

Utrecht

City of knowledge and culture



AN OUTSTANDING POSITIONING IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

Utrecht is the fourth largest city in the Netherlands, with a population of more than 300,000, and still growing. Utrecht's central location in the country, as one the angles of the Randstad (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague), and high accessibility (30 minutes away from Schiphol airport) makes it an attractive place to live and a top location for business. According to the current city narrative, Utrecht enjoys a range of distinguished features:

- A bustling city, with a very diverse cultural life. Events and festivals are held weekly, such as the popular Cultural Sundays. Culture lovers can get their fill at the municipal theatre, Vredenburg Music Centre and at the numerous museums.
- A rich history. The city gets its charm from the unique medieval city centre and its canals and canal-side cellars, old churches and of course the Dom Cathedral.
- A centre of knowledge. The University of Utrecht is the largest in the Netherlands. The city is home to 65,000 students of higher education, giving it a relatively young population and the most highly educated work force in the country. Utrecht is a well developed knowledge-based economy and life sciences is one of the most prominent clusters in the city.
- A creative city, with the largest proportion of creative professionals in the Netherlands. The creative industries and more specifically the game industry is also one of the key business clusters in the city.
- Continuous evolvement of the urban fabric. The immediate area around Utrecht Central Station is undergoing extensive renovations. Utrecht will create a larger, livelier city centre with links to the surrounding districts. Utrecht is also building the largest new development in the Netherlands: "Leidsche Rijn". Around 30,000 dwellings will be built here to house around 80,000 people. It is expected that around 40,000 people will find employment in Leidsche Rijn.
- At the forefront of public governance. As in the whole country, Utrecht displays an innovative style in public governance, with an evident bet for social innovation and flexible but effective collaboration with local stakeholders.

These excellent conditions and quality developments have gained international recognition over the last years. In the EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2010, Utrecht scored high in a variety of aspects, such as infrastructure, health, higher education, labour market, innovation and productivity. More recently, the Utrecht region received several distinctions during the "FDI Awards 2012" for its position in the European top 10 on quality of living, human resources, economic potential, business friendliness or infrastructure. Form this positioning of excellence, a main motivation of a medium-sized agglomeration like Utrecht as far as branding is concerned, is to further increase their visibility

and attractiveness at international level, within the EU but especially beyond, in particular by taking the most of multi-level governance, cities alliance and networking and digital media as channel.

CITY-BRANDING IN THE LAST YEARS

From 2008 onwards there was the emergence of a political wish to further intensify integrated city promotion. The ambition was to profile Utrecht as a city with an attractive and competitive environment to live, work, study, visit and invest, in order to maintain and strengthen the amount of jobs and city facilities. During this period, there was a **shift from city promotion to city branding**, based on an identity mainly defined by the local authority: Utrecht as a **City of Knowledge and Culture**. This shift was sustained by the installation of a special office (Promotion and Brand Management) and the launching in January 2010 of the city's **logo and visual identity**, supported by a promotion campaign (with the corresponding **web-based brand toolkit** for potential users).

UTRECHT

After the municipal elections in 2010, there were changes in the local political leadership and also in the city-branding policy. Coinciding with growing financial impacts of the economic crisis, the city promotion budget was reduced. Other aspects of this new perspective were to be found in the views on the responsibilities of the municipality and the potential role of other stakeholders at local level. All of this called for a **renewal of the city's approach on city branding and marketing**. One of the first steps towards this renewal consisted in the establishment in 2011 of the **Marketing Utrecht Taskforce**, in order to further the dialogue with marketers of the cultural and tourist sectors. It is worth mentioning the Festival Platform and the Utrecht Development Board as two other initiatives for greater stakeholder involvement. During these first years of experience in integrated branding, in addition to the design of the city's logo and visual identity, the municipality developed activities mainly focused on **events and tourism**.

