

Liverpool

Inside #itsliverpool



Free Thinking

Straight Talking

Trendsetting

Ever Changing

#itsliverpool

#itsliverpool

Ever Changing

Coordinator: Miguel Rivas

Partner director at Grupo TASO and principal consultant for the AT.Brand project.
mrivas@grupotaso.com

Special thanks to Chris Brown, Peter Smith and Katie Crozier, Director, Head of Marketing and Marketing Manager respectively of Marketing Liverpool for all the material and comments provided.

Also thanks all the Liverpool-based stakeholders that have given precious inputs to this report, in particular Jon Egan, Head of Strategy at Archetype, Sue Finnegan, Visitor Economy & Commercial Manager at Culture Liverpool, Yaw Owusu, Curator of Liverpool International Music Festival, Matt Smith, Head of Communications at University of Liverpool, Clare Rogerson, Digital Marketing Manager at John Lennon Airport, Barry Crichton from Deloitte Liverpool and Colin Sinclair, Director of Property Marketing at Bruntwood.

This report has been supported by the EU through the Atlantic Area Programme, as part of the AT.Brand transnational project.

2015.

Branding as accompanying strategy to huge urban transformations

To a large extent, the rise of city branding as formalised practice in Europe and in the world has been closely associated to huge changes in most of the UK's core cities, moving from old industrialism to new post-industrial economic patterns. In that transitional context, city branding has proved to be a very valuable, almost essential, accompanying strategy to big economic and physical urban transformations. As a matter of fact it is about to manage actively the communication dimension of a long term process, this time related to cities and regions as a whole. That is, it's absolutely an strategic issue which is rather far to be reduced to a matter of just campaigns, logos or straplines.

That's the case of Liverpool (470,000 inhabitants, 1.5 million in the city-region). The city underwent fast decline in the first part of the 20th Century, and then was trapped into a spiral of economic and social decline and chronic lack of infrastructure investment. To some extent, at that time the city image was linked to unemployment and population decline. Only from mid 1990s the city began to experience a positive transformation. The programme for the European Capital of Culture in 2008 was a definitive catalyst of that process, and since then Liverpool started to make systematic use of city branding techniques ¹.

Thus, in a very short period of time and with modest resources in terms of funding and manpower compared to other core cities in the UK, Liverpool's city branding team has done a brilliant work in re-positioning the city nationally and internationally. That's why for many Liverpool is a benchmark in this field ².

In a very short period of time and with modest resources in terms of funding and manpower compared to other core cities in the UK, Liverpool has done a brilliant work in rebranding itself. That's why for many Liverpool is a benchmark in this field

Liverpool is nowadays the result of an ambitious physical regeneration programme, which reached a new step in 2012 with the so called Strategic Investment Framework (SIF). Thus, the emblematical regeneration of Liverpool's Waterfront continues, building on the transformation that started with the creation of ACC Liverpool, the conference and exhibition centre. Other major projects are Liverpool2, a £300 million deep-water container terminal that will bring the world's largest container vessels;

¹ From then on, Culture Liverpool, the City Council's cultural service in charge of the European Capital of Culture programme, has been more than a promoter and facilitator of culture. It is a driving force for the regeneration and economic growth of the city and a heavyweight stakeholder in branding and marketing the city.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A58ASR9t-pg>. This absolutely unconventional promotional video shows that radical effort to rebranding the city, with no absolute mention what is already massively known about the city, Football & Beatles. This video production assumed a high risk to lead to a brilliant result.

three new Enterprise Zones - Mersey Waters, Liverpool City and Sci-Tech Daresbury; and Mersey Gateway, a six lane new bridge across the River Mersey.

It's Liverpool narrative and imagery

The main motivation when conscious city branding was introduced in Liverpool's urban management was the need to build up a more compelling city image and more consistent and unifying city narrative, both reflecting the huge changes the city was addressing. In this respect, the idea of using one single claim synthesizing the whole city was refused. As Marketing Liverpool Director Chris Brown says "ever changing and unique for everyone, it's virtually impossible to communicate what's special about Liverpool with a single snappy marketing message". Most likely this applies to every city.

Instead, an open model was set up, with guidelines regarding the design of the block ident as landmark (along with the "it's Liverpool" signature) whose colour and content are flexible, but intended to reflect the city brand essence³ and suit the particular subject or purpose of each specific communication.

At the beginning of the "It's Liverpool" strategy, which was launched in September 2011, a top-down, creative agency-driven style was followed in order to produce or unveil city's core values and narrative. This way can certainly be useful to break inertias on how the city is perceived from the outside but also from its own citizens, and give greater consistency to the city brand at the initial stages. But it may also lead to somewhat common clichés in the way cities brand and market themselves⁴. However, this risk was avoided by Archetype Studio, the Liverpool-based creative agency that was hired to design the first it's Liverpool campaign, by means of developing a behavioural narrative and communicating the city differently.

