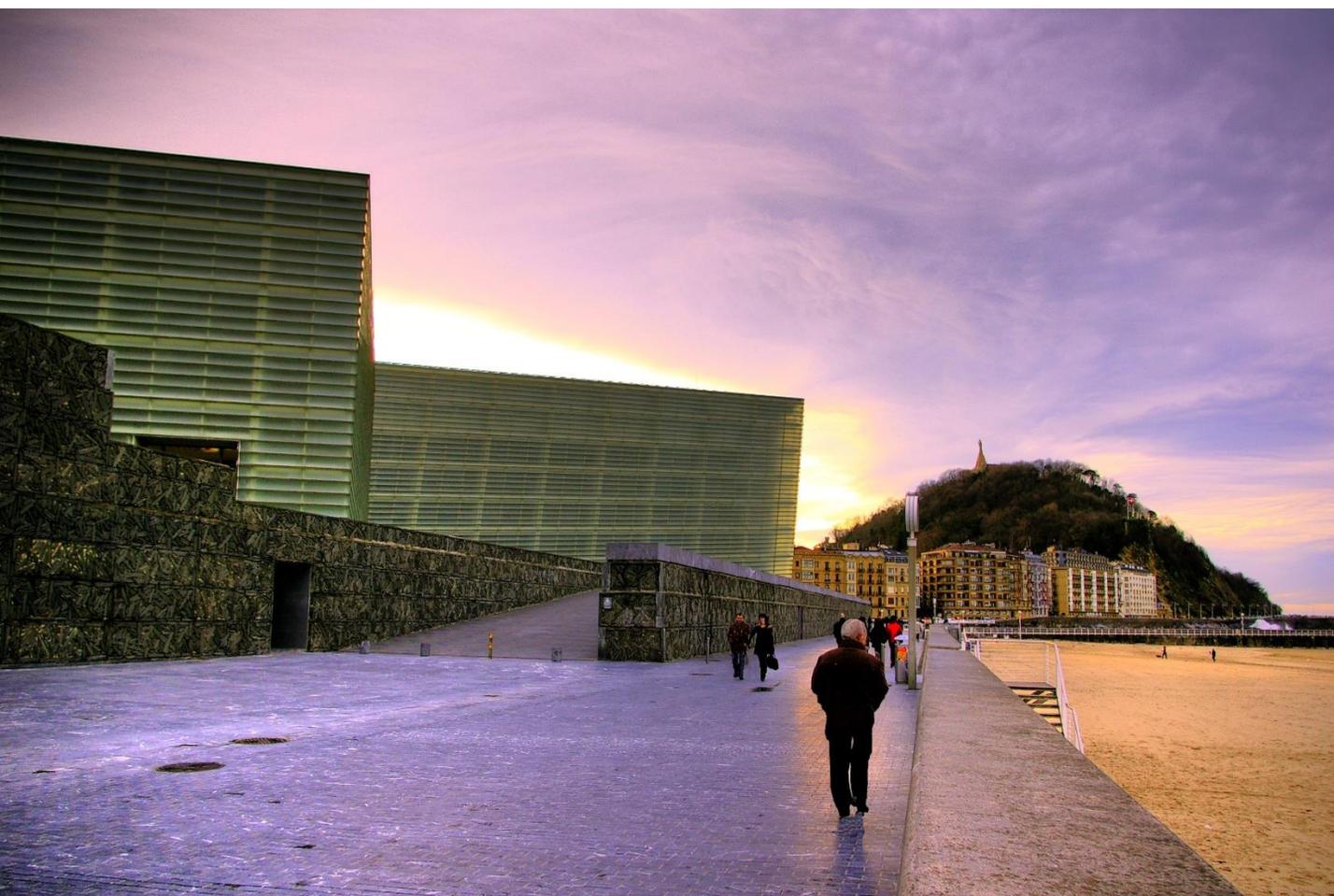


Communication actions in today's city branding & marketing

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

DONOSTIA-SAN SEBASTIAN, 21-22 APRIL 2015



A new ecology of tools

After having focused on the two strategic aspects of integrated city branding, namely: unifying city narratives, duly translated into strategic messaging and related imagery by means of brand toolkits (Liverpool, June 2014) and governance, as a matter of bringing together the range of local stakeholders with a relevant role interacting with different audiences and target groups (La Rochelle, December 2014), now the third AT.Brand international workshop, to be held in San Sebastian, enters the more operational ground of communication action planning.

A first assumption is the deep impact of the **digital shift**, at a point that increasingly there is no significant distinction between promotional strategies off-line and on-line, as both are intertwined. Now, urban identities must be equally constructed at the digital level, and the experience of place starts in front of the computer screen. Even most innovative Destination Management Organizations are re-designing themselves, from an organizational perspective, by means of the digital driver.

Getting awareness of the digital shift's different angles is important to make the most of the trend. Thus, as marketing is interaction, new digital media allows the city to reach easily far-located target audiences and "open conversations" with them throughout a kind of return communication. As said, thanks to the digital shift, new tools have emerged adding new dimension and enriching the experience of place in real time by both visitors and locals. Furthermore, digital media enable refined and affordable tools to measure local community involvement with the city brand.

However, addressing the question of communication channels & actions in today's city branding and marketing is not only a matter of migrating to digital-based initiatives. The challenge for cities is to make a choice on their particular mix of different tools, which may include all-time formulas but now duly revisited, along with others coming from a wider concept of what communication action can be.

