Amsterdam (see below) and Lyon still does this very well, and over the last twenty years, more and more cities and regions have adopted a similar approach. Barcelona Global (see below) has shown again and again how to engage the private stakeholders in flexible coalitions on their own terms. The Cities of The Hague and Utrecht built a core team for place brand management to apply the place brand strategy both internally (municipal organisation), and externally (through facilitating the existing cooperation with stakeholders in various sectors and ecosystems to take the brand into deliberate consideration).

3.3 Key Priorities

The meeting reviewed and confirmed some key priorities for Team Oslo.

- i. It is time to reignite the brand alliance for Oslo now, so that Oslo can have a fresh and successful post-pandemic cycle.
- ii. Attention should be paid to promoting Oslo internationally, and also to encouraging the region to rediscover itself, and help to position Oslo within Norway as an important balancing source of resilience through diverse sectors, jobs, taxes, and talent formation.
- iii. Develop the brand alliance through the Team Oslo approach. Start with convening 10-20 partners that are willing to work together on common strategy for next 2-3 years. Seek to enlist key organisations such as Airport, Universities, Large Firms, Cultural Institutions, and Financial Institutions. In addition to a core coalition, it would be wise to allocate resources to facilitate more flexible coalitions as well, not only looking for a structural multi-sector alliance, but also alliance-building as a managerial instrument to deliver the strategy.
- iv. Develop the role of the City of Oslo as lead convenor of the brand alliance through a series of event and briefings and coordination activities.
- v. Develop the roles of Oslo Regional Alliance, Oslo Business Region, and Visit Oslo to provide content leadership for the alliance and to shape the programme of work.

How did Amsterdam build a brand alliance?

Geerte Udo

Amsterdam&partners is a public private foundation focussing on the target groups residents, attracting business, talent and conventions and guiding visitors. 1/3 of our income comes from the city of Amsterdam, 1/3 is consumer income and 1/3 is partner income.

Our partner network consists of +700 partners. It is a mix of Companies, Cultural organizations, 32 Municipalities around Amsterdam, 2 Provinces, Knowledge institutions, Interest groups.

A lot of the smaller partners are partner because they get visibility on our website and are invited at partner events, and knowledge network events.

We have a special group of 100 iconic partners, of which we believe they create and shape our metropolitan area the coming decades (see list). We build these partnerships over the last 20 years by improving the 'what's in it for them' over and over again. We started with the 25 biggest and most iconic brands. We limit the club at 100 because we believe it is most powerful if the key players know each other, real connections can be made and changes started. Because once in a while partners leave we can invite new members, so we keep the group relevant and up to date

The return of investment for these partners is at different levels:

- They collectively invest in a better reputation of Amsterdam which will benefit their own business as well in the long run, by paying a fee to Amsterdam&partners
- Because it is a cross-sectoral network it creates new relations and unique discussions on the bigger issues we have to tackle in the metropolitan area. These discussions are fuel for all the policies of members in the network at different levels
- Once a year we travel to a European city for 2 days, to collectively learn on the city development, power of cultural institutions, mobility, new economic trends, sports social policy etc. we learn but also discuss the dreams we have for our own metropolitan and how to get there
- Once a year we visit a Dutch or Belgium city for 1 day to learn and discuss relevant topics
- We organize events for knowledge sharing with and at partners, on relevant topics in the metropole, topics that are essential for all partners, such as labour force challenges, ChatGPT, energy transition, etc (8 times a year)
- It is an exclusive network of CEO's, mayor and vice mayor, and presidents of the boards of knowledge institutions. The president of this Metropolitan Amsterdam Club is the Mayor of Amsterdam
- We make sure that all are activities as unique so there are multiple reasons for our partners not to miss all the organized events.

For this exclusive club the cultural institutions, smaller municipalities and companies and the knowledge institutions pay 5000 euro a year. The bigger companies and municipalities pay 20.000 euro.

How does the private sector support Barcelona's global positioning?

Mateu Hernandez

On reigniting the brand, would be great for Oslo to go deeper on a public - civic joint strategy. When in 2011 Barcelona had the need to reinvent its global proposal and add a business appeal to its touristic and leisure global perception, the creation of Barcelona Global was a strategic element.

Barcelona Global is a fully private civic platform, that has decided to fund its activities without the support of the public budget and mainly engaging a wide range of transversal actors such as big corporations, research centres, universities, cultural institutions, small companies, entrepreneurs and independent professionals (from medical doctors, to lawyers and artists).

Barcelona Global as a wide platform of civic leaders has been key on identifying why Barcelona should shift its branding from a touristic destination into something else that allows the real assets of the city to emerge. That is why Barcelona Global since its beginning has decided to focus on making Barcelona one of the best cities of the world for talent and using its great position on the visitors economy to help on that.

The strategy followed by Barcelona Global was based on engagement of different key city actors such as top researchers, entrepreneurs, artists, business leaders, medical doctors, academics, and a wide range of creative people. Barcelona Global also pushed hard to engage actors that traditionally were not engaged on improving the city such as people from abroad who decided to live and work in Barcelona (Barcelonians by choice) or those from Barcelona who are working and living abroad. With the support of Barcelonians by choice and Barcelonians living abroad the ideas and projects to improve Barcelona were highly more strategic than those coming from traditional organizations such as employers organizations or Chambers of Commerce, none of them strictly focused on Barcelona as a key subject.

Barcelona Global, after 11 years has become a key actor on the city mainly due to the fact of its way of thinking and proposing actions and its focus on making things happen. Since its creation, Barcelona Global has engaged more than 1000 members on helping Barcelona, and also has created several products to promote the city such as the Barcelona Global International Council where Barcelonians living abroad meet and help or a top network of Barcelonians by choice. By using this network, Barcelona Global has been able to win the America's Cup for Barcelona, create an investment attraction office, promote Barcelona as a classical music destination, improve taxation to attract talent or create a strategy to promote Barcelona as a higher education hub.

Barcelona Global is only an example of public and private collaboration in Barcelona. The city has other examples such as the Mobile World Capital Foundation, created to build a legacy for one of the major technology congresses worldwide based in Barcelona, the Mobile World Congress (that hosts every year more than 100,000 top attendees). This Foundation plays a key role on identifying projects related to technology to be created in Barcelona using the opportunity of having such an event in town.

Public and private partnership has also been key on attracting for Barcelona one of the top global sports events, the America's Cup. The initiative was brought to Barcelona Global by a group of influential members and the bid was built by Barcelona & Partners, its investment office. Engaging the different administrations and also raising private commitment and funds was key to convince Team

New Zealand that apart of the best already existing infrastructures, Barcelona's commitment was top on the list specially due to the personal commitment of an initial group of 25 business leaders.

As a summary, Barcelona, who's global brand is highly recognised and valued has the challenge to transform this brand in something more than a touristic destination and emerge all the talent and knowledge economy (together with logistics, services and industrial production) that Barcelona has to show. The challenge to add a business card into the existing post card is important for Barcelona, and this challenge needs an efficient civic engagement and a working public private strategy.

Appendices

Greg's Presentation