"Ever changing and unique for everyone, it's virtually impossible to communicate what's special about Liverpool with a single snappy marketing message"

Chris Brown, Marketing Liverpool

At that time a number of key messages and stories were created to highlight some of the city assets, such as the UK's fastest growing economy outside London or Liverpool ONE as the fastest growing retail centre in the country. It's worth to mention that the imagery that

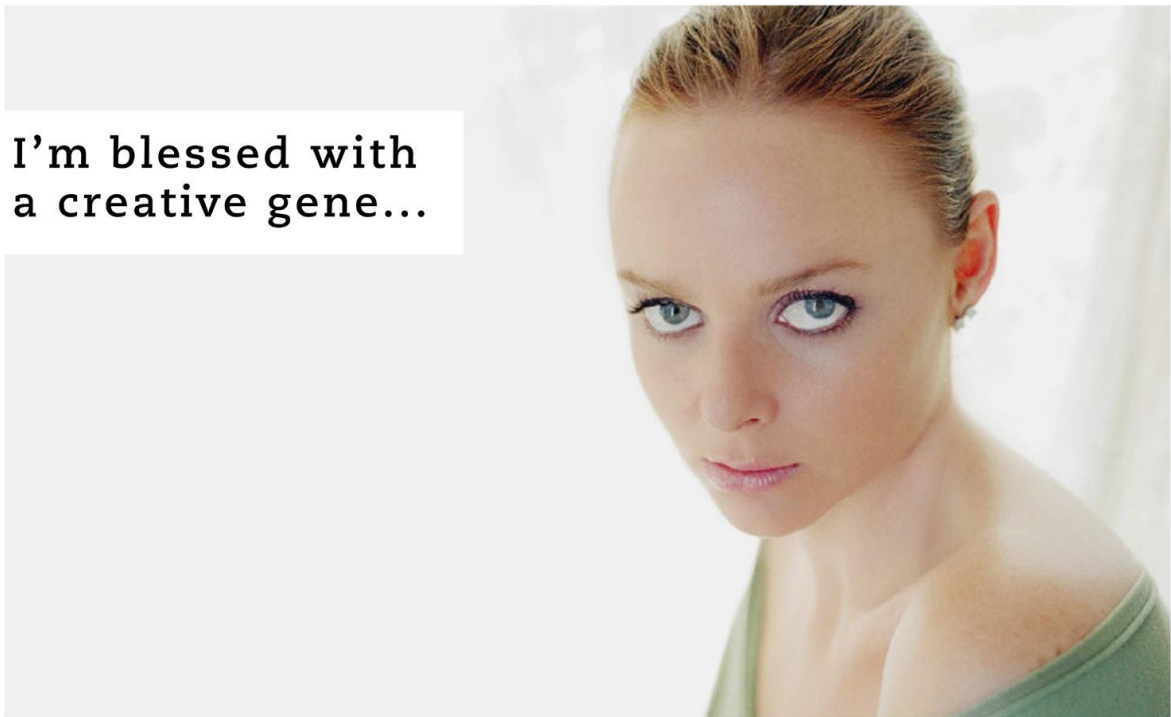
³ Brand Liverpool essence deals with "dynamic creativity", a concept with a particular meaning for each of the audiences considered: "inherently different" in the case of visitors, "life affirming" for residents and students, and "fertile ground" for business.

⁴ We mean to that uncritical adoption of what supposedly the "standard modern city" should be - smart city, creative city, lively streets everywhere... - resulting in poor differentiation. Roughly speaking, to our view it has to do with leaving the city storyline only in the hands of creative and brand agencies, which often seem to work homogenizing cities instead of differentiating them.

was then built up, and it still is, within the it's Liverpool strategy, is heavily based on Liverpool's people. This choice strengthened substantially the place brand inside the city, but outside too.

According to Archetype creative director Jon Egan, "Liverpool is more than a place. It's an experience, a quality, a state of mind. Liverpool is a personality with unmistakable accent and attitudes. It's Liverpool's people, who have defined its contribution to global commerce, culture and ideas. People are a powerful and essential means of communicating the city's spirit and identity". Accordingly, brand ambassadors – local designers, business leaders, artists, sport people – were involved via the "I'm Liverpool" motto, each of them with a short statement in line with the brand's key values. For instance, designer Stella McCartney declared "I'm blessed with a creative gene", while boxing champion Natasha Jonas claimed "I'm fighting stereotypes".

**I'm blessed with
a creative gene...**



Stella McCartney - Designer

i'm liverpool

From now onwards, Liverpool should enter a new phase less dependent of a campaign timing and logic. It makes full sense the city started with a campaign-driven process, giving a "blow on the table" to be heard inside and outside, especially when rebranding and promoting new city values are main goals. Then, as general guideline, the storytelling of a city should be more influenced and better connected to local strategic planning and a bit less dependent of the last creative agency hired. In fact this vision coincides with Marketing Liverpool's, for whom "integrated city branding is a strategic management tool, not a logo

or slogan. It should connect the city's vision/policy/framework with the promise and experience it offers its target markets".

Maybe it is time to test new ways of branding the city, with no urgency for seeking the spotlights as primary goal. A new framework where better address questions such as:

- Crowd engagement to telling and representing the city;
- More effective alignment of all the different communications efforts by relevant stakeholders and significant projects, whose respective communication policies, duly articulated and fed by a common narrative, are precisely the ones that must be at the front row and under the spotlights;
- Broader understanding of what communication action might be, also in order to make the most of limited public budgets.

This approach will certainly demand less money for ads and campaigns and more for salaries in manpower. There would be also room to learn how to build up city narrative in a way not so suspiciously unpolluted. We guess this is a frequent gap in not a few British cities, also resulting in somewhat lack of differentiation among them. It seems like they were unable, or afraid of, to manage the contradictions or declining processes all cities face in one way or another. Obviously the city brand should highlight strengths and mark an ambition, but not absolutely everything has to be painted in gold. It leads to lack of credibility.

