

brand urbanism

POP
UP
CITY

BRAND
THE URBAN AGENCY

The city as mediachannel

A growing number of consumer brands are investing in the city, working together with cities to find a solution for urban issues. In a time of austerity, this 'brand urbanism' provides local governments with more possibilities in realising ambitious projects, while giving brands a one-off opportunity to tangibly show their involvement in and responsibility for the city. Proponents see brand urbanism as a new way of city-making, bringing added value to all parties involved. Criticasters, on the other hand, fear for the sell-out of our urban public spaces and a decrease in publicness. Either way, brand urbanism is a trend that is increasingly palpable in cities all over the world.

BRAND URBANISM =
A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND A BRAND IN WHICH A SPATIAL PROJECT IS REALISED
THAT IS (PARTLY) FINANCED AND/OR INITIATED
BY BRAND IN EXCHANGE FOR EXPOSURE.

Brand urbanism can be viewed as a new type of marketing tool. The wider public is becoming more and more critical of brands trying to ventilate their message in a traditional manner with TV commercials, billboards or online banners without trying to initiate actual interaction with them. Brands that want to make a difference, for their target groups as well as the wider world, are looking for more creative and subtle ways to get their message across. This also involves starting a conversation with citizens, for which the contemporary city is the perfect arena.

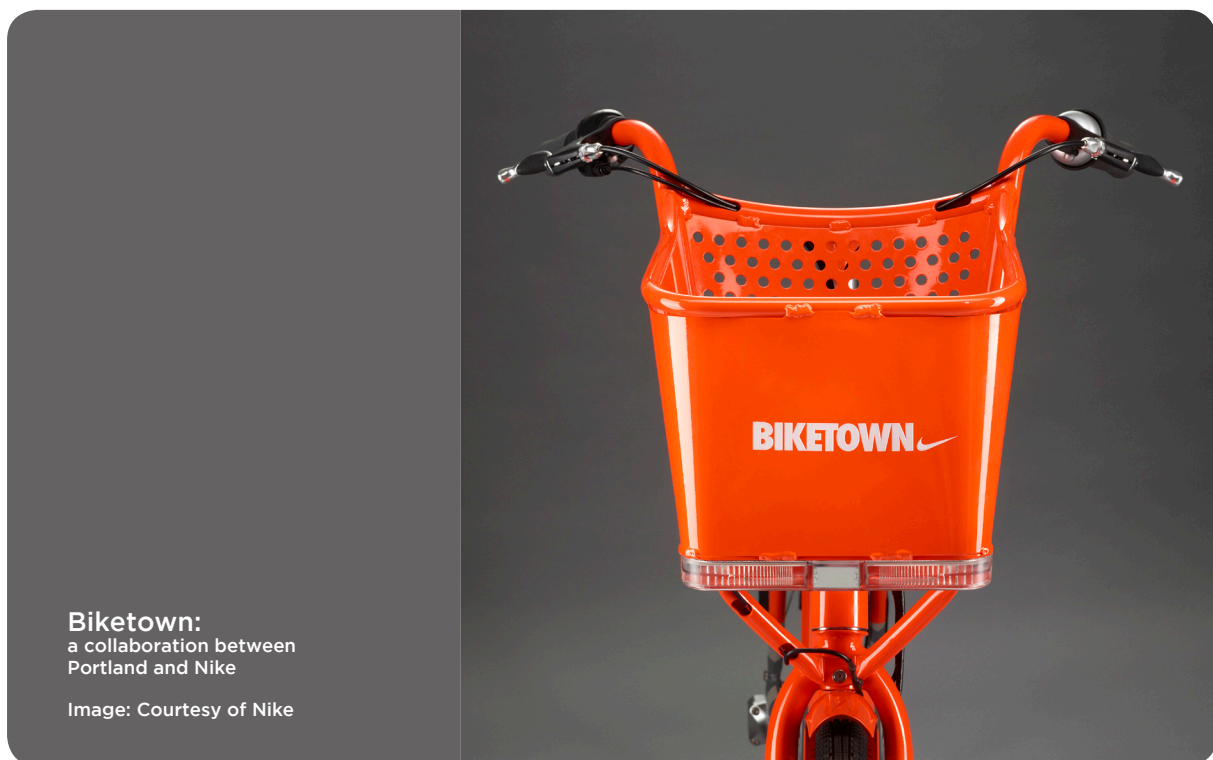
Our cities are our future

2007 was a remarkable year. That year, for the first time, more people lived in urban areas than they did in rural areas. This is a phenomenon that is only going to increase. In less than 20 years, 75% of the world's population will be living in cities. Add to that the fact that 90% of our prosperity is created in cities, and we can only conclude that the importance, as well as the power, of cities is ever increasing. Mayors of metropolitan cities are on their way of gaining prominence over prime-

