

# Oslo International Advisory Board. Meeting February 2020

## 1. Background to the meeting.

The meeting took place in Amsterdam where it was hosted by Amsterdam & Partners on February 3 and 4 2020, prior to the recent lock down phase of the COVID19 management process. Officials from Oslo Region Alliance met with all 4 members of the International Advisory Board:

- Geerte Udo, CEO of Amsterdam and Partners.
- Dr Martin Boisen, Independent advisor at For the Love of Place, Lecturer in Human Geography & Planning at the University of Groningen
- Mateu Hernandez, CEO, Barcelona Global
- Prof Greg Clark, Global Advisor on Future Cities & New Industries.

During the visit the case studies of city branding in The Hague and Amsterdam were considered. The agenda for the IAB meeting included:

- i. Review of progress since last IAB and current context for Oslo.
- ii. Impact of the Oslo Brand Strategy.
- iii. Leveraging the European Green Capital.
- iv. Stakeholder engagement and participation.
- v. Organisation, capacity, and resources.

## 2. The Moment we are in.

The IAB were reminded that we are in a century of rapid urbanisation where city-regional population growth is continuous and is combined with an economic transition that favours metropolitan locations, a climate emergency that requires urgent action at city-regional level, and a new suite of technologies that provide potential solutions for city systems optimisation, and the engagement of regional residents and a global populations, in city-citizen communications. This metropolitan century has multiple implications for how city-regions communicate. They face diverse opportunities and challenges to show their distinctive capacities, and to demonstrate their ability to provide a capable location for residents, workers, students, visitors, entrepreneurs, businesses, institutions, events, and investors.

This communication challenge requires that city-regions think carefully and organise their communications efforts so that they have optimal impact and avoid the common problems of fragmented stories and voices, unbalanced preoccupations, preposterous or exaggerated claims, or generic propositions that could be true of any other city-region. They must address their communication task as a complex and nuanced responsibility that can be best executed with specialist expertise combined with a strong partnership. Good city-region branding will not only help to promote the city-region, it will also help to unite, organise, and plan the city for the future.

Oslo's recent explicit attempts at city-region branding began 5 years ago with the development of the Oslo brand platform. Much has been achieved in the 5 years since inception, as we note below.

In the current moment, when we are absorbed by the arrival of the COVID19 Pandemic, it is important to remember that crises of this kind play important role as accelerators, catalysts, sorters and sifters of industries, companies, governments, and city-regions. There are winners and losers from these kinds of crises. Those that communicate well in and through the pandemic will also be take opportunities more easily as a result and will be able to accrue confidence for within and outside their borders for the turbulent times that lie ahead.

### **3. Oslo Brand Strategy**

The Oslo Region Brand Management Strategy has been in place for five years and continues to be relevant for the marketing of Oslo. The strategy has maintained a high degree of relevance, thanks to the process for developing the strategy and the values upon which it is based. The strategy is the basis for the work being done by the Oslo Region Alliance, Oslo Business Region, Visit Oslo, Visit Oslo Region, GreenVisits Oslo Region, and several other organizations. The KPIs are the basis for Oslo Region Alliance's work with branding. They focus on achieving international attention for Oslo, creating a perception of Oslo that reflects the region's values, and building broad stakeholder involvement in the marketing of Oslo.

There now is a need to operationalise the strategy in a four-year plan to create a stronger connection between the long-term strategic ambition and the annual action plans and budgets. This also would make it possible to leverage opportunities and address challenges for Oslo in a mid-range time perspective.

In the first phase after 2015, many of the projects were focused primarily on attracting attention to Oslo without a clear and precise definition of specific target groups. As Oslo has gained a stronger international position, the marketing effort has gradually become increasingly focused on leveraging Oslo's positive reputation to create value for stakeholders in the region, with a stronger emphasis on attracting business and talent. Talent attraction, in particular, has become a more important part of the "branding portfolio."