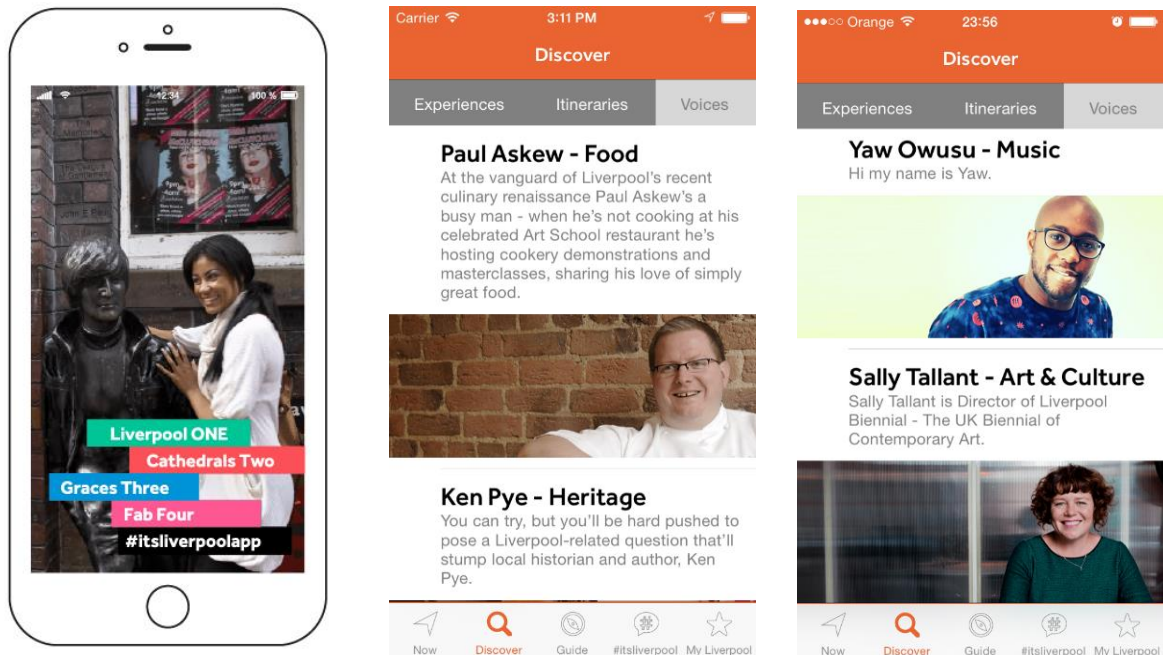
We would suggest to balance a top-down, creative agency-driven style of messaging and imagery with more crowdsourced storytelling, in order to keep a flow of fresh stories and enhance authenticity, even paying the cost of a bit less of overall coherence

In this sense, we would suggest to balance a top-down, creative agency-driven style of messaging and imagery with more crowdsourced storytelling, in order to keep a flow of fresh and updated stories and enhance authenticity, even paying the cost of a bit less of overall coherence. Marketing Liverpool is in line with this, as some of its recent activity shows:

- Energies and considerable resources are now devoted to social media platforms to keep the brand alive. In mid-2015, it's Liverpool had 32,000 followers on Twitter and 12,000 on Facebook. The website had registered 15,000 email sign-ups. Maybe those are not large figures compared to other cities, but a significant part of that community is quite active and enthusiast.
- To a large extent, the it's Liverpool app, which has been launched in 2015, is based on crowdsourced contents. The app allows visitors to upload their own experiences in the city and invites locals to share their own tips. Moreover, it has 16 funny, thought-provoking and personal films from real Liverpool people.

Liverpool brand content is pretty well balanced between messaging (which gives narrative power) and imagery (which provides symbolic power). Photography has actually massive importance for the city brand team in Liverpool, what is distinctive and undoubtedly a smart

choice. Some point out 70% of the textual material supporting a city branding strategy today lays upon the same arguments, e.g. knowledge, creativity, sustainability, competitive clusters..., and in that context visual aspects can make a difference.



Liverpudlians at the core. "Voices" section from the new it's Liverpool App: funny and personal films from real Liverpool people

Regarding this, the current strategy is to go beyond overused city's imagery related to the déjà vu triad of Football-Music-Waterfront, and trying to also tell different and unique stories throughout moments of surprise, delight or excitement. People are at the core in the way Liverpool introduces itself, but the other pieces of an urban semiology like cityscapes, architecture... are also used accordingly.

