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## **Brand orientation and the voices from within**

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### Abstract

This work adds to the brand orientation literature by showing that while brand strategies may sometimes be aspirational, multiple identities exist which may either challenge or support a brand. In this place branding study, in-depth interviews of local residents reveal the existence of multiple place identities as well as how these identities relate to a place brand strategy. A framework is provided which illustrates how longitudinal identity studies can be a useful way to assess changes to place identities and the internal effectiveness of brand implementation. It is proposed that the functional communication-based research approach together with the novel framework developed in this study has relevance to the brand orientation of corporations, as it does for places.

### Keywords

voices, within, orientation, brand

### Disciplines

Business

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# **Brand orientation and the voices from within**

**Dr Jessica Baxter, Dr Greg Kerr and Associate Professor Rodney J Clarke**

## **Abstract**

This work adds to the brand orientation literature by showing that while brand strategies may sometimes be aspirational, multiple identities exist which may either challenge or support a brand. In this place branding study, in-depth interviews of local residents reveal the existence of multiple place identities as well as how these identities relate to a place brand strategy. A framework is provided which illustrates how longitudinal identity studies can be a useful way to assess changes to place identities and the internal effectiveness of brand implementation. It is proposed, the functional communication based research approach together with the novel framework developed in this study has relevance to the brand orientation of corporations, as it does for places.

## **Summary statement of contribution**

The relationship between place identities and brand orientation is established. In addition, a new communication based framework that has relevance to both place and corporations is provided to show that identities can be reviewed longitudinally to guide brand design and assess the internal effectiveness of brand implementation.

**Keywords:** Brand orientation, place marketing, place branding, identity, brand identity.

## **Introduction**

The application of marketing and branding practices to places is becoming more common as places compete for more mobile resources including skills and capital. The application of place branding often lacks methodological support, research and guiding frameworks. In this regard, we argue that brand orientation is a necessity rather than an option for successful place branding. Of particular interest here is the existence of multiple place identities and their relationship to a singular place brand; a problem relevant to both place and corporate brands. This paper explains place marketing and place branding, followed by a discussion of place identity and brand orientation. A conceptual framework is provided that leads to a communication-based methodology that can reveal the existence of multiple place identities. The findings show identity management needs to be part of brand orientation. A framework is proposed which serves to guide brand design, implementation and assessment.

## **Place marketing and place branding**

Place marketing involves the application of marketing principles to places. The term place includes towns, cities, regions and nations. Places have supply-side characteristics and can offer value, with examples being resources, security and safety, employment, and government support. As suppliers of value, places have markets which include new residents, corporate headquarters, exporters, manufacturers, investors and tourists (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). More places are competing to attract desirable segments of these markets. Dickinson (2007) refers to the competitive state where the government intervenes to create competitive advantage, at either a general level or within specific sectors. Gardyn (2002) points out competition has increased as choices of where to live, where to visit and where to do business have expanded; advances in communications technology are also providing more geographic options. Place marketing is often a reaction to increasing competition between

some places and the economic decline of others (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Hauben, Vermeulen, & Patteeuw, 2002).

Related to a greater need for place marketing, there has been an increasing pace in research and practice into the use of branding principles for towns and cities (Baker, 2007; Gardyn, 2002; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Kotler, et al., 1993; Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2013; Mommaas, 2002; Virgo & de Chernatony, 2006) and nations (Anholt, 2007; Fan, 2006). Those involved in place branding have been guided by knowledge and practice in destination branding and corporate branding. From the perspective of tourism, places have been treated as destination brands (for example, Cai, 2002; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). Kerr (2006) points out the differences between place branding and destination branding with the former involving not only tourists but those additional place markets of new residents, corporate headquarters, exporters, manufacturers, and investors (Kotler, et al., 1993). The challenge of simultaneously dealing with multiple markets in place branding has made comparisons with corporate level branding relevant. Olins (1999) introduces the corporate brand-place brand analogy where the identities of nations are becoming more like companies in their approach and vice-versa. Similar to corporations, community leaders could be viewed as senior managers (Anholt, 2007) and residents as employees, with the latter having the shared characteristic of being the first and sometimes only point of contact with customers. Authors including Olins (1999) and Green (2005) warn of taking the corporate brand-place brand analogy too far, particularly given the greater number and more diverse group of stakeholders and the fewer control mechanisms which exist in most places. Notwithstanding, destination branding and corporate branding have provided sound foundations for place branding research and practice.