ministers and in some cases, they already have. They are increasingly interested in new forms of collaboration and new types of public-private partnerships after all, their cities are international catalysts of innovation. Local governments having full control over their cities is a thing of a bygone era; local residents, communities and other stakeholders increasingly have and want a say in urban affairs. This trend has also led companies and brands to turn their attention to the city, as their stage, as their playground, and as their responsibility.

Win-win situation for local government and the private sector

Local governments consider brand urbanism a new source of funding and a way to realise grand ambitions, while large and small firms alike seize the opportunity to link their (brand) name to a substantial improvement in the urban environment. An example is Nike's collaboration with Portland: the involvement of Nike enabled the realisation of a bike-share scheme long wished for by local government. Moreover, successful brands are increasingly those brands that strike an emotional chord with their target groups and that somehow join up with their potential clientele's worldview and lifestyle. In this context, subtle and well-informed actions that add value for your target group and preferably a wider audience are in place.



As of yet, most successful brand urbanism cases are projects from abroad. Most projects involve an extensive process and big budgets but due to the novelty of the concept there is no clear-cut model for such partnerships. In every case, they are made to measure. Not every brand can invest in the city in a credible way, however. For a brand urbanism project to be successful, it needs to meet the following characteristics.

The 10 characteristics of brand urbanism

1. CREATING REAL AND VISIBLE VALUE FOR RESIDENTS
2. LARGE BUDGETS AND EVERY CITY HAS ITS OWN PRICE
3. THE PROJECT IS SUSTAINABLE, RUNNING OVER THE COURSE OF A FEW YEARS AND POSSIBLY PERMANENT
4. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND INTENSIVE COOPERATION
5. FREE PUBLICITY AND GOODWILL AS ROI
6. PART OF A BOTTOM-UP STRATEGY
7. SUCCESS DEPENDS ON SHARED CORE VALUES
8. THE RIGHT MOMENT IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS
9. BOTH BRAND AND CITY CAN TAKE THE INITIATIVE
10. IT'S ABOUT CONSUMER BRANDS RATHER THAN BRANDS WHOSE CORE BUSINESS IS THE CITY ITSELF