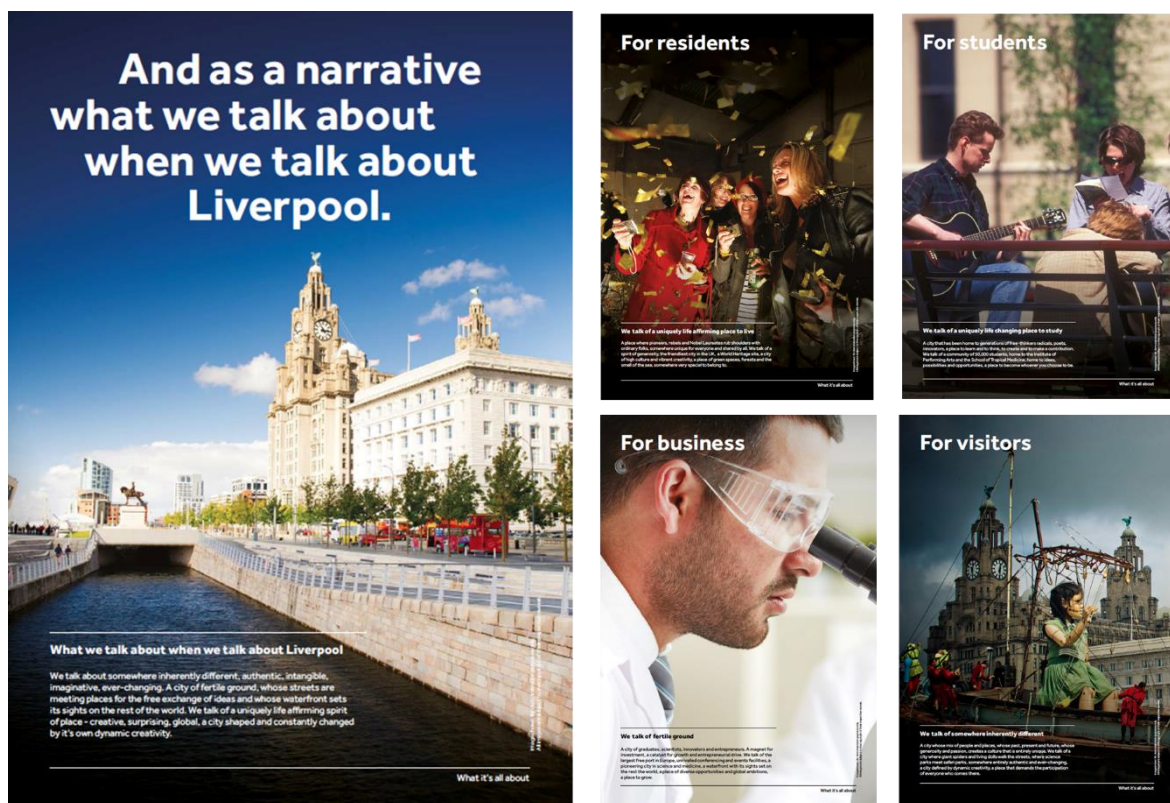
Perhaps, in the future, Liverpool's imagery might be sourced giving more room to other means besides photography, like stunning info-graphics for instance. The connection with the urban planning department in the City Council or the creative-digital sector can be fertile grounds for new ideas to representing the city.

Photography has massive importance in Liverpool's brand toolkit. Current strategy is to go beyond overused imagery of football, music and waterfront, trying to tell different and unique stories such as moments of surprise, delight or excitement

Segmentation

One of the most remarkable achievements of the it's Liverpool strategy is to consider the local population as main target group, at least as important as visitors and businesses. Even more, citizenship (ordinary people, not only local VIPs) are truly approached from a double perspective, as target and stakeholder. As said before, people from Liverpool are at the core of the city narrative and imagery which are promoted by the city brand team.

Having said that, Liverpool' segmentation of its real and potential audiences is very clear, albeit a bit conventional on its formulation – the predictable Visitors, Residents, Business, Students ⁵.



For each of them, a logical framework has been designed to help with the production of coherent messages. It consists of an overarching value/concept (e.g. "Inherently different" for visitors, "Fertile ground" for business) and a number of associated proof points such as quotes and testimonials, stats and facts... stories. Those target groups are also

⁵ Business is in turn addressed under a more precise, cluster-based segmentation, namely: advanced manufacturing, creative & digital, financial & professional, life science & health, low carbon, superport (logistics linked to the port) and visitor economy.

characterized in terms of persona, as ideal profiles aimed to put face to Liverpool's desired audiences and better understand their trajectories and motivations.

In a future, perhaps one would expect a more unconventional way of clustering the city's stories into big themes or segments. For instance Urban Innovation, Lifestyle (this could embrace culture, heritage, urban life...), Knowledge (how Liverpool is contributing to major global challenges), etc.

Target groups are characterized in terms of persona, as ideal profiles aimed to put face to Liverpool's desired audiences and better understand their trajectories and motivations

Governance and stakeholder involvement

Marketing Liverpool was established in 2013 as a division of Liverpool Vision – a wholly owned and funded subsidiary of Liverpool City Council in charge of economic development. The division was born to manage the city's Liverpool brand and strategy, as well as marketing the city as destination and business location. Therefore, the level of integration and synergies in terms of narrative and communications between both sector-oriented city marketing practices is very high. Marketing Liverpool has now 18 full time staff, which is modest manpower indeed compared to other DMOs in the UK.

In terms of top decision making, Liverpool Vision is governed by a Board of only two directors, the Mayor and the Councillor in charge of regeneration and transport, albeit it is supported by a small advisory group of Councillors, a representative of the private sector and Chief Executives of the Council and Liverpool Vision. So, properly speaking, as it is now, Marketing Liverpool is not a brand platform, in the sense of bringing together a number of key local stakeholders under some kind of co-decision making model.

Instead, there is fluid dialogue with the most relevant stakeholders in the city: Liverpool One (shopping, residential and leisure complex), ACC Liverpool (Arena & Convention Centre Liverpool), Liverpool Waterfront, Merseytravel (the agency responsible for the coordination of public transport in the Liverpool City Region), Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership, Tate Liverpool, University of Liverpool, John Moores University, Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool John Lennon airport, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, Liverpool Football Club, Everton Football Club, etc.

There is therefore room to improve in terms of alignment with the entities that are marketing the city to their respective audiences. The Marketing Liverpool team is perfectly aware of this, and one to one meetings have been carried out with a small group of key stakeholders — so as to understand how it's Liverpool could work for them. According to Peter Smith, from Marketing Liverpool, for those stakeholders the city brand value can be summed up in four aspects:

- Access to a suite of communication assets;
- Connection to a network of partners in the city;
- Use of it's Liverpool brand as an endorsement;

- Promotion of the partner's own brand through it's Liverpool range of channels, e.g. website, social media platforms;
- Be a part of coordinated city wide campaigns.

