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**Signum and Visual Identity**

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## **Signum and Visual Identity**

**Ruggero Torti**

### **Abstract**

The contribution focuses on the analysis of the role of the sign as the foundation of the visual identity of artistic-cultural artefacts, also intended as a connotation of their place of belonging. Today the cities, the territories and consequently the architectures and the works of art contained in them must emerge from the visual anonymity to stand out, even for the purposes of socio-economic development. The attention is then placed on a possible process of conception of a visual identity system that starts from the territory, from the city and its characterizing artifacts and is capable of transmitting identity and attractiveness to the users, be they residents, tourists, operators. The intent is to demonstrate the effectiveness of communication design in the definition of a sign or a system of signs that represent and make impressed in the memory the characters considered essential of a place and of what qualifies it, passing through the analysis of some case studies. We then arrive at a first conclusion that shows how the systems of Visual Identity defined for a given territorial and/or urban reality, also through significant artifacts, on the one hand they must be recognized as belonging to the population of the place itself, which must identify and reflect in them and, on the other hand, must also succeed in giving new impulses and possible future developments. Ultimately, the definition of a sign - o of a system of signs - identifying a place can assume a relevant importance also in the conversion of territorial and urban areas.

**Keywords:** visual identity, communication design, place branding, city branding.

## Introduction

When we talk about the identity of a territory we mean the geographic conformation, the architecture, the traditions, the people but also the different emotions and sensations that every single place transmits and spreads. In today's society, cities, territories and consequently the architectures and works of art they contain must emerge from the visual anonymity to stand out, even for the purposes of socio-economic development. The greater attractiveness of cultural places, cities or entire territorial areas is in fact linked to the creation of a visual identity combined with an effective communication strategy. The attention is then placed on a possible process of conception of a visual identity system that starts from the territory, from the city and its characterizing artifacts and is capable of transmitting identity knowledge towards users, whether they are residents, tourists, operators: place branding.

The visual identity of a place envelops different areas of study, in fact, the territorial branding, in addition to affecting the design of communication, also affects the sociological, anthropological, marketing and so on, considered essential to obtain a complete vision and multifaceted of a place. The goal is therefore to delineate the tools, methodologies and aims of the place branding discipline through the analysis of the role of the sign as the foundation of the visual identity of artistic and cultural artefacts, also intended as a connotation of their place of belonging.<sup>1</sup>

## Literature Review

For greater clarity, place branding can be associated with a real strategic and compelling vision of a place and not just a mere tool for differentiating the place itself, through the use of logos and graphic signs with a symbolic and evocative character.

The key concepts for understanding the branding mechanisms of a place are contained in visibility and univocity. In order for the visibility to remain etched in the mind, the image of a place must inevitably be distinctive, i.e. it must be able to stand out from the other brands. Among the top experts of "brand identity" strategies of nations, cities and regions, the creators of the concept of place branding we can mention Philip Kotler and Simon Anholt, who say that often happens that many companies are limited to producing large advertising campaigns created around to the logo thinking it could be the optimal solution. In fact, building branding of a territory, regardless of whether it is a nation or a city, means creating a soul, an ideal shared by the inhabitants, that can represent that place and that can be an element of union between the citizens, the institutions, businesses, organizations, visitors and investors.

Anholt argues that: "Creating a territorial brand implies some of the most profound philosophical questions that can be faced: the nature of the perception of

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<sup>1</sup>Carta, *The cultural armor of the territory (L'armatura culturale del territorio)*, 1999; Cirafici, *Disegno e graphic design*, 2012

reality, the relationship between objects and their representation, the phenomenon of mass psychology, the mysteries of national identity, leadership, culture and social cohesion".<sup>2</sup>

According to the theories of Graham Hankinson<sup>3</sup>, Simon Anholt, and Stephen V. Ward, it is imperative to identify and distinguish the four fundamental concepts of activities related to territorial branding, namely "Destination branding", "Nation branding", "Region" branding" and "City branding".

Destination branding is a term related to the marketing and branding of a place in terms of leisure and tourism or is a key activity linked to the tourist organization as it concerns the conception of a communication branding system able to synthesize the values and the intrinsic characteristics of a destination. It is aimed at both tour operators and tourists who want to travel to a particular destination and many countries, regions or cities around the world are actively involved in destination branding as they normally adopt the communication techniques borrowed from the classic corporate branding.

By nation branding we mean an essential communication tool adopted by the governments of the different nations to maintain and spread their identity on the opinions of various foreign countries. This system adopts a long-term communication strategy to measure, manage and build a nation's reputation. According to Anholt, nation branding is mainly linked to the aspect of tourism promotion capable of increasing socio-economic development at national level thanks to appropriate government policies, able to raise the quality of life and the liveability of the place both for its own citizens, both for tourists. Moreover the safeguard of the aspects linked to the culture and the traditions, together with the human patrimony, constitute the attraction and the originality of the place itself. In addition, the appearance of the export brand falls within the nation branding, i.e. all products linked to the national territory that have a worldwide resonance such as Made in Italy, for example, synonymous with superior quality products.

Region branding is basically a process of communication of the image of a precise and well defined geographical area that takes into account all the elements that a territory can potentially offer, from infrastructures to services, as they are an integral part of the identity of the place. The creative process of region branding aims to identify a single brand that identifies the entire region. Therefore, the creation and diffusion of a single image of the region at all levels of communication is of fundamental importance.

The city branding instead is based on the presence in the collective imagination of the city in direct competition with the other international realities. There are several parameters that come into play to outline the attractiveness of a city including the appearance and the geographic and architectural conformation of the "place" that constitute the distinctive and connotative elements of a city and that make it unique, as well as the concept of "potential" that the city is able to offer both from an attractive point of view and from the point of view of the avant-

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<sup>2</sup>Anholt, *Competitive Identity: the new brand management for nations, cities and regions*, 2007; Kotler, *Il marketing secondo Kotler*, 1999.

<sup>3</sup>Hankinson, "Destination brand images: a business tourism perspective" In *Journal of Services Marketing* 19, 2005.

garde of services, infrastructures, work and education. Even the "rhythm" of life is an aspect of vital importance, a source of attraction and at the same time identifying a target of users, as well as "people" understood as an expression of an index of the consideration of the inhabitants of a place as a decisive aspect in the choice of the city to visit or live. Finally, we must not forget the "prerequisites" understood as the set of perceptions that the visitor has of the place even before visiting it, or the image that the city has created in the long term.