Certainly, there has been a strong focus on **events as tool for city branding**. On the one hand, Utrecht actively sought visibility in high-range international events, such as Giro d'Italia 2010 or World Expo Shanghai 2010. This ambition of international visibility through flagship events is still on the public agenda; with currently a range of projects like the 300th anniversary in 2013 of the first European peace treaty (Utrecht's Treaty) or the candidature for the European Capital of Culture in 2018. On the other hand, a support scheme was set up for individual festival organizations to

improve their marketing and link it to city marketing. The programme was delivered by Utrecht Uitburo, the local agency responsible for cultural promotion and city dressing.

Secondly, the **enhancement of tourism** has also been an important focus of the municipality's policy on city branding, through its participation in several tourism-related projects in partnership with other Dutch cities and providing support to **Toerisme Utrecht**. This a private platform involving more than 100 private operators in the local visitor economy; they are very active in continuing attracting new private partners. In this sense, Toerisme Utrecht has a 5 million budget per year, 50% coming from income services and 1 million coming directly form the 50% of the tourist tax paid by visitors.



CITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE

The vision of “City of Knowledge and Culture” is to target, nationally and internationally, two different groups:

Visitors and inhabitants. Here there is a range of local organizations which intervene:

- Culture Foundation of Utrecht is responsible for the organization and programming culture festivals and events. It includes a ticket sales office. The Foundation also publishes an online culture magazine, www.sapsite.nl.
- The aforementioned Tourism Utrecht as the marketing and promotion organisation for visitors (leisure and business). It manages the Tourist Information Offices and the Utrecht Convention Bureau, and also runs promotion campaigns.

- Specific website for the promotion of Utrecht's 11 museums www.museautrecht.nl. The objective of the Utrecht Museums is to reach the amount of visitors to 1 million per year.
- The Peace Treaty of Utrecht 2013 initiative, which will promote many cultural activities.
- Application to the European Cultural Capital 2018. Utrecht is working on a bid book to be elected as the European Cultural Capital in 2018, www.utrecht2018.eu.
- Promotion activities by the Foundation for European Youth Olympic Festival 2013, a big event to take place in Utrecht.

Companies and investors. The city has 2 main on-going development areas, which will raise its position and profile: the Utrecht City Centre project and Utrecht Science Park. Regarding the former, the objective is to create a modern meeting place for shopping, leisure, offices, along with the biggest public transportation facility in the Netherlands. The Utrecht Science Park will generate an investment of 1 billion Euros within 10 years in new student houses, new hospitals, new university and business buildings. The municipality's economic affairs department promotes also economic niches / top sectors in the region, mainly life sciences, gaming and sustainability. In this specific field, there is also a range of stakeholders with marketing activities on their own:

- Utrecht Science Park.
- Invest Utrecht, the regional investment agency for international companies.
- Utrecht Investment Agency, the regional development agency for national companies.
- The Main real estate projects.
- All kind of commercial real estate brokers and councillors.

Concerning students as a target group, Utrecht's universities and knowledge institutions are very active in promoting themselves, in a context of fierce international competition. They also face the challenge for more cooperation with local companies.

RE-THINKING CITY BRANDING IN UTRECHT: MIND THE GAPS

This experience has made the city aware of many success and failure factors in city branding, which has also developed a certain expertise regarding the marketing and branding contents. At this time two challenges can be highlighted in the short term.

First, gap for improvement in more **effective engagement of local stakeholders (particularly in the knowledge-business side) and locals**. The marketing and promotion of "Knowledge" in Utrecht is hardly a common goal and set of activities yet. This is all the more problematical given the fragmentation of promotion organizations and activities in the city. For instance, Utrecht's

universities and science institutes have promotion strategies of their own. Most local companies do not recognize themselves in the municipality's brand, "City of Knowledge and Culture", as they may feel there are few tangible expressions of the motto. As far inhabitants as concerned, the low appropriation of the brand may stem from a lack of specific measures such as those related to city ambassadors. How to promote the use of city logo and visual identity by external partners, or influence their own city storytelling? Which models of management of the brand if there were to be a pooling of financial resources? These are two of the various questions at stake.