Concretely, Marketing Liverpool has a concise toolkit available for partners and future partners, including image library, film, PowerPoint deck, map artwork, stats and facts, merchandise and promo items available for co-branding. That's an important step. Even so, when improving the relationship with partners and local stakeholders, the key issue is not just usability of a specific brand toolkit but engagement.

At this point, Marketing Liverpool/Liverpool Vision is making a significant work in project-based engagement, where they can be organizers and facilitators but not necessarily the main player. For instance, organizing abroad side business agendas which capitalize cultural and sport events such as the Liverpool Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's trip to China, Liverpool FC pre-season tours or the Beatles' 50th anniversary of their first concerts in the US. Moreover, city-wide campaign activities are being organized through a specific mix of partners, where an agreed theme or event leads to a campaign idea, with the following structure: it's Liverpool coordinate the campaign, creating the campaign toolkit and rolling out core campaign collateral, while partners roll out individual collateral using the campaign toolkit. The "it's going to be big" campaign is an example of this type of coordination, based on the agreed idea around the joint promotion of a summer full of big events. For this 2014 campaign, Marketing Liverpool teamed up with Liverpool One, National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool Biennial and the International Festival for Business.

Anyhow, most of the challenges Marketing Liverpool is raising up for the near future are related to governance and management: ⁶

- Partner buy-in. In Marketing Liverpool they say "place branding can never be the responsibility of one organisation, and that their aim is to develop and provide a strategic platform for all organisations in the city that are promoting Liverpool". A platform of that kind means co-decision making model and that's the challenge the city has to face seriously. A better institutionalization of the existing flexible and informal collaborative model would

Two main lanes on the Liverpool's road to excellence. One is about strengthening the existing flexible and informal collaborative model with all the relevant stakeholders, in the sense of a better institutionalized model of co-decision making

⁶ Considering the very good job on rebranding and repositioning the city made in that last years, we would refer to that improvement process in the years to come as the search of excellence. To our view two main lanes might be addressed on that road to excellence: i) strengthening the collaborative model with all the relevant stakeholders in the sense of a better institutionalized model of co-decision making; ii) promoting and organizing user-generated city brand content, which in fact is a technological challenge, as a way to deliver a more authentic and credible city narrative.

be a big step in that direction. In fact, Marketing Liverpool, which is actually a nascent structure, is in the process of establishing a steering group made up of senior marketers representing different sectors – culture, educational, business, community.

- Funding. As a matter of fact, Marketing Liverpool is already on the way to a new funding scheme, project-based, with the concurrence of key stakeholders - see below the city's attendance to MIPIM or the aforementioned "It's going to be big" campaign. Anyway, this is related to the point from above, since co-management or co-decision making also means somewhat financial co-responsibility. At this point the concept of shared value could strategically reinforce Marketing Liverpool's relationship with its partners.
- Skills, especially in content marketing. It's about the capability to tell good stories about the city for a variety of environs and communication channels – transmedia storytelling. However, it is worth to mention the real challenge for a city brand team is not to directly produce all the stories, like in the newsroom, but ensure a continuous flow of stories to curate from a network of partners and spontaneous contributors in the city.
- The need to measure the impact of city branding & marketing activities in terms of final results. It would require substantial modelling work to establish consistent cause-effect relationship regarding policies and concrete measures on city attractiveness, city branding and city marketing. Pooling with other European cities to get EU funding would be the smartest way to address that first R&D stage.

The real challenge for a city brand team is not to directly produce all the stories, like in the newsroom, but ensure a continuous flow of stories to curate from a network of partners and spontaneous contributors in the city

As in many other cities in Europe, Universities illustrate the collaboration potential still to be exploited in the field of city branding & marketing. In this respect, the University of Liverpool makes a significant use of the city as differentiation factor, putting forward a series of features when talking about Liverpool:

- Large student community, as Liverpool hosts 4 higher-education institutions.
- Cost of living, as Liverpool is rather affordable compared to other competitor cities.
- Culture as key point of differentiation: wide offer of music and sport events, and "more art galleries and museums than any other UK city outside London".

Making use of his own monitoring data, University of Liverpool Head of Communications Matt Smith demonstrated at the AT.Brand workshop in La Rochelle how the city image is a crucial factor in University's attractiveness. Out of a list of 13 main factors influencing the decision of which University to study, the city itself is one of the top three, along with course content and University reputation. In the case of Liverpool it is furthermore a matter of

concern, since the city is the number one reason to decline the University of Liverpool offer (“not my preferred city”) – this reason influenced 60% of the total decliners. In other words, to some extent, the city is penalizing a world-class University with strong reputation in Medicine, Physics and other specialties that has given 9 Nobel Laureates so far. In a city with four HEIs which account 50,000 students (30,000 in the University of Liverpool), this issue demands a stronger response from the field of city branding.



Politics of city representation: Liverpudlians at the core. New photo series supporting key messages.

Although University of Liverpool’s communications include it’s Liverpool brand material and links to its communication platform, there is room to more alignment in terms of sharing resources, initiatives and timelines. There is still work to do at the University level to harnessing the advocacy of the student community, which is a huge network. The University currently maintains contacts with its alumni, particularly as part of philanthropy and fund-raising activities. Nevertheless, more can be done to engage them as city brand ambassadors. A first step is that the Alumni office will be integrated into the University’s marketing office.