## Methodology

By focusing more attention on the concept of city branding, we can identify and synthesize different goals of the complex and along the path of identifying and communicating the true identity of a city. First of all, we must define the objectives of the city brand considering that the starting point of a new planning process lies in understanding what the city can actually offer and what future developments can be. Cities with a historical past are obviously benefiting from cities with an industrial past that, due to the crisis in the sector, must reinvent a future thinking of a communication strategy able to promote the new image. The image that you want to spread must therefore be unique and credible and, in order to develop this aspect, it is necessary to understand the results of the consumer analysis, the analysis of the competitors as well as the analysis of the city itself for the identification of its true soul. Once the objectives have been defined, we move on to identifying the target to which we want to address, so as to be able to create and develop the vision. In fact, in addition to the three main targets related to the tourism sector, the business and the citizens themselves, other players must be identified, thanks to digital media and new technologies that allow greater interaction with the target. Leaving aside the target speech linked to the tourism sector and business, we want to focus on citizens as the city branding is aimed at both residents and potential new residents. All actions are therefore aimed at creating an interaction between the city and the citizen so that the latter can actively participate in the city branding by promoting his vision of the city. For an effective development of the vision we must therefore take into consideration the results of the analyses carried out so far to develop, in the long term, a strategic management projected in a future scenario. In this phase the various aspects that characterize and constitute the city, its history, its image and its imaginary are then taken into consideration, and then reasoning on future developments.<sup>4</sup>

Once the vision strategy has been identified, it is possible to identify both the images that can really express and connote a place, and the aspects that are part of the collective imagination. According to Kotler the image of a place can be defined by a set of beliefs, ideas and information more or less mediated, that the public has of the place itself. Generally, regardless of whether it is positive or negative, the image of a place persists in the mind and is difficult to modify. On

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<sup>4</sup>Bistagnino, *Il disegno nella scuola di Ulm (trans) The drawing in the Ulm school*, 2018; Falcidieno, *Parola Disegno Segno (trans) Word Design Sign*, 2016.

the basis of this first phase of research of the objectives, the target, the vision and images and the best representation of people and places, we can proceed with the operational phase necessary to outline the communication and promotion strategy to communicate the city through a strongly connotative and dynamic brand. The image that is to be transmitted must adhere as closely as possible to the identity of the place so that it can communicate and spread its true spirit.

Ultimately, the communication tools related to place branding, nation branding or city branding, while being characterized by different policies for the branding strategies to be adopted, contribute to the same goal, the affirmation of an image that is impressed in the minds of individuals and leading to desired results in the long run. On the contrary, destination branding seeks to achieve the objectives set in the short term without implementing safeguard actions to protect culture, populations and the identity of places, leading to the inevitable increase in attractiveness rather than competitiveness.

As anticipated, in today's society, cities that intend to emerge from anonymity must distinguish themselves by focusing on the creation of their own visual identity combined with an effective communication strategy. It therefore becomes necessary to clarify the concepts of brand and brand image. The brand dictionary includes the following definition: "The perception that a person has of a product, service, experience or organization; the art and science of building a brand "while for brand image" The mental representation, by the consumer, of a product, service or organization".

Marketing expert Colin Bates defines the brand as: "the set of perceptions in the consumers' mind". The brand is therefore an identity that is built and maintained over time as characterized by a system of coherence and distinctiveness, or rather it is the main tool of differentiation that is based on the graphic sign able to enclose in it a series of values, actions and experiences that combined with a skillful visual communication arouse feelings and fix the image in the mind. Unlike the brand characterized by a set of graphic, visual and textual elements, the brand is more abstract and nuanced, less tangible.

Cities with their cultural attractions become successful brands when they succeed in establishing an agreement with the user, making it a participant or even an integral part of the creative process, as happened in the modern branding project for the Italian city of Bologna, the first Italian example of a generative logo capable of offering new experiences and emotions. Even cities therefore have their brand; Paris is known as the romantic city, London is famous for its cosmopolitanism, New York is the city that never sleeps.

Ultimately, the attractiveness of a city brand or the perception of a place is influenced by many factors ranging from environmental, safety, economic prosperity, diversity of people, the presence of infrastructure, the quality of the cultural offer that , along with many other assets, contribute to the formation of the perception and identity of the place in people's minds. Also to mention a factor more related to branding, we must not forget the ability of the city to tell its own story.

The new competitive challenges to attract investors, economic-financial resources, visitors and talents from the cities are the result of the globalization

process that has made it necessary to redefine its international positioning, in a strong and univocal way. The road identified by the city branding communication strategies appears for now the most effective tool available.

This is why in recent years the role of the sign as the foundation of the visual identity of a place has adapted to different needs; it no longer plays the sole role of a connotative sign capable of distinguishing a territorial reality from the others, but it is also a living, changing, generative brand.

The process of creating a visual identity system, regardless of whether it is a corporate identity project to rejuvenate an institutional image or brand image, must take into account some concepts of fundamental importance. The inhabitants of a place have a high sense of belonging because each place is a bearer of an intrinsic identity concept that at the same time generates attractiveness in those who do not live or do not live there. Identity and traditions constitute the very essence of the place as they have settled in it. In addition, the intervention of man on the territory over the centuries must be considered, expressed through signs of artifice on the natural context such as architectural, artistic and architectural choices that have characterized the modern appearance of the city.

Identifying the permanent elements that contribute to the recognition of the identity of a place, despite the overlap and the succession of signs that throughout history have produced information, stratifications and cancellations, and above all adapt these constant elements to contemporary conditions, are principles that are at the base of the formulation of an effective territorial innovation process.

The exploration of the territory in search of constant and characterizing signs allows us to extrapolate a distinctive language in perfect harmony with the architectural, artistic and socio-cultural context; an effective language, shared by the inhabitants of the place. The design of a territorial visual identity is not born from pure inspiration but is inspired by pre-existing values or images consolidated and memorized by generations who lived and lived that place. We must therefore take into account the social aspects of the images, we must ask the question of how this graphic sign to be designed is seen and interpreted by the public. Also, we must identify the visual elements that are part of the local tradition.

Today the territorial communication process is moving in the direction of dynamic brand image systems for the elaboration of a dynamic identity and the creation of a "live" brand, in continuous evolution capable of adapting itself to the changing needs required by visual communication. The traditional corporate image systems based mainly on the brand as the fulcrum of communication, around which everything else gravitates, are increasingly disused because they are weakened by more dynamic and open visual systems, where the graphic sign characterizing the brand is always 'central element but at the same time is the subject of variants adaptable according to needs. A successful brand therefore, cannot be reduced to the study of a logo, a slogan or a winning advertising campaign but must define a recognizable identity, which can be a synthesis of the symbolic and identity values between what is perceived internally, what is communicated and what is perceived outside the territory.

The secret of an effective city branding strategy is to start from a process of sharing that already involves all the citizens, institutions and companies present in



the territory in the preliminary phase. In fact, citizens must become the protagonists, the first ambassadors of the city, the main actors of a long-term strategic development plan.

It is therefore interesting to understand how the main social changes, among which the figure of the consumer who becomes a prosumer or recipient of goods or services, lead towards a direction of greater participation and inclusion. The consumer citizen constantly creates his product, in this case his city, based on his needs and desires. As well as the consumer, the figure of the communication designer who is the subject of a radical change also becomes the author, because today he collaborates with those who were only the recipients of his project before. The focus shifts from the finished product to the phase of its conception and the visual designer must acquire new skills and new tools to manage.