Second, there is also a consensus in the municipality on the necessity to, in the "City of Knowledge and Culture" perspective, **strengthen the connection** between both areas. Coordination of investments (of time and money) in city developments connected to knowledge and culture should be improved. Regarding the branding policy itself, a major step forward would consist on the definition of a long-term strategy and a well defined focus, which would certainly create favourable ground for the establishment of partnerships with stakeholders. In fact, Utrecht is in front of further sophistication for its branding policies: definition and selection of priority profiling opportunities, identification of specific objectives for the various target groups (residents, visitors, businesses, investors, students...). This is another task for which the dialogue with other relevant institutions and organizations is needed, and course the URBACT CityLogo experience on trans-national learning is expected to make a significant impact as well.

ENHANCING COLLABORATION: TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE INTEGRATED CITY BRANDING

The need to advance more quickly towards an integrated city branding policy as a common framework strategy and guidelines for all the municipal units and entities, and for other local stakeholders and private agents targeting specific groups, is the main challenge to be faced by the municipality of Utrecht at present time.

From 2008 until 2012, the municipality had a specific organization for city promotion activities. In total, 10 people working on 3 goals: Events, Tourism and City branding. A relative motive of dissatisfaction for the city council, as this organization was failing to produce the expected results. In addition, the national context of public spending cuts and a pending modification of the administrative organisation of the country have been very influential factors for a change. So, the municipality has started in 2012 with a new way of organizing city marketing functions within the city government and its relation with relevant stakeholders. The new model can be summed up as a **flexible coordination inside and outside the Municipality around city branding. The new model is essentially focused on coordination and to establish links and synergies.**

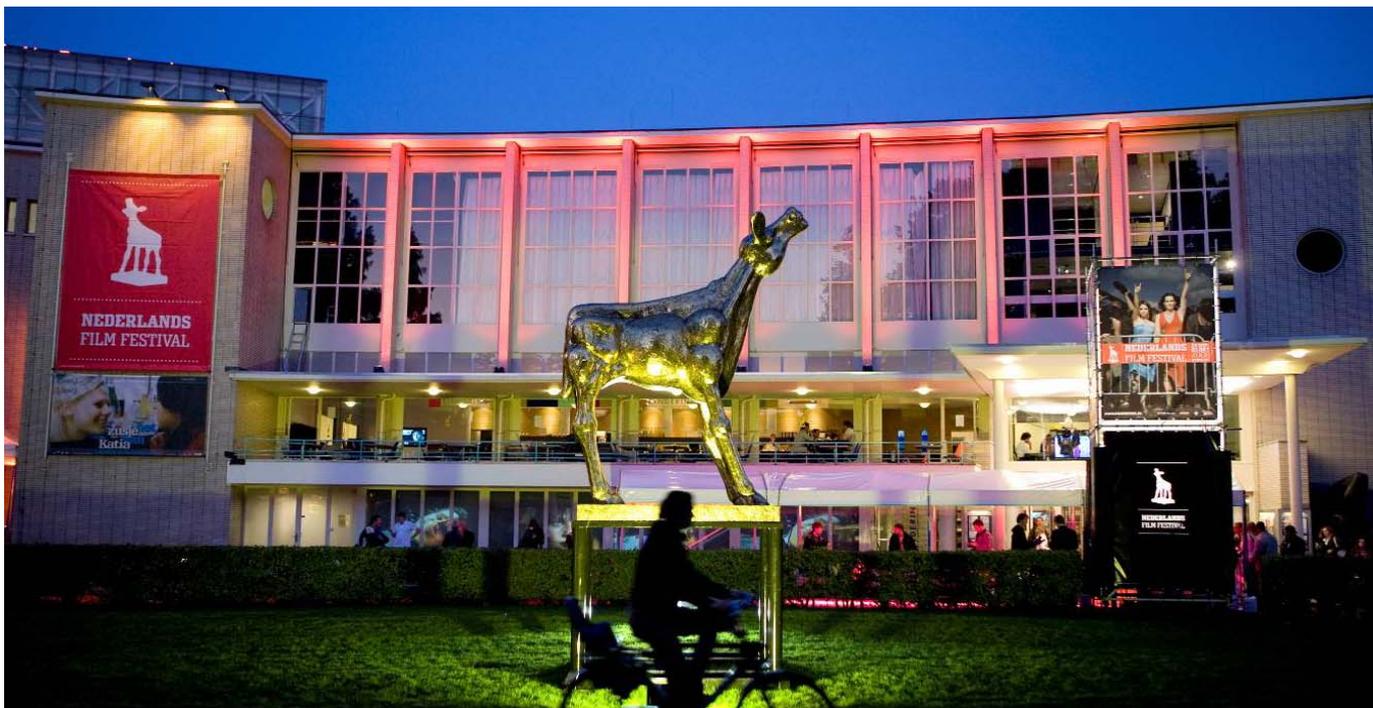
At political level (executive decision-making), the Vice-Mayor responsible for city marketing is also responsible for Economic Affairs, Finance, Environment and Sustainability. All of these issues have