Moreover, there is a high interest in capturing the feel and expressions of how students live and enjoy the Liverpool experience today, especially throughout the exploitation of social

media, in order to use that perspective to enrich the city brand content. In this respect, what the Danish city of Aarhus and Aarhus University are doing is a good example ⁷.

At the time of attracting and welcoming students, Aarhus University manages the student recruiting concept Yourniversity <http://yourniversity.au.dk/>. It is a user-generated content platform across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Vine to provide potential students a real look at life as a student at Aarhus University. User-generated stories and images are then used in student guidance material and in campaign material such as print, billboards and digital ads. Almost 10,000 pictures, movie clips and tweets have been shared on Instagram and Twitter by more than 1,000 students.

There is still work to do at University level to harnessing the advocacy of the student community, which is a huge network

On the other hand, the Youth Goodwill Ambassador Corps of Denmark <http://ygadenmark.org> is a reference on how to turn foreign students into a delivery force of the city & country brand. It shows that with a little help and duly coached, student ambassadors can create a remarkable PR. The programme is run by an innovative partnership led by the main Universities in the country (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg and Technical University of Denmark) and it's a unique experience of large-scale University engagement in place branding. Actually, programme's mission is not only rising awareness on Denmark's strengths worldwide, but also providing soft landing to international students seeking to study in Denmark and developing a platform for career opportunities.

Dealing with geographical scale: the challenge of multi-level governance

Managing geographical scale properly, and accordingly multi-level governance, should be prioritized to some extent when branding and marketing Liverpool.

The main issue is getting effective coordination at city region level, and in this respect there is no other way rather than just scaling city branding up to the city region level. And doing that without resting appealingness to the city storytelling and without increasing complexity to the city brand management model. That's the way Liverpool's direct competitors like Manchester and Birmingham are already working on.

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Liverpool City Region <http://www.liverpoollep.org> is an organization established in 2012 by UK government with the mission to undertake a comprehensive economic development agenda, also including place branding & marketing issues, for an area comprising 1.5 million inhabitants. The LEP introduces itself as the agency for inward investment and "the official Tourist Board or Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for Liverpool City Region". Fortunately, from July 2015 the LEP has commissioned Marketing Liverpool to deliver destination marketing for the whole city region

⁷ With 50,000 students, the Aarhus University usually ranks among the top 100 best Universities in the World.

as well as to manage the visitor economy membership scheme. However, they keep their own digital showroom of the city region as destination <http://www.visitliverpool.biz/>, besides Marketing Liverpool's, which is confusing. We guess there is room to improve in the crucial smooth articulation between Liverpool Vision and the LEP.

The potential of a Manchester-Liverpool alliance is something that deserves further exploration, maybe through a dedicated joint task force⁸. Besides a seaport, Manchester has to gain in terms of global image, since Liverpool is quite well renowned internationally, while Liverpool could dramatically reinforce its assets related to connectivity presenting widely the Manchester airport⁹, the existing Virgin trains serving the West Midlands or the future high speed two (HS2) railway Manchester-London as part of its own local ecosystem¹⁰.

Managing geographical scale properly, and accordingly multi-level governance should be prioritized to some extent when branding and marketing Liverpool

Events as levers to expand core city values

Liverpool's mix of communications serving its brand strategy and overall marketing basically includes website <http://www.itsliverpool.com/>, digital newsletter, high quality print magazine issued twice a year, Twitter and Facebook as social media networks, App, city dressing actions and eventually campaigns and missions abroad. But, above all, the events have been the cornerstone of Liverpool's communications for years.

According to Sue Finnegan, Visitor Economy & Commercial Manager at Liverpool Vision, the motivation for them when promoting or supporting events goes far beyond their intrinsic cultural value or even the benefits for the visitor economy. It is also about:

- To support regeneration;
- To position and promote Liverpool on a local, national and international stage;

⁸ In MIPIM-Cannes both cities already share some PR events.

⁹ Manchester offers many more international flights than Liverpool John Lennon airport, including the US and the Gulf.

¹⁰ Furthermore, maybe the existing Core Cities Group, which today is too focused on the question of financial devolution, could prospect the field of co-branding as a way to counterbalance London's massive attractiveness and influence. The Core Cities represent the councils of England's eight largest city economies outside London (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield), along with Glasgow and Cardiff which reached the group in 2014. <http://www.corecities.com/>

As regards the issue of multi-level governance, we have presumed, correctly or incorrectly, the articulation to nation branding & marketing initiatives, namely the alignment with Visit England and UKTI, the UK Government's Investment Agency, is not a gap or a matter of special concern.

- To attract inward investment and new business;
- To make Liverpool a great place to live, work and invest;
- To promote the wider city offer

This multi-purpose view of the event, serving city-scale objectives, is certainly ground-breaking but it demands clear vision and strong cooperation between different departments and teams in the city. This is a big lesson from Liverpool ¹¹. As a matter of fact, the entity in charge of the cultural and event agenda, Culture Liverpool, represents a powerful instrument for branding Liverpool. They are frequent users of the city brand toolkit and work hand in hand with Marketing Liverpool ¹².

Liverpool try to make the most of its event agenda to reaffirm and disseminate its core city values - in Sue Finnegan's words "we focus on what makes us unique" ¹³. That's the case with music and music festivals.