There are many types of approach to the design of a changing and constantly updated brand, ranging from the widespread container system to the approach of wallpaper to get to the approach to generative design as the latest trend. The container system consists in creating a container that becomes the frame within which you can create endless possibilities for customizing the brand through colors, textures, illustrations. The shape of the container therefore remains unchanged while its content takes on a changing nature according to different needs or situations. Instead, the wallpaper approach provides for the presence of a fixed element that can be identified in the brand or logo and a field behind it as a constantly changing element, thus becoming the brand that can be customized by the user to implement the interaction between the brand and the people. The trend of recent years is therefore to have a process that leads to determine the final result of the brand and not the graphic designer who simply designs a system through which the process flows. Countless are the creative possibilities of this type of approach that is based on the intervention of external inputs that, passing through predetermined parameters, affect the result. In this way we obtain a constantly evolving visual identity that follows today's trends and trends. There are various types of input, it can be the user who in first person affects the ideational process; it can be an atmospheric condition, a sound, the passage of time and so on. The result is a living identity characterized by a fixed element to guarantee the brand's recognizability. The designer assumes the role of author of the process rather than the author of the product.<sup>5</sup>

The slogan also plays a fundamental role in the process of visual communication, especially when combined with the logo. The slogan is a short sentence of sure effect able to express an overall view of the place. The slogan reinforces the message that the logo wants to convey and is characterized by a concise but at the same time exhaustive and clear phrase. Examples of successful combinations of slogans and logos include "People Make Glasgow", "Be Berlin",

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<sup>5</sup>Van Nes, Hughes, *Dynamic Identities: How to Create a Living Brand*, 2013; Neumeier, *Il dizionario del brand* (trans) *The dictionary of the brand*, 2010.

"I Love New York", "Porto", "I Amsterdam", "Genova more than this" (Figures 1, 4, 9, 12, 17, 20).

## **Findings/Results**

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of communication design in defining a sign or a system of signs that represent and make impressed in the memory the characters considered essential of a place and of what qualifies it, analysis has been considered fundamental of some case studies. In fact, thanks to communication, many cities have managed to increase their visibility in an amazing way at international level, think of Dubai, which today is characterized by a new brand with ambitious expectations, as the goal is to be read by both Europeans that from the Arabs thanks to the fusion of the two characters in a single writing. This intuition, besides facilitating reading, avoids the production of double or bilingual brands. Copenhagen instead focuses on a tourism brand that is based solely on the letters that make up the name of the city, focusing on the part of the name "open", an expression of open, multiethnic, multicultural city where the promise is already in the name. As well as an analysis of the main case studies such as Glasgow, Berlin, New York, Melbourne, Porto, Nordkyn, Genoa, Bologna, highlights the effective effectiveness of the process of designing a visual identity system that from the territory, from the city and from his characterizing artifacts he succeeded in transmitting identity knowledge towards the users. The cases of territorial branding of international success are really numerous as the local administrations have understood the importance of communication as a strategic factor necessary to increase the attractiveness of the territories and the consequent economic development that derives from it. Furthermore, the summary analysis of case studies aims to shed light on the current state of the discipline of visual communication and in particular highlights the new role of visual designer in the territorial field.

### *People Make Glasgow*

The first to have used visual communication as a tool for relaunching the image of the city and its socio-economic aspects is the city of Glasgow. The graphics certainly contributed to the reconversion of the identity of the place which from industrial agglomeration managed to become an attractive tourist reality. The urban redevelopment initiative in Glasgow, which began in the 1990s, follows the line of public design that emerged in the early twentieth century in Great Britain with the London Underground experience and has developed new representative needs of the city across the Channel that have characterized the communication program. A series of projects, events, artefacts, followed by a new system of tourist signs and interventions on urban furniture have been added to the communication campaign based on the phrase "People Make Glasgow" which puts the user in the foreground leverage on the appearance of the community (Figures 1 and 2). The aim of the communication lies in encouraging the active

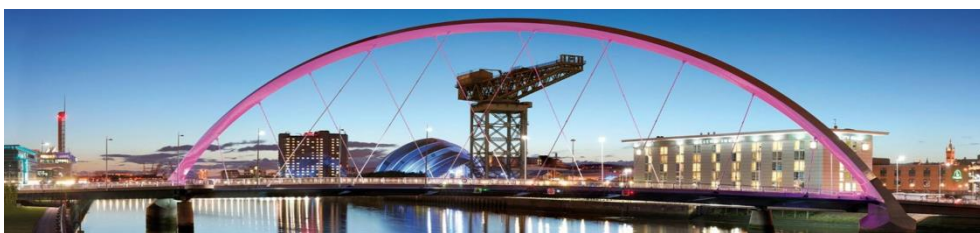
participation of the residents, giving the visitor the idea of an open city where its inhabitants are the strong point: if Glasgow is so, it is thanks to the people who are part of it (Figure 3).

**Figure 1.** *City Branding of Glasgow*



Source: <https://peoplemakeglasgowbrand.com>.

**Figure 2.** *Communication Campaign that Focuses on the Appearance of the Community*



Source: <https://peoplemakeglasgowbrand.com>.



**Figure 3.** *Idea of an Open City where its Inhabitants are the Strong Point*



Source: <https://peoplemakeglasgowbrand.com>.

*Be Berlin*

The communication campaign promoted by the city of Berlin in 2008 and produced by the Meta Design studio, stems from the need for repositioning on the "market" and is aimed not only at residents but also at those who would like to be part of it. The motto "be Berlin" as already described for Glasgow, wants to create a sort of community spirit where people are through their work, their passions, their desires to make the city unique (Figure 4). Unexpected aspects of everyday life that are framed as if they were a snapshot that wants to convey the message of an open, free, cosmopolitan, welcoming city. The campaign focuses on revisiting the existing brand portraying the Brandenburg Gate to which the motto "be Berlin" is added. The adopted character, the BMFChange, versatile and with a distinctive connotative and exclusive sign, is a font specially designed to convey a strong impact to the advertising campaign. An open character, consisting of rough details and at the same time softer details that reflect the different souls of the city of Berlin, full of visible contrasts. The only constants of communication reside in the typeface, in its colors and in the characteristic comic strip, elements that can emphasize the level of recognition (Figures 5 and 6).