relation to city marketing, and there is a clear objective to link long-term development strategies for the city (product) to the profiling strategy of the city (branding). The local government assumes that its key role is “to take care of the product” (quality of housing, public spaces, transports, education, etc).

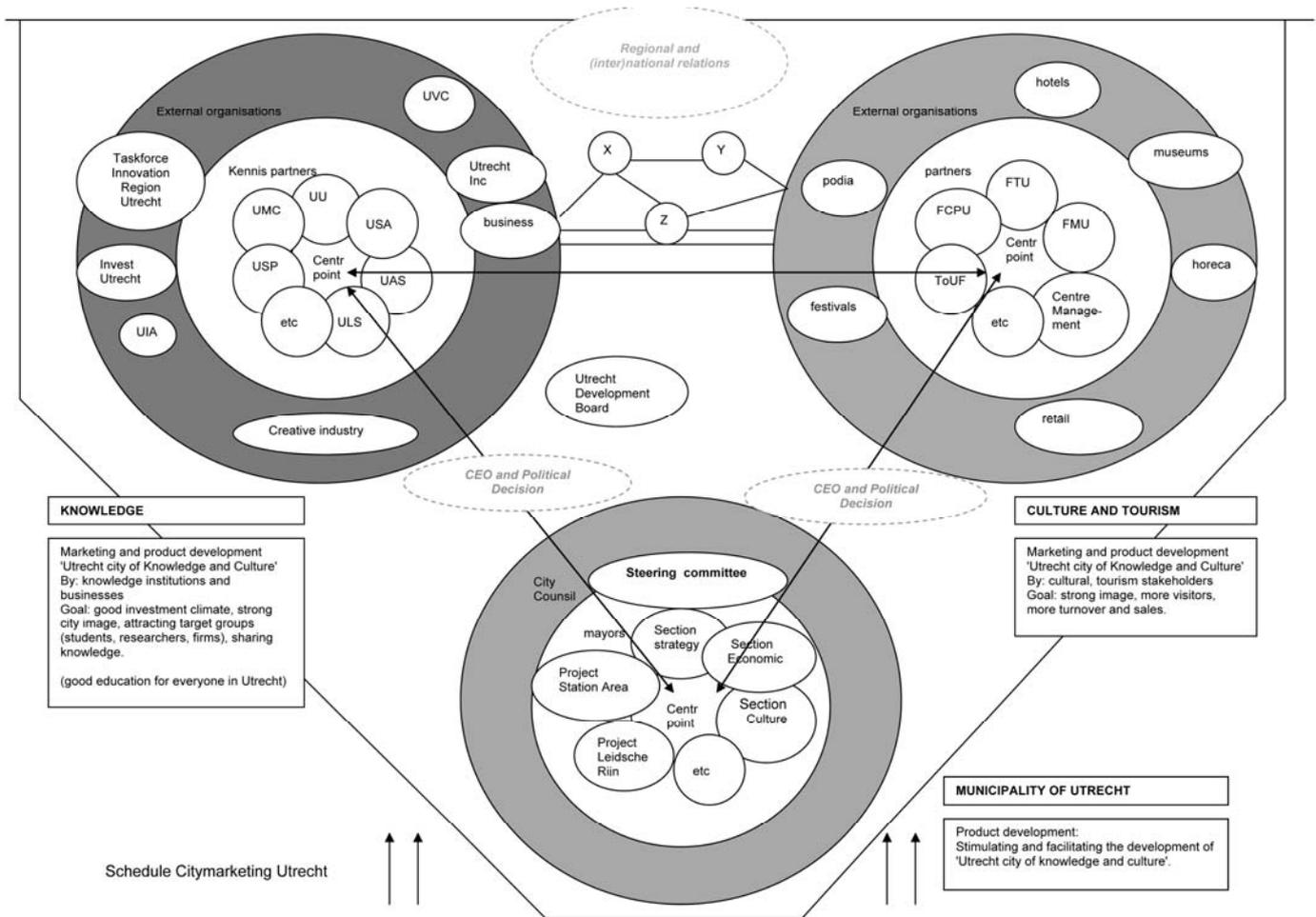
The event and tourism policies are now under the responsibility of the economic department, while **city branding staff** (which is now comprises of 3 officials) is concerned with coordinating and control activities (and not with concrete promotion campaigns anymore), as part as the branding strategy to be formulated by this specific unit. Another responsibility has to do with the promotion of connections between knowledge and culture, with a dedicated officer.