There are more than 320 music events every week within the city centre, with over 1,150 musicians performing. The city has five main festivals – Africa Oye, Creamfields, Liverpool International Music Festival LIMF (first edition in 2013), International Beatle Week & Liverpool Sound City – and the home of a number of key music engagement and development organisations, including the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, Merseyside Youth Association and the Resonate Music Education Hub (formerly known as Liverpool Music Support Service).

In addition to generic festival marketing techniques, such as engagement with core tastemakers and audiences via advertising and the use of emblematic city buildings and gateway signs to promote the event, LIMF and other key events related to music have benefited from it's Liverpool branding resources and platforms.

Liverpool try to make the most of its event agenda to reaffirm and disseminate its core city values - "we focus on what makes us unique". That's the case with music and music festivals

¹¹ At the AT.Brand workshop in San Sebastian, VisitOslo CEO Bente Bratland gave clear evidence on the impact of big/singular events over the visitor economy, in terms of overnights and turnover. According to her, events should keep a significant role within the mix of conscious communications and symbolic actions serving a strategy on city branding & marketing, which has a special value coming from a practitioner so innovative like Bente.

¹² Culture Liverpool's areas of activity are the following: programming of major cultural events; cultural infrastructure, development and community participation – for instance, through the funding of around 50 cultural organisations; management of the Liverpool cruise terminal; Liverpool Film Office; commercial sponsorship and income generation, offering private partners the access to key consumer audiences and to B2B opportunities; visitor economy, via the management of Tourist Information Centres and of visits to Civic Halls, including Liverpool Town Hall and St George's Hall. <http://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk>

¹³ In addition, events can also be expanded in a way to promote new city values. It is what Culture Liverpool calls "transformational events".



The UK's definitive music city. Leveraging big events upon core city values.

Going to MIPIM: a case of public/private collaboration

Attendance to real estate shows, like MIPIM-Cannes, is also an all-time formula which has been deeply reformulated in Liverpool, in the same way than other cities like Manchester. Now, the role of the City and its Marketing Agency is to provide organisational support to wider city delegation, whose overall cost is distributed among all the participants, mainly private and commercial entities such as real estate developers. The mission is only feasible in case of a critical mass of partner entities.

For the 2014 and 2015 editions, Marketing Liverpool achieved a budget of £125,000 approximately, while different packages for private sector participation were arranged, e.g. Associate £7,000, Partner £12,000 and Sponsor at a minimum cost of £20,000¹⁴. 14 private firms participated at the Liverpool stand and agenda in MIPIM 2014 under this framework.

¹⁴ Those packages of participation included the following: Associate (£7,000), Logo on Liverpool stand, Half page in Liverpool brochure, 1 x ticket IFB 2014 dinner, 1 x ticket for a Manchester / Liverpool breakfast, 1 x ticket Core Cities event, 1 x delegate pass; Partner (£12,000), Logo on Liverpool stand, Page in Liverpool brochure, 2 x ticket IFB 2014 dinner, 2 x ticket for a Manchester / Liverpool breakfast, 1 x ticket Core Cities event, 2 x delegate passes; and Sponsor (minimum investment £20,000), Headline logo on Liverpool stand, Referenced "in association with" on all communications, 2 pages in Liverpool brochure, 2 x ticket for a Manchester / Liverpool breakfast, 1 x ticket Core Cities event, 4 x tickets Wednesday evening event, Logo opportunity at IFB 2014 dinner, 3 x delegate passes

Even the steering group which led the Liverpool attendance to the show was private sector oriented and consisted of Deloitte, Bruntwood, Brabners, Peel Holdings and Marketing Liverpool.



It's Liverpool stand at MIPIM 2014

Local voices for the It's app

It's Liverpool app is the latest innovative development of the brand Liverpool in terms of communication tools. Funded by the AT.Brand project, it has been progressively launched from beginning of 2015 and it is now available for iPhone and Android. What makes this app different is that it makes room for "voices". That is, local people talking about their favourite places in the city. As Katie Crozier says "the ambition was to design a reflection of the city personality, not only the shopping list and not only for visitors, but also for the brand's other target audiences".

Besides conventional features of the apps on place destinations, the it's app allows users to store their favourite sites in "My Liverpool" section, and through the #itsliverpool hashtag, the mobile application is also connected to the brand communications on social media – Twitter and Facebook.

The launch of the app has been supported by marketing and promotion activities, in collaboration

With the it's Liverpool app, the ambition was to encourage a reflection on the city's personality, not only the shopping list, and not only for visitors, but also to other target audiences

Katie Crozier, Marketing Liverpool

with the city brand stakeholders. Marketing Liverpool have held over 30 meetings with potential partner organisations. Promotional materials are displayed in hotels, tourist information centres, key attractions and airport and train stations. Further crowdsourcing to contribute to the dynamic contents of the app is now Marketing Liverpool's top priority regarding this communication tool.

Print is not defunct. It's magazine

Good quality printed materials, carefully distributed, combining business, culture and lifestyle, can be sometimes the best media to market the city. With everyone getting so much information through their inbox, an "alternative approach" might make a difference. "It's" is a quality magazine that is issued twice a year by Marketing Liverpool, with the following objectives:

- To communicate Liverpool's economic renaissance over the last 10 years and ongoing positive trends, with a realistic tone - "no overriding propaganda".
- To target senior executives - CEO, Board members. Only 3,000 copies are printed for each issue.
- To generate commercial revenue.

50% of the copies are distributed nationally, especially in the London area, 25% at local and global levels each. According to Marketing Liverpool, each issue involves a budget of 5,500€ on printing, 4,000€ on content creation and 1,400€ on distribution.