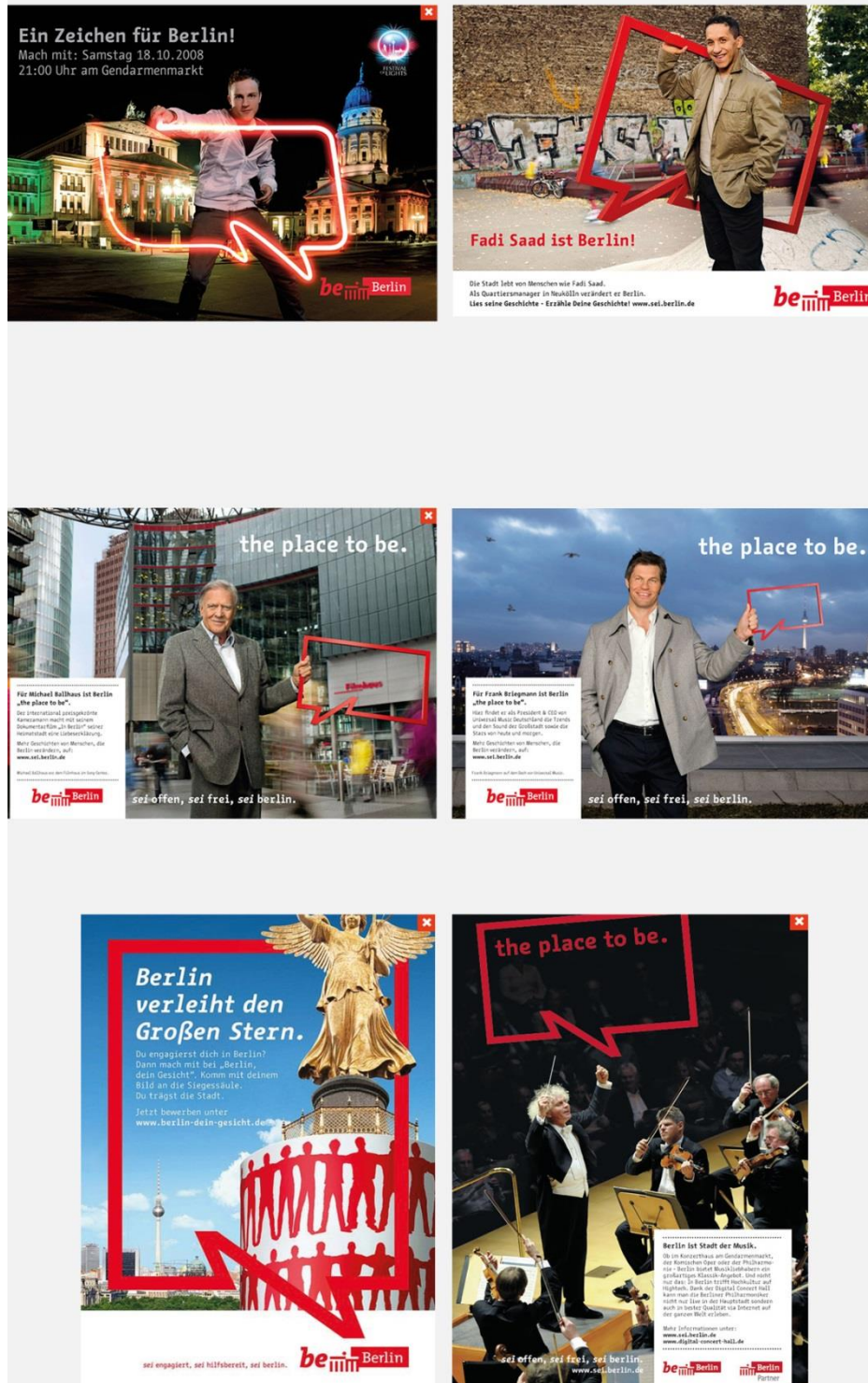
**Figure 4.** *City Branding of Berlin*



Source: <http://www.seum.it>.

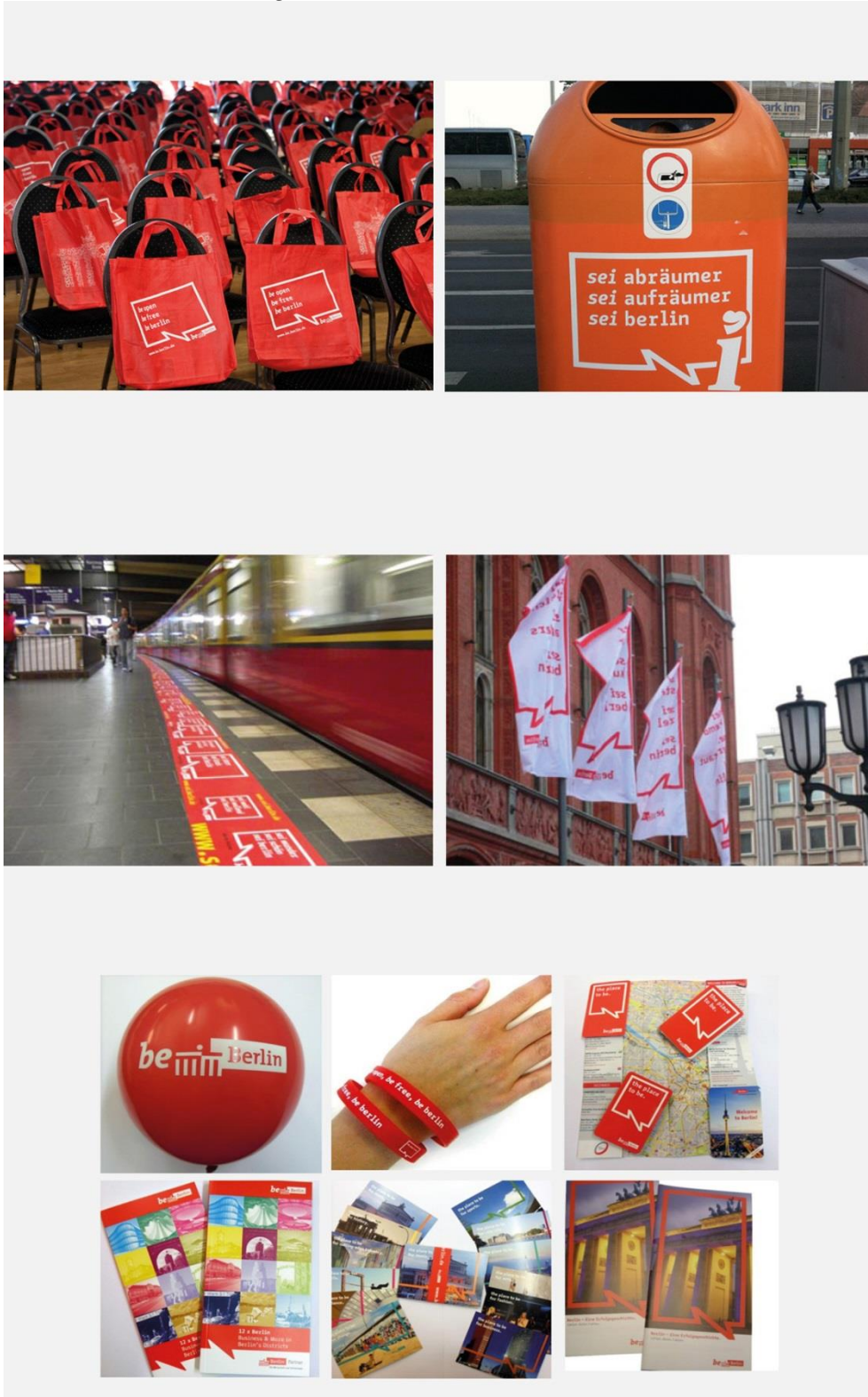


**Figure 5.** *It is the People through their Work, their Passions, their Desires that Make the City Unique*



Source: <http://www.seum.it>.