Source: *Merkstedenbouw, Pop Up City*

Commitment

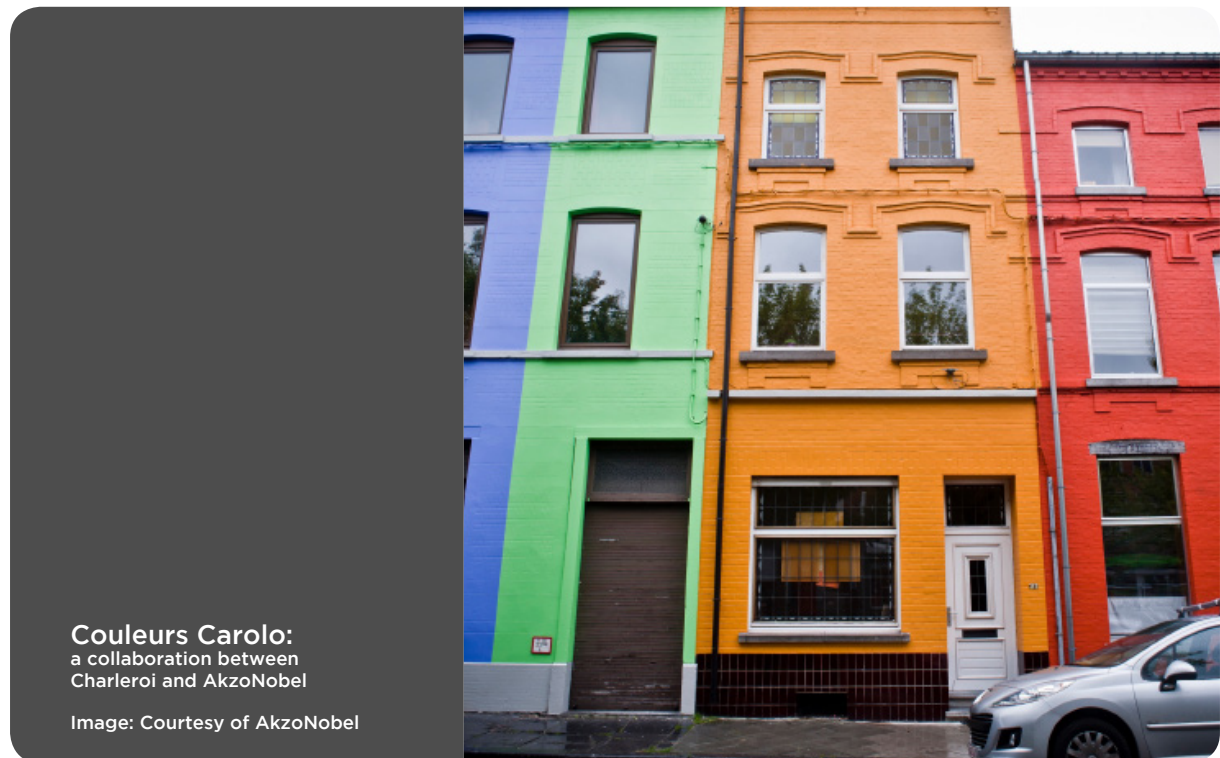
All brand urbanism projects are of a long-term and durable nature. We can, however, distinguish two types of brand urbanism. The first type is concerned with one particular project. Portland and Nike collaborating on the Biketown bike-share scheme is an example of this. Another interesting case is that of the night bus line in the Belgian cities of Ghent and Antwerp. The public transport company suffered from federal budget cuts and had to cancel their night services. To make sure their clientele would get home safely after a night of drinking, beer brand De Koninck invested in the night bus and thereby ensured the continuation of the night line. The project resulted in an increased number of passengers, leading to a decision of the federal government to start funding the night services anew.

The second option is a long-term partnership with one or more cities in which the brand heavily invests in the local community or commits to placemaking (in which the urban environment is improved by and for local users). A way of doing this is to partner up with a (local) specialised organisation. Southwest Airlines, for example, made its premise 'connecting people' a reality with its Heart of the Community project since 2013. They partnered with leading placemaking organisation Projects for Public Spaces to launch a number of initiatives for local communities in cities served by Southwest, among which Baltimore, Chicago and San Diego. Every project involves an investment of \$100.000-200.000.

Take the local community as a starting point

Community involvement and transparency about roles and responsibilities of brand and local government, as well as the general process are key to the success of a brand urbanism project. This is especially the case in mainland Europe, where government traditionally has had a strong position and where private sector involvement still often is considered unwanted. The involvement of a brand in a public good, and especially in public space, has to be genuine. In this context, it is important that there is a logical match between the brand and the project.

In Paris, for example, high-end (basketball) fashion brand Pigalle cooperated with Nike to create a neighbourhood basketball court in an underutilised space where local government had envisioned a parking lot. The brand and the project match not only in content (basketball) but also in location: Pigalle was founded in the Paris neighbourhood of the same name. And in Charleroi, AkzoNobel daughter Dulux sponsored 15.000 litres of paint to brighten the cityscape. Furthermore, they actively involved the local community in the process of painting.



Vibrant urban environment

Brand urbanism provides brands the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to cities and communities that are important to them. For cities, it is a way to realise long-standing ambitions. Projects can be of all shapes and sizes, but it is always a committed collaboration between brand and city. It enables the local community to benefit from valuable facilities on a daily basis, which in turn benefits cities and brands alike. For the latter, this expresses itself mostly in 'soft' outcomes such as positive perception, free publicity and goodwill.

Did brand urbanism spark an interest?

Would you like to know more about the possibilities for your city or brand?

Please drop us a line at rinske@brandurbanagency.com.