Internally, coordination processes within the Municipality are as follows:

- **Mayors Council on “Knowledge and Culture”**: meeting every two months between the Mayor and the relevant deputy mayors.
- **“Knowledge and Culture” Steering Group**: meeting every two months between the heads of departments involved (strategy, economic affairs, cultural affairs and international affairs) and the “knowledge and culture coordinator” (within the city branding staff).
- Internal branding network, which gathers every month the city agents concerned with the product and promotion aspects of city branding, for example investment marketing, the marketing of main development projects in the city, marketing of culture and sports, etc. Each of them maintains direct contact with the stakeholders in their sector.



Besides, the Municipality has designed a new model for a flexible but effective involvement of all stakeholders, public and private, with a stake in the city development, through networking groups, distinguishing between Knowledge and Culture & Tourism. The city model is shown in the figure below.



Abbreviations used in Knowledge:

- UU = University of Utrecht
- UAS = University of Applied Sciences
- USA = Utrecht School of the Arts
- UMC = University Medical Centre
- USP = Utrecht Science Park
- UVC = Utrecht Valorisation Centre
- Utrecht Inc
- ULS = Utrecht Life Sciences
- Taskforce Innovation Region Utrecht: UIA = Utrecht Investment Agency; IU = Invest Utrecht

Abbreviations used in Culture & Tourism:

- FCPU = Foundation for Cultural Promotion Utrecht
- FTU = Foundations for Tourism Utrecht
- FMU = Foundation Museumquarter Utrecht
- ToUF = Treaty of Utrecht Foundation

Smart and flexible cooperation in city branding: the Utrecht's model. Source: Municipality of Utrecht

It is also worth mentioning that there is a political will to open the participation to the previously created Taskforce Marketing Utrecht to marketers from knowledge/research institutions. The objective is that in the future the organizations collaborate in one marketing organization for Utrecht.