**Figure 6.** *The Typogean Character, the Colors and the Characteristic Cartoon Frame are the Recurring Connotative Elements*



Source: <http://www.seum.it>  
NYC



New York City, one of the most important economic centers in the world known as the big apple and in the collective imagination as the city that never sleeps, eclectic and avant-garde. Its strong profile derives from years of effective and careful communication where branding has contributed surprisingly to its repositioning, obscuring the widespread feeling of a criminal and dangerous city, managing to reverse this negative aspect starting from 1977 with the creation of the famous brand "I love New York" work of the artist and designer Milton Glaser (Figure 7). Furthermore, the entire marketing and communication design strategy was based on the desire for change by the inhabitants. The current visual communication campaign for the New York tourist promotion, commissioned by Wolff Olins, focuses on the need to capture the distinctive features of the city, its personality, its true essence. The idea is that New York is unique and unparalleled and in designing the new brand you want to recall the structure of the city itself evoking, thanks to the great thickness of the close letters NYC, the sense of gigantism and closure that can only be felt in New York when you walk between the skyscrapers. The writing NYC is conceived as a container and at the same time as a frame within which is articulated a visual system characterized by a series of non-stereotyped images in continuous evolution capable of transmitting the energetic, noisy and eclectic spirit that distinguishes the city. The generated signs create an open and flexible visual system that adapts to new scenarios and different situations (Figure 8).

**Figure 7.** *"I love New York" Work of the Artist and Designer Milton Glaser*



Source: <https://www.miltonglaser.com>.

**Figure 8.** *The Current Visual Communication Campaign for the New York Tourist Promotion, Commissioned by Wolff Olins*



Source: <https://www.wolffolins.com>.

*M*

Melbourne is a dynamic city that has been able to create itself internationally over the years, a strong image characterized by its diversity, livability and sustainability. The year 2009 marks the rebranding by the Landor Associates firm, characterized by the unification under a single brand of all the connotative identities of the Australian city. The intent is to transform the city into a pleasant place both to live and to visit with particular attention to the future. Melbourne wants to be a city that cares about the wellbeing of people, respectful of diversity, multicultural, generative of innovation, knowledge and culture, attentive to new forms of art. The goal is to become a connected city by implementing collaboration with the inhabitants and providing the city with a vibrant and projected image to the future where diversity is the core of the graphic project, characterized by a design that can be traced back to the category of the container. The letter M, in fact, becomes the distinguishing mark and container of the infinite creative variables dictated by communication needs (Figures 9 and 10). Inside it alternates colors, shapes, images, textures, etc. depending on whether you want to communicate a sporting event, institutional or otherwise: the M as a container is the connotative element within which the true spirit of the city is fused.

**Figure 9.** *Rebranding Characterized by the Unification under a Single Brand of All the Connotative Identities of the Australian City*



Source: <https://landor.com>.



**Figure 10.** *The letter M Becomes the Distinguishing Mark and Container*



Source: <https://landor.com>.

## *Porto*

The communication project of the city of Porto stems from the need to create a new visual system for the city and the recent project of 2014 by the Portuguese studio White Studio manages to realize the concept according to which Porto is a palimpsest of stratifications and distinctive signs that they are well suited to connote an identity. The fulcrum of the communication project lies in the idea that every citizen has a different opinion of the city in which he lives, so the design study lends itself to infinite possibilities of representation. The white and blue ceramics that characterize the urban aspect, undoubtedly are strongly connotative elements, as well as the logo "Porto." made with a sans-serif typeface is the fixed and constant element around which develops the whole system of signs constituting the visual identity. The simple typographic element is flanked by a complex system in continuous change of icons that tell the city both to those who reside and those who visit it. Based on a single geometric grid, over seventy icons have been created to describe the city and its history. Every single piece spreads and tells its story, the set of pieces constitute a larger plot capable of generating interesting patterns and textures. There are many representations, ranging from architectural, landscape and gastronomic, from cultural, sports and transport. The aim is to create a distinctive and easily recognizable identity but at the same time dynamic, changeable and versatile (Figures 11-14).

**Figure 11.** *The White and Blue Ceramics that Characterize the Urban Aspect*



Source: [www.eduardoaires.com](http://www.eduardoaires.com).



**Figure 12.** *System of Signs Constituting the Visual Identity*



Source: [www.eduardoaires.com](http://www.eduardoaires.com).



**Figure 13.** *The Typeface is the Fixed and Constant Element around which Develops the whole System of Signs Constituting the Visual Identity*



Source: [www.eduardoaires.com](http://www.eduardoaires.com).



**Figure 14.** *Every Single Piece Spreads and Tells its Story*



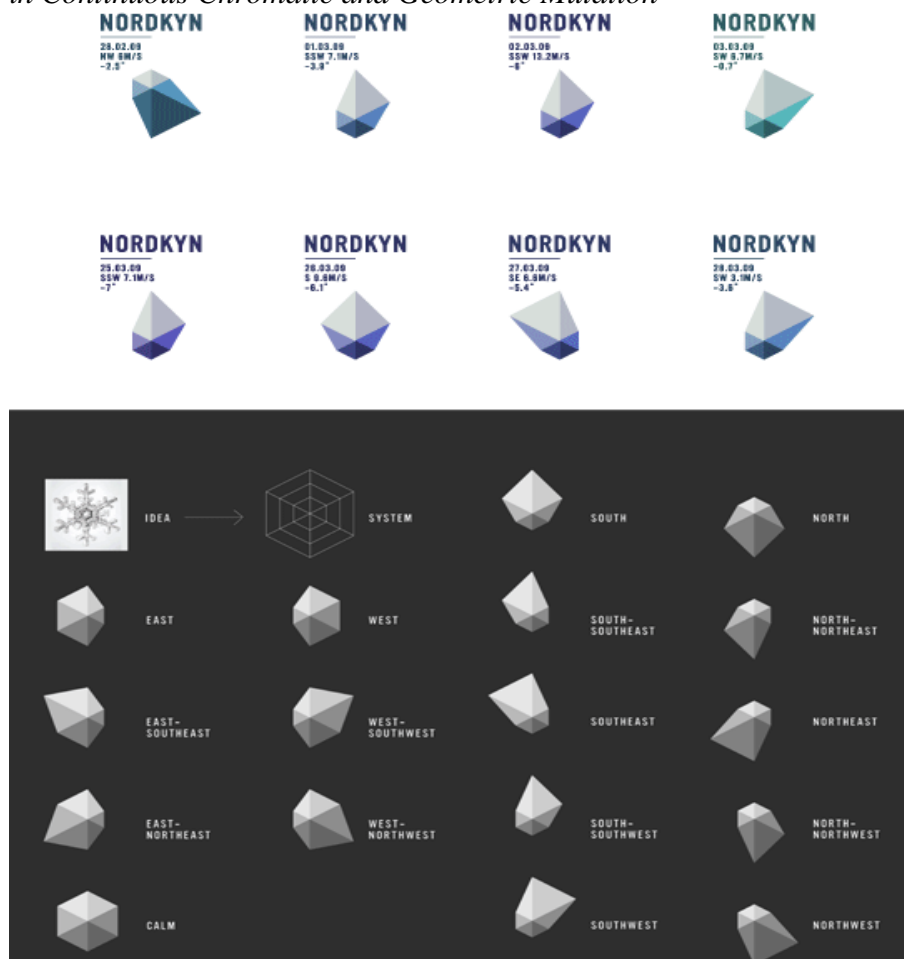
Source: [www.eduardoaires.com](http://www.eduardoaires.com).