For legal reasons, the Oslo Brand Alliance was dissolved in 2018. The Oslo Region Alliance is now the leading public-sector organisation for the branding of Oslo, with contributions from the municipalities and counties in the Oslo Region being the most important source of funding. In 2019 the budget for branding was approximately 600,000 Euros. Oslo Region Alliance has continued to collaborate with Oslo Business Region and Visit Oslo on individual projects. Both organizations contribute their own funds to these projects. The collaboration recently has been strengthened, and the leadership hold regular meetings to coordinate marketing efforts.

The board of the Oslo Region Alliance recently decided to integrate brand management into the regular portfolio of the alliance, making it mandatory for all members to take part in the funding of brand management. This year, the members will decide on the membership fee amount to cover this from 2021 and beyond.

The annual State of the City report documents the improved recognition of Oslo. The Oslo brand is stronger compared to 2015. However, there still are substantial perception gaps in areas where Oslo is not yet fully recognised for its performance. The international competition between city-regions is dynamic and constantly influenced by broader global trends and circumstances. This underlines the need to build on the work with branding thus far and further strengthen this effort.

The selection of Oslo as the 2019 European Green Capital (EGC) has had a strong influence on the city's international reputation. The City of Oslo, however, has not integrated its work with the EGC with the brand management work done by the Oslo Region Alliance, and there is no clear strategy from the City of Oslo on how to leverage the legacy of the EGC for brand management purposes.

The Oslo Region Alliance continually produces campaigns to market Oslo in areas such as culture, innovation, sustainability, and tourism. These campaigns are most often developed and executed in collaboration with partners across different sectors and throughout the Oslo region. The number of partners that are engaged in this way has increased year on year. There is however no formal or permanent structure for collaboration with private and public partners outside of the Oslo Region Alliance organisation.

While the team of the Oslo Region Alliance was strengthened this past year, it is still small compared to the ambitions outlined in the strategy document, resulting in a gap between expectations and performance and strains on the organization. Lack of staff numbers is considered to be the biggest challenge for the execution of the brand strategy. This, however, is linked to the budget which also is small compared to most peer cities and regions. Uncertainty about future funding and organizational structure is also a challenge for mid-range and long term and planning.

#### **4. Lessons from Amsterdam.**

Amsterdam launched the metropolitan area wide city-brand strategy and the motto 'I amsterdam' in 2004. In 2013 it merged all promotional bodies into one city marketing body. It reviews and adjusts its strategy every three years, or more if necessary. But the branding philosophy is still the same, as are the core values. The Metropolitan Area changed a lot over the last 15 years, but the DNA is the same. It is the DNA that differentiates Amsterdam from all the other Metropolis.

Together with 950 partners, Amsterdam & Partners (A&P), is building a liveable, attractive, prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable Amsterdam Area. Partners are local governments (32 municipalities and 2 provinces), cultural institutions, business and knowledge institutions. The public private co-creation is essential because these partners together create the future of the Amsterdam Metropole. It helps in building the real story about who, as metro area, Amsterdam is from the perspective of the different target groups.

The main goal of Amsterdam & Partners is to build a better reputation for the metro area, and to 'guide' the different target groups via online, offline, and physical communication. The target groups are residents, business (international companies and investments including start-and scale- up, conventions, meetings and talent) and visitors. To achieve this goal Amsterdam & Partners invest a lot in connection with partners to shape the future together.

The Amsterdam Area has grown considerably in recent years. More people want to live, work, and study there. More businesses want to settle there. More visitors want to travel there for short or longer stays. The Amsterdam Metro Area is dynamic and constantly changing. Amsterdam & Partners has to be willing and able to anticipate and respond to these changes. This calls for a new approach that puts residents first and that extends a warm welcome to businesses, congresses and visitors – assuming they add something to the Amsterdam Area. The focus is shifting from quantity to quality for the entire region as a whole. By using the right data and insights, the latest technologies, and engaging storytelling, A&P are building a better reputation for the entire Amsterdam Area every day – a reputation that more accurately reflects our identity.