Liverpudlians at the front row. It's magazine, issued twice a year by Marketing Liverpool

City dressing actions

As far as the brand activation challenge is concerned, Marketing Liverpool has made extensive use of outdoor billboards in its own city. This makes full sense, even it is highly advisable, when furnishing selected urban facilities and especially the main entrance gates to the city, like airport terminals and railway central stations. However, city brand advertising on the streets and open public spaces should be more carefully assessed, as it could rise some controversy. For some it is like the City itself fueling the visual blitz we daily suffer from publicity.

Certainly there is very little choice in the publicity arena. But cities and places do not have to strictly use the same communication channels than commercial brands. In not a few cases it is a waste of (public) money, given the great difficulty of gaining that 2% of brain attention¹⁵, especially when not everyone can manage big budgets for campaigns. That is, cities and places have not to share necessarily the same publicity space than commercial brands, e.g. outdoor billboards, TV spots. To capture the attention of its audiences, including its own residents, there are channels where the city story can be told without competing so hardly with commercial brands. We even would advise to avoid as far as possible publicity spaces massively used by commercial brands.

Much more interesting than conventional street advertising is Liverpool's city branding team's current interest for physical branding. That is, to translate into tangible devices or urban installations concepts and ideas that are connected to the city brand's values. In this respect, instead of simply following the fashionable idea of installing street giant city logos, as it was initiated by Amsterdam and then rapidly imitated, Liverpool has produced a more interesting artifact which melt urban furniture design and the concept of urban parklet¹⁶. Definitely, this could be an interesting path to explore.

To Peter Smith, Head of Marketing at Marketing Liverpool, a program of this kind could crowdsource the best ideas for urban parklets, or for any other physical concept, and match them with local creatives (designers, visual artists, architects) and pub and coffee shop owners. It's about to turn user-generated content from the social/digital space into

Instead of simply following the fashionable idea of installing street giant city logos, as it was initiated by Amsterdam and then rapidly imitated, Liverpool has produced a more interesting artefact which melt urban furniture design and the concept of urban parklet

¹⁵ It's the statistical chance for an ad to be noticed. Marketers use to say we are exposed to an average of 4,000 advertising messages daily and that our brain is designed to protect us against that information overload by filtering out more than 98% of those messages.

¹⁶ Originally from San Francisco and now a grassroots movement spread all over the USA, the parklet is a sidewalk extension that provides more space and amenities for people using the street. They are installed on parking lanes, using several parking spaces, and local designers and artists used to provide original layouts and designs. See www.thebolditalic.com/abbywilcox/stories/1585-parks-and-recreation

urban/physical space. Social media as the curator for spaces that people use and value.



Materializing it's Liverpool. Interesting device melting urban furniture design and the concept of urban parklet

“Let the city speak for itself”: user-generated content as Liverpool’s new frontier

At present, It's Liverpool website is updated daily with original and curated content that is faithful to the brand values. The new app has been another step trying to take full advantage of technologies and solutions related to social media, web 2.0 and user-driven content, in order to enhance the “conversation” with target audiences, citizens and the range of partners of the Liverpool brand.

Regarding social media, Marketing Liverpool is focusing its effort on Twitter and Facebook. They are afraid to spread resources too thinly and have decided to sacrifice additional platforms, and concentrate on “creating a movement of followers who are enthusiastic (even evangelical) about the brand and city”, which makes sense. Anyhow, in this point, we would

recommend to consider Instagram as well. Because of its focus on photography, which is easier to curate, and the community of Instagrammers, who are much more engaged than the other social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Google+.

Moreover, some of the city's key stakeholders are already making extensive use of the social media for their own activity. Liverpool airport's community of followers in social media currently amounts to 50,000, and it is an asset for the airport's relationship with the airlines.



Welcome at the Liverpool John Lennon airport

Making the most of the local crowd is definitively the new frontier in city branding, for two reasons. Because it increases authenticity, since it's more credible when third parties also talk about the city than just "official storytelling" delivered by dedicated agencies and teams. We mean spontaneous talks, not only testimonials within official promotional materials. And secondly because these crowdsourced tools, suitably curated, can be a solution to keep updated and fresh the series of city stories on a permanent basis.

The channel to activate and curate a pro-active community with potential to produce communication-oriented content about the city is by now social media platforms. But in the years to come, most innovative cities will develop their own, personalized platforms for user-generated content. Being a pioneer in fully addressing this challenge will make a difference in terms of visibility, positioning and attractiveness.

Promoting and organizing user-generated city brand content, as a way to deliver more authentic city narrative, which is a technological challenge indeed

That's a fertile ground and it is expected an advanced practitioner like Liverpool moves in that direction.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, "let the city speak for itself" is like an unofficial statement from Liverpool's city branding team and it shows one of the priorities for the next years. However, the challenge is really big, and taking full advantage of all the disruptions and benefits associated to the digital driver, social media and user-generated contents will demand significant organizational changes. In short, getting out of the comfort zone and adopting a visionary approach. The existence of Digital Agendas at local level can be helpful as facilitating framework.

¹⁷ In this respect VisitOslo, the Norwegian capital's DMO, has now included three new KPIs: engagement from its own followers in social media, content created by others and exposure of its own content.

AT.Brand is a partnership of six cities – Dublin, Cardiff, Faro, La Rochelle, Liverpool and San Sebastian- plus the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, working on three areas: i) a cross-learning process 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.

AT.Brand: reviewing practices in city branding | pillar on cross-learning

Model on innovative city
brand management

State of play reports

International workshops