## Nordkyn

Cape Norkyn, a city located at the most extreme point of Norway, in 2012 was the subject of a destination branding project by Neue Design Studio that wanted to take into consideration the natural heritage as an environmental factor predominant for the development of the territorial visual identity. The visual system created in this way is based on the snow structure in continuous chromatic and geometric mutation, flanked by a constant motto "Where nature rules" sometimes replaced by the numerical values representative of the temperature combined with a chromatic scale that varies from turquoise and from green to magenta. There is therefore a continuous alteration of the visual aspect of the logo that changes spontaneously, while maintaining the identity load also thanks to the use of typefaces such as the Sans-Serif and the Trade Gothic Bold Condensed. There is therefore a strong link with nature that influences and controls the entire communication system based on the generative brand approach (Figures 15 and 16).

**Figure 15.** *The Visual System Created in this Way is based on the Snow Structure in Continuous Chromatic and Geometric Mutation*



Source: <http://logok.org/visit-nordkyn-logo>.

**Figure 16.** *The Nature Influences and Controls the Entire Communication System based on the Generative Brand Approach*

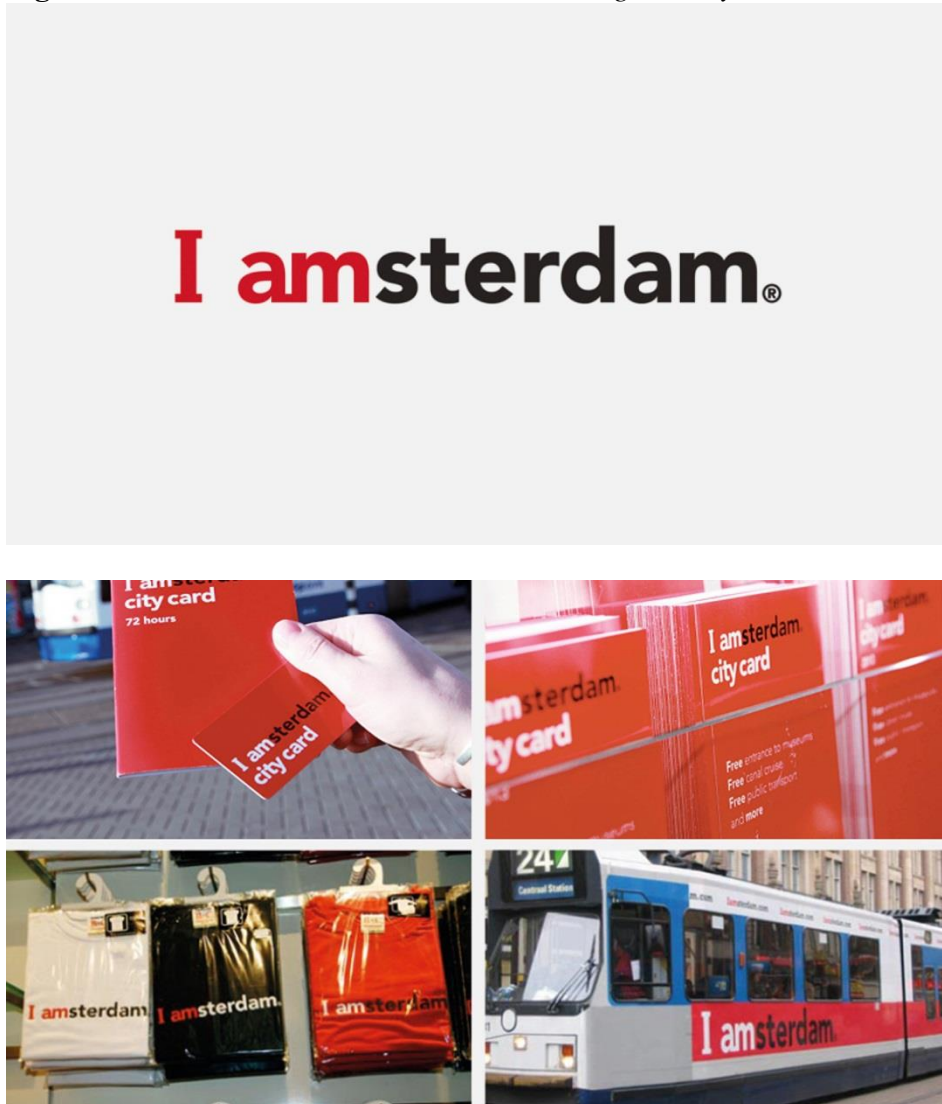


Source: <http://logok.org/visit-nordkyn-logo>.