Besides building a better reputation, A&P use these same resources to influence the behaviour of various target groups; to guide residents, visitors, businesses, and congresses to lesser-known spots and hidden gems that fit their needs. A&P has an annual budget of 11,2 million euro. 1/3 of A&P income is the subsidy of the city of Amsterdam, 1/3 comes from the partners and 1/3 income comes from visitors. There +/- 85 employees.

## **5. Lessons from Den Haag**

The Hague positioned itself as 'The International City of Peace and Justice' for quite some time before adapting place brand management. Similar to Oslo, The Hague developed a brand filter with core values and then went on to utilize brand filter workshops structurally to raise the consciousness of internal and external stakeholders about the extent to which initiatives were, or could become, 'on-brand'.

At the same time, a reorganisation created The Hague Brand Office at City Hall, which is responsible of getting as much behaviour and communication 'on-brand'. This Brand Office has 4 fte staff allocated to it and a budget of €3,33/inhabitant dedicated to place brand management. The Brand Office is 100% publicly funded. The Brand Office advises on all major projects, subsidies, events, attractions, urban developments, thematic years and such.

Outside City Hall, a fusion between a number of organisations has resulted in public-private partnership called The Hague & Partners (Tourism, Talent-attraction, MICE, FDI, Start-up). This organisation has a 2020-budget of €13,49/inhabitant and 55/45 fte (2019). This consist of €5.000.000, from the City, €1.000.000, from other municipalities and the region, and €1.350.000, from 'the market' (private partner contributions and commercial services). Private partners are more likely to contribute to events and activities than to running costs of the organisation. The activities of 'The Hague & Partners' are expected to be as 'on-brand' as possible, and they cooperate with the Brand Office to ensure this.

## **6. Lessons from Barcelona**

Barcelona has been successful in positioning its brand internationally, and now is a well-known and positioned city worldwide. This process of international reputation hasn't had any formal structure or strategy and it has been a consequence of

- i. a major urban transformation in the city from late 80's to beginning of this century;
- ii. a common story telling about the city shared by public officials, civic and business leaders and citizens;
- iii. a sense of pride about the city transformation and about international recognition.

This sort of "honey moon" about city branding ended a decade ago and since then there is much debate about Barcelona reputation impacting in different fields: egalitarian approaches aiming to better share the economic growth and against a supposed "mercantilisation" of the city through its international promotion; doubts about the positive impact of tourism and anti-tourism movements.

In this context, Barcelona Global, a private non for profit civic platform has promoted the idea of the importance of taking care of the Barcelona reputation and helping to transform it from a touristic appeal into a much wider reputation related to talent. The claim of this idea is based on the perception that Barcelona is perceived as a Postcard (nice landscapes, party, architecture, football and beaches) and we should add to that Postcard a Business Card where the idea of city of talent, research, culture, entrepreneurship and added value is underlined.

Since then the City Council has developed a program on City Branding doing a wide analysis of the perception of the city among different stakeholders (local and international), writing a "brand book" to disseminate a sort of new story-telling, and creating a new "logo and claim" (Always Barcelona). Due to political changes and a 100% public leadership on the management, City branding program is far from being widely accepted. This city branding initiative was founded by the City Council with an overall budget of 800.000€.

In this context, Barcelona Global has begun different programmes on city reputation such as the creation of a International Press Desk to work closely with global journalists and opinion leaders, develop several Barcelona Days in major economic destinations to promote Barcelona as a city of research, investment, culture and great experiences, built a network of "Barcelona ambassadors" worldwide based on professionals with strong links with the city, followed city rankings and lobbied for Barcelona, and developed different plans to foster public private partnerships on invest attraction. Barcelona Global has activated region business and institutional leaders as brand ambassadors and fostered a global network of ambassadors and friends of Barcelona. Barcelona Global spread good news about Barcelona as a city of talent and business throughout this network.

## **7. Legacy of Green Capital.**

It is easy to assume that primary legacy of hosting an annual award such as being designated Green capital of Europe will be Environmental projects, policy innovation, and sustainable innovation. Those things are undoubtedly important outcomes of such a year of

activity. The IAB discussed how Oslo was doing to leverage the success of the Green capital year and made the following observations based on the experience of cities like Barcelona, The Hague, Amsterdam, Kyoto, Singapore, Copenhagen, and Medellin.