In alignment with this new model, the municipality endeavours to increase the use of **online communication tools**, basically for cost reasons, in particular social media and apps for smart phones, to disseminate branding core messages and interacting with potential targets. Currently, it uses its various websites (institutional, tourism, for all target groups, but there are also websites focused on specific projects, such as www.utrecht2018.eu. In addition, every city department works with some channels and tools for specific target groups, including digital newsletters.

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE IN HOLLAND CONCERNING CITY BRANDING

Since how to manage city promotion world wide is a main concern now in Utrecht, questions like multi-level governance and cities alliances are relevant questions for Utrecht at this time.

Utrecht is enrooted in a dense reality of active large cities within a small country, made famous in the world of governance by the "polder model". Applied to place-branding, this results in multi-level and multi-object kind of governance interacting with other main Dutch cities and with the regional (province) and national levels.

As far as tourism is concerned, the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) brands Holland as a travel destination (including business travellers). It is interesting to underline that the NBTC is not exclusively focused on international promotion. It created a specific brand for the domestic market. At this stage, the municipality of Utrecht collaborates with NBTC through the provision of information from the 'economic affairs' department and the Foundation for Tourism Utrecht.

In the field of cultural promotion, Utrecht is working together with other municipalities in the Utrecht province and with other cultural and tourism stakeholders on the two major flagship projects in the upcoming years: the celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht in 2013; and the candidature for the European Capital of Culture in 2018.

Concerning economic promotion a main actor is the Utrecht Investment Agency, an entity created as a common initiative between the city of Utrecht, the neighbouring city of Amersfoort and the province of Utrecht. The agency collaborates with the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency. As part of the so-called "Northern Wing" of the Netherlands, Utrecht is working on ways to deepen the collaboration with Amsterdam.

Also, Utrecht participates in the Netherlands City Marketing Network, an initiative aiming at knowledge exchange between the cities, but not at joint campaigns.

As a small country, but with a very well positioned nation-brand, The Netherlands' s branding strategy might be more anchored in what its core cities can offer to the world. Articulation with nation wide agents in the field of promotion is essential for middle-sized agglomerations like Utrecht, to increase opportunities and efficiency in targeting far located potential markets/groups like China, India and the rest of emerging economies in the World. The alliance with Amsterdam around the "Northern Wing" of the Randstad conurbation should also work in that way and may be fruitfully taken further.



APPROACHING AN URBACT LOCAL ACTION PLAN ON CITY BRANDING

Strenghts / contributions	Gaps / demands	main challenges / LAP
<p>Excellent positioning as knowledge and cultural hub. A powerful city narrative has been already produced.</p> <p>Cultural tradition in “smart and flexible collaboration” with stakeholders.</p> <p>Coordination inside the Municipality at both political (Mayors Council ‘Knowledge & Culture’) and technical level (Steering group ‘Knowledge & Culture’).</p> <p>Linking effectively events to integrated city branding.</p> <p>Private sector engagement in destination branding through Tourism Utrecht.</p> <p>Physical urban planning as content provider for city branding: physical-based city narrative.</p>	<p>Cuts in local public budget may diminish effectiveness in city branding in the short term, while transition to a new organizational model is in progress.</p> <p>Unbalanced integrated city branding: less developed for Utrecht as knowledge economy and business place.</p> <p>Still weak engagement of the University, with a potential key role in city branding to explore.</p> <p>Still low appropriation by local innovators and residents of the city-brand and city-brand initiatives.</p> <p>Branding as opportunity to socialize flagship projects and emerging dynamics.</p> <p>Need for concrete crossovers between both culture-tourism and knowledge-business sides of the city branding strategy.</p> <p>More room for networking and targeting segments outside the EU.</p>	<p>Consolidation of a new organizational model for city branding based on the idea of smart and flexible collaboration.</p> <p>Integrated city branding: how to connect knowledge and culture?</p> <p>How to translate “knowledge & culture” in practical proposals for companies and investors?</p> <p>Accurate segmentation and concrete choice of channels and initiatives for the coming years.</p>