*I amsterdam*

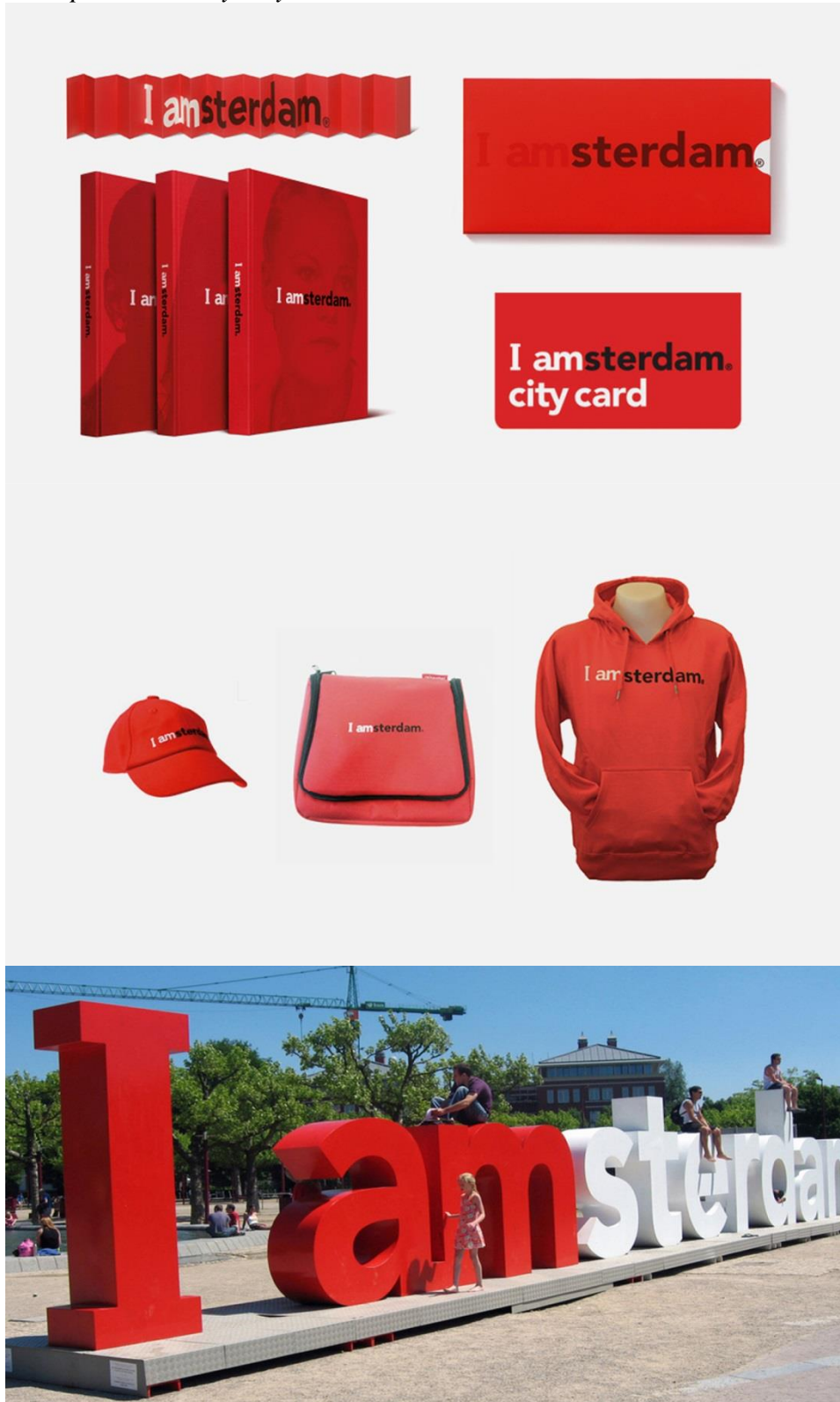
The "I amsterdam" logo has given rise to a play on words that is widespread in many city brands. Studied in 2004 by the studio Kessels Kramer presents a strong identity accentuated by colors and clear-cut lines. The logo is therefore characterized by a play on words highlighted through red and white: I am-sterdam (Figures 17-19). The clear message wants to place the citizen and the city in a position of absolute centrality and, in public applications, maintains the presence of the famous "XXX", historical symbol of the city. The city brand of Amsterdam, did not want to lose its true identity by denying the past characterized by a bad reputation, indeed preferred to drop the strong negative accent related to drugs, narcotics and sexual freedom, accentuating the idea of free city, open and creative.

**Figure 17.** *The "I amsterdam" Presents a Strong Identity Accentuated*



Source: <http://www.seum.it>.

**Figure 18.** The "I amsterdam" Logo has given Rise to a Play on Words that is Widespread in Many City Brands



Source: <http://www.seum.it>.



**Figure 19.** *The Clear Message Wants to Place the Citizen and the City in a Position of Absolute Centrality*



Source: <http://www.seum.it>.

*Genoa*

The importance of visual communication as a strategic factor to strengthen the attractiveness of the territories is the basis of the city branding of the city of Genoa that arises from the need to create and disseminate a non-identifying brand of the administrative structure of the City but the city, characterized by a articulated visual identity. The study of the brand dates back to 2014 and is the work of the creative studio 7vicocrema. Contrary to other city brands the idea is not to resume the appearance of a monument but it is to represent Genoa with its same name on three levels and the choice to represent the letters in an incomplete way leaving some parts invisible, hiding the principle of a city in constant transformation, because Genoa reveals itself in small steps and, when it does, is always more than what it lets imagine. The colors of the logo are white for the incomplete letters and the bright red for the field to remember those of the cross of St. George present in the emblem of the city (Figure 20). The logotype, in addition to conferring added value to all the city's initiatives, is an element of immediate recognition and traceability to the city and the combination of "more than this" motto confers an international resonance as a further element of recall that anticipates how much is still there to be discovered in Genoa (Figure 21).

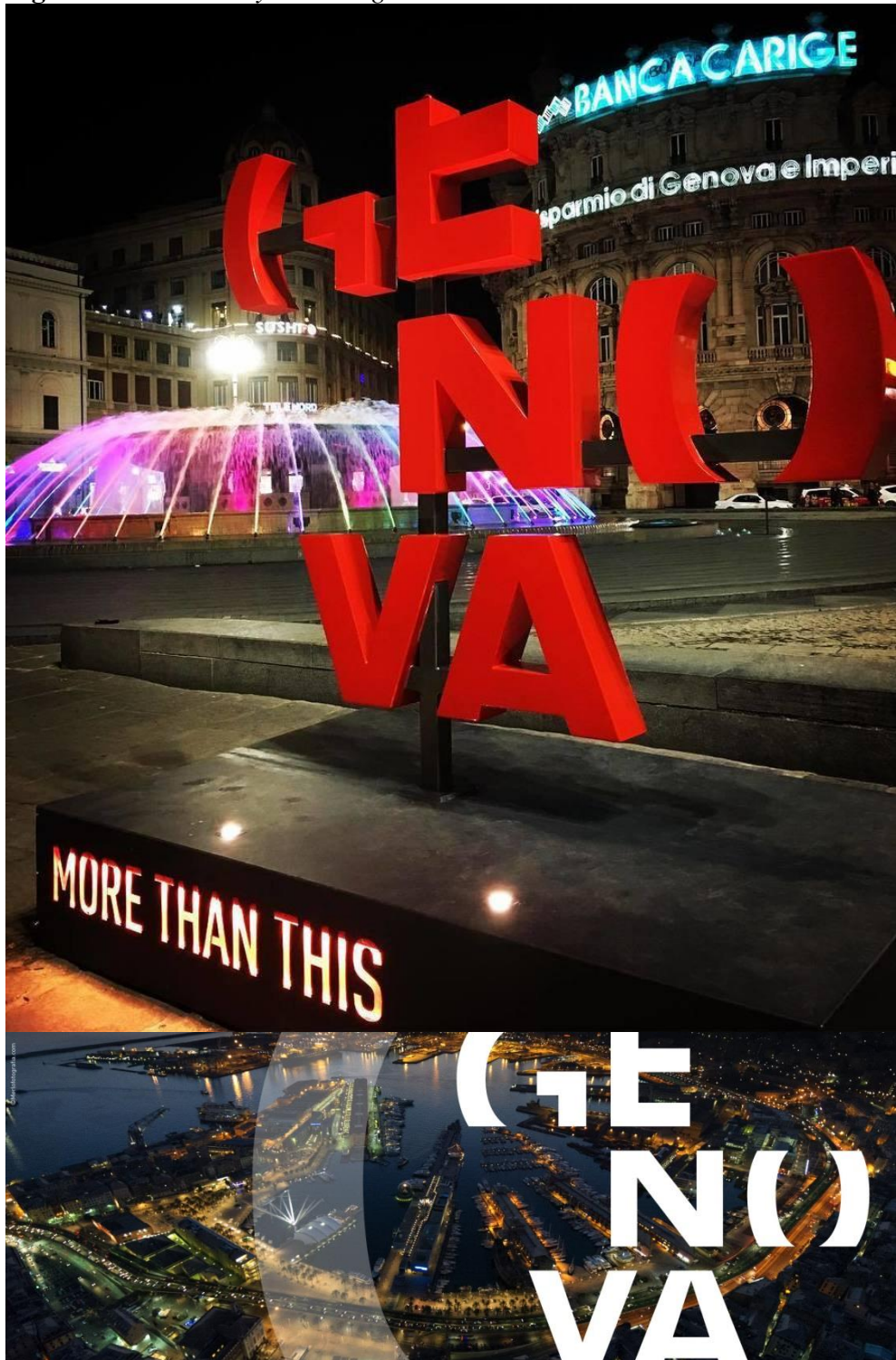
**Figure 20.** *The Logotype, in addition to Conferring Added Value to All the City's Initiatives*