There should be consideration of fostering a legacy in 5 key areas.

- Project and initiative legacy.
- Innovation Policy and practice legacy.
- Leadership, Confidence & Capacity legacy.
- Reputational legacy.

The reputational legacy can be shaped and promoted by linking the topic of Green Capital into the wider city branding effort. This means driving the topic of green city-region through the brand filter and using it as a demonstrator of other parts of the brand filter such as pioneering, enriching, and real. It can also be used to enhance story telling about Oslo as the world favourite compact city.

At the same time, the ongoing communication processes associated with Green Capital should now consider how they can better leverage and communicate the brand platform.

The IAB would recommend a stronger connection between the ongoing Green Capital programme and the Oslo brand strategy.

#### **8. Partners and stakeholders**

So far, the Oslo brand strategy has been largely operationalised through public sector organisations. This has been a key strength of the work so far and it has demonstrated the commitment of public leaders to the communication imperatives of the region.

However, there are some limitations to a brand strategy that is solely driven by public partners. The case studies of Amsterdam and Barcelona demonstrate the importance of leveraging private and civic sector organisations.

Civic institutions such as Universities, Research Institutes, Airports, Museums, Sports Clubs, Cultural Organisations, and NGOs, and private sector companies such as those in sectors that include professional services, media, investors, real estate, transport, trade, logistics, travel and tourism, retailers, hospitality, banking, and IT, that are based in the Oslo Region, have significant communication power. They have this through their commercial relationships, staff, marketing, and product/services offerings, and through their visibility in international markets.

Put simply, these institutions or companies can be either 'on brand' or 'off brand' in terms of the Oslo brand strategy. If they are on brand they will reinforce and promote key messages and ideas about Oslo, and reinforce the brand strategy objectives, at no cost to the Oslo public budgets.

However, they are extremely unlikely to do this by accident. It is necessary to actively recruit, train, and activate these civic and commercial stakeholders through an orchestrated programme of marketing projects and campaigns, international missions, and the

training/networking of the leaders involved. There are many different methods available to do this and the IAB has experience that can be shared.

### **9. Capacity & Organisation and Financing**

One concern addressed by the IAB at this meeting was the capacity of the ORA to fully deliver the enhanced implementation requirement for the Oslo brand strategy over the next 5 years. The IAB believe that the strategy is now showing multiple signs of success and these are recorded in the annualised State of Oslo reports.

The imperatives that face the region in terms of competitive positioning for talent, investment, and innovation, combined with the need to navigate the COVID19 generated recession, and to help Norway diversify its economy away from oil and gas, suggest that an enhanced capability will be required moving forwards.

The IAB recommend that a short review is undertaken to assess the organisational capability needed and to deliver the Oslo brand strategy over the next 5 years.

One aspect of the review should be to consider additional and alternative sources of investment and finance. The case studies from Amsterdam, the Hague, and Barcelona show the importance of generating multiple financing streams and leveraging non-governmental resources. There are several mechanisms to do this that are tried and tested. They included membership groups, sponsorship arrangements, levies, fees for service, and pooled budgeting.

### **10. Recommendations**

The IAB wants to congratulate Oslo Region leaders on the first 5 years of success with the Oslo brand strategy. The IAB recommends that for the next 5 years the following points are key priorities:

Maintain commitment and momentum with the brand strategy.

Integrate the green capital reputational legacy into the brand strategy.

Expand the Oslo brand work by recruiting civic and business partners into a larger alliance or consortium approach.

Increase capacity and financial resources supporting the strategy.

Address the new environment of the COVID19 pandemic and its aftermath by positioning Oslo as a region that is aligned the new imperatives that emerge from the crisis including human health, sustainability, social capital, and the digital uptick.

### **11. Next Meeting**

Subject to circumstances being conducive, the IAB would be pleased to meet again in Oslo in 2020. Some of the agendas might be:

- Meet with regional leaders to review progress and success.

- Discussions with key non-governmental stakeholders.
- Engage with regional media on progress made.