In re-thinking "classical" formulas first discussion is about the role of **advertising** and campaigning. It is a fact city branding has been closely associated to overall, expensive campaigns, only affordable to a few, which to some extent has damaged the reputation of the field, particularly in a context of financial and economic crisis affecting many local governments. Unfortunately, a conventional marketing approach, along with the dominant role of branding and advertising agencies, still push in that direction. Anyhow, the creative side of advertising can be seen as a challenging effort aimed at producing an outstanding and synthetic combination of core messages and images. That is, the last test tube where the unifying city proposition is distilled, successfully or unsuccessfully.

Ambassador networks is another well-known tool to deliver city's messages and qualifications as well as to promote local engagement around the city brand. However, its potential is not always fully exploited because of lack of concrete assignments and work plans for all the people recruited. The same for the **big events**, or better said singular events, as they have great potential to be capitalized in terms of communication and global positioning for the host city, especially if they are consciously leveraged upon existing city values, as Liverpool is doing with music and music festivals. Other smart strategy is making the most of the big event in a way that it can be expanded and transformed into a new city value. That is what Barcelona has brilliantly done, turning the annual organization of the World Mobile Congress into Mobility as cross-cutting theme which is deliberately contaminating many other activities and events in the city all over the year. In a short period of time, it has resulted in new value creation and Barcelona is also branded now as "mobile world capital".

Indeed, a wider understanding of the concept of communication action is certainly a key driver to address action planning in the context of city branding/marketing, and a way to unleash the field from the constraints of a campaign-based logic. Thus, re-inventing the **visitor centre** (this time also showcasing flagship urban projects and ongoing emergent dynamics in the city, therefore places that might target the local population as well), re-refreshing official city merchandising (for instance re-interpreting old icons from contemporary design, as part of high-quality policies of city representation), low-cost guerrilla tools and other soft actions for promoting without "selling the city", they all can make a difference if are well articulated to conventional communication initiatives.

But the new frontier in city branding and marketing deals definitively with getting adapted **social media-based tools** and **crowdsourced techniques** in order to boost engagement, interaction and co-creation with the different city's target groups, in particular with its own residents and stakeholders. It's more credible when third parties also talk about the city than just "official storytelling". In Nantes, for instance, bloggers are now at the heart of the tourism office's digital strategy. And these tools, suitably curated, can be a solution in updating and keeping fresh on a permanent basis the range of city stories. The rise of an active citizenship and civil society, digitally educated, and their ability to personalize and share city experiences is opening new exciting opportunities in many aspects of urban development.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- Impact of the digital shift
- Revisiting well-known formulas
 - Re-thinking ad and PR campaigns
 - Work plans for brand ambassadors
 - Rising media awareness
 - Websites at the core. Magazines and newsletters
 - Capitalizing big events and flagship projects for city's communication
- Expanding the concept of communication action
 - Showcasing the contemporary city: new generation of visitor centres
 - Refreshing city merchandising and visitor info.
 - Urban signage as setting for city's core messages.
 - Commissioned reports, symbolic actions and other ways of promoting without "selling" the city.
- The new frontier: crowding together the city's story.
 - Mobile applications for marketing the city.
 - Social media-based tools and crowd-sourced initiatives.
- Experimenting on place representation and interaction with target groups: data visualization, gaming, etc.

Please contact Miguel Rivas, workshop's scientific coordinator, in case you intend to contribute to the programme, mrivas@grupotaso.com

Workshop format and registration

This is cross-learning

AT.Brand workshop in San Sebastian is a small event, seized to promote discussion on innovative city branding among peers. It is basically organized by practitioners for practitioners. That is why it is important the relevance of the different city delegations participating in the workshop in terms of capacity for policy decision-making.

Leaving apart classical meeting culture

The international workshop in San Sebastian will be very horizontal, with no keynote speakers and no boundaries between contributors presenting case studies and other participants – even meeting room's layout will work in that direction. Contributors who make a presentation and then leave are not welcome. No passive attendance.

No uncritical presentations without clear messages. Do not tell just about lights, we are also interested in learning from the shadows and failures. Presentations might be approached as food for critical discussion with all the participants. Discussion time will be at the core of the meeting.

Open event

Participation in the workshop is open to any senior practitioner, expert and scholar working in the field of place branding, and it is free, although **registration is mandatory** and subject to admission by the organization committee since the workshop's capacity is limited. Registration includes participation in the workshop sessions (sessions of interest for a wide audience will be concentrated into one full working day), workshop materials, coffee and lunch breaks and social event.

For any consultation on the registration procedure, please contact Elisabeth Jorge, Donostiako Sustapena - Fomento de San Sebastián, elisabeth_jorge@donostia.org

AT.Brand is a partnership of six cities – Dublin, Liverpool, Cardiff, La Rochelle, San Sebastian and Faro, plus the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, working on three areas: i) cross-learning on innovative city branding, open to any interested practitioner; ii) implementation of pilot actions in each of the participating cities, matching specific needs and with high potential for transferability; iii) and exploration on trans-national co-branding in the Atlantic area, including open consultation to a wide range of stakeholders in the macro-region.

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City brand building:
politics of city representation
International
workshop_Liverpool

City brand governance:
shaping the collaboration
model
International workshop
La Rochelle

Communication actions in
today's city branding
International workshop
San Sebastian



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