Source: <http://cargocollective.com>.



**Figure 21.** *Genoa City Branding*

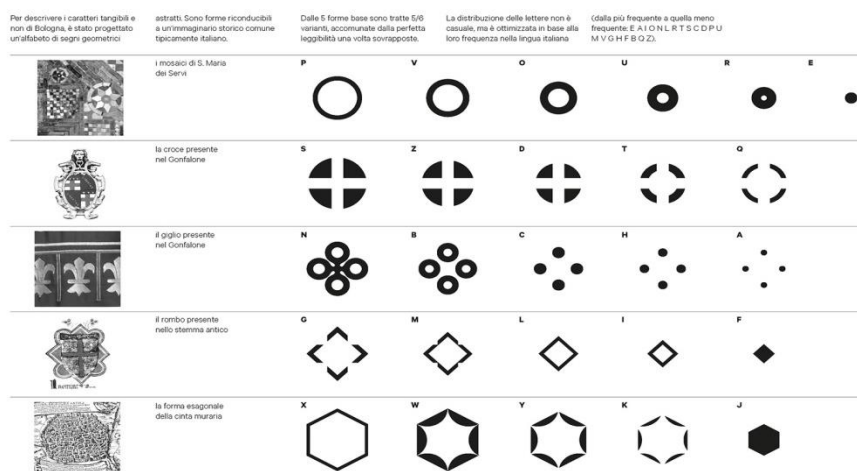


Source: <http://cargocollective.com>.

## *It is Bologna*

Bologna is the first Italian city that has taken the road of the generative logo of a city. Bologna city branding comes from an international competition and the result is an open and dynamic graphic project characterized by the possibility of involving anyone to contribute to the construction of the visual identity of the city. The idea is to create a new Bologna writing system that allows to compose and narrate multiple narrative aspects related to the city by its users. An on-line public platform involves citizens, institutions and visitors, making them an active part of the creative process, offering their own point of view for building a shared narrative of the city. The goal is to visually translate the infinite facets and perceptions of the city by developing a textual system that replaces the graphemes of the alphabet with characterizing abstract signs that freely resume some of Bologna's figurative archetypes. To each form is associated a letter of the alphabet and with these forms/letters it is therefore possible to represent or better "to write" any concept referable to the city (Figure 22). The resulting graphic result is a precise form and different from all the others. Each logo can be colored with colors derived from two colors identified on time and the word that you decide to write is always accompanied by the payoff "is Bologna" that reinforces the identifying traits useful to tell what the city represents. In conclusion it can be said that the identity of Bologna, born from elements of the classical tradition but is realized through the use of new technologies as thanks to the latter you have the opportunity to generate a wealth of signs characterizing the visual identity of the city itself. Moreover, the use of an online platform gives the possibility to create your own symbol and to share it on various social networks and the fact that the logo can be generated directly by users makes it unique. Ultimately in Bologna as in Norkyn, the whole communication system is based on the generative brand approach able to trigger participatory processes with the entire population (Figure 23).

**Figure 22.** “è Bologna” City Branding Study



Source: <http://www.urbancenterbologna.it>.



**Figure 23.** *The Communication System is based on the Generative Brand Approach*



Tuttoilmondo  
**è Bologna**



Source: <http://www.urbancenterbologna.it>.

## Conclusions

We then arrive at a first conclusion that shows how the systems of Visual Identity defined for a given territorial and/or urban reality, also through significant artifacts, on the one hand must be recognized as belonging to the population of the place itself, which must identify and mirror in them and, on the other, they must also succeed in giving new impulses and possible future developments. Ultimately the definition of a sign - o of a system of signs - identifying a place can assume a significant importance not only in the definition of brand image, but also in the conversion of territorial and urban areas. Today, designing cities implies understanding the changes and needs of populations, as well as taking into account the diversification of skills and ways of communicating. Furthermore, traditional elements are joined, without yet replacing them, with new communication tools that require specific creative and design sensibility, regardless of whether they are used in the representation of architecture, the environment, a place or as an expressive act and visual communication for the definition of its city branding, for which the use of all those disciplines related to the world of design as a graphic, infographics and multimedia language remains essential. The traditional information supports are supported or better integrated by the digital ones as carriers of novelties. These allow you to enter into a relationship with millions of people at the same time and everywhere, thanks to the network and social networks. The communication transcends, therefore, the consolidated geographical limits of public administrations, allowing cities to communicate beyond the borders of their territory.

It can therefore be said that in a world that is so fast and in constant evolution, the static nature of the visual identity is becoming less and less. The brand is alive and the creative possibilities are endless; in addition, relationships are established with users that imply the change and evolution of the brand itself, which makes it suitable for any type of event or for any specific need.

We are faced with multiform approaches, open identities, dynamics that evolve into new design solutions, in other words we are establishing visual systems able to communicate multiplicity, therefore characterized no longer by a single sign but by various forms. Today in the communication of cities, the simplification and rationalization of forms, typographic character and color replace the concept of a brand for each body in favor of a single brand declined for the various functions.

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