A shared characteristic of a place brand and a destination brand is the rigidity of the brand name. Despite instances when places have adopted a new name or new places have been

declared (for example the case of Slovenia see Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013), Cai (2002, p.722) points out, 'unlike typical goods and services, the name of the destination brand is relatively fixed by the actual geographic name of the place'. Cai (2002) suggests logos and slogans may be used to aid the construction and communication of the place brand. Prior to further considering place branding, the concept of corporate and place identity is explained.

### **Corporate identity and place identity**

With regard to corporations, identity describes 'who we are as an organisation' (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006, p.102). Furthermore, Brown et al. (2006) explains the identity holders not only take part in the creation of organisational identity but are also shaped by it. Thus, the organisational member is a *producer* and *consumer* of organisational identity, a characteristic which we argue is applicable to the residents of a place.

Place identity has been researched within the field of environmental psychology with Schneider and Graumann's investigations of the relationships between people and their spatial environment being an example (Schneider & Graumann 1984, *Städtische Umwelt: Identität und Identifikation*, Paper presented at the 8th International Conference of the IAPS, cited in Lalli, 1992). Drawing on cognitive mapping theory and studies conducted by Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983), Rollero & Piccoli (2010) proposed that the person-place relationship consists broadly of affective and cognitive dimensions. This affective dimension is termed *place attachment* and refers to the emotional bond with places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), whilst *place identity* is seen as a complex cognitive structure (Proshansky, et al., 1983). Place identity and place attachment are theoretically and empirically difficult to separate (Speller, 2000) and in some cases the terms are assumed to be synonymous (Brown & Werner, 1985; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001)

Consensus exists regarding the cognitive elements of place identity (Downs & Stea, 1977; Moore, 1979 ; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010; Tolman, 1948), which is explained by Proshansky et al. (1983, p.59) as the ‘endless variety of cognitions related to the past, present, and anticipated physical settings’.

Studies from sociology explain identity as a social and cultural process. Treinen discussed the relationship between place and the individual as a cultural process reflecting society’s values (Treinen 1965, *Symbolische ortsbezogenheit eine sozio-logische untersuchung zum heimatproblem*, *KSlner Zeitschrift fi~r Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, cited in Lalli, 1992). Hall (2003, p.194) describes place identity as ‘multiple discourses of urban spatiality’ which include ‘positive and negative (place) evaluations, depending on their stance and interpretation of the city’. This view is taken up by us in our approach to place identity.

Ding (2005, p.9) explains identity ‘cannot be considered independently from the social context in which it developed’. Similarly, Hague (2005, p.7) points out that an individual’s beliefs are not formed in isolation as place identity is influenced by society. Place identity is contained by the cultural environment in which the identity holder has access and can be considered as relational (Hague, 2005). It is a social construct (Huigen & Meijering, 2005), existing within the socio-cultural environment and is a process of acknowledging similarities and differences between places (Mueller & Schade, 2012; Relph, 1976). Place identity is communicated through tangible and intangible place elements, such as infrastructure and culture (Mueller & Schade, 2012), and a fluid concept subject to change with experience (Minca, 2005).

Within place branding literature, place identity is interpreted as the total collection of characteristics or essence which makes each place distinct and unique (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Florek, Inch, & Gnoth, 2006). In addition to being a fluid concept, a characteristic of identity, be it organisational identity (Balmer & Greyser, 2003) or national identity (de Cillia,

Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999) is that it is pluralistic not unitary. Organisations and places have multiple identities. Balmer and Greyser (2003) explain that a corporation consists of multiple identity types manifesting from corporate culture, communications and employee and management behaviour, all of which may, or may not be aligned. As such, identities are influenced by sources within and outside the corporation resulting in a need for *constant identity management*. In a study of national identity, de Cillia et al. (1999, p. 200) conclude, due to its subjective and individualistic nature ‘there is no such thing as the one and only national identity’. Importantly, these identities may be complementary or conflicting, not only with each other, but also with marketing and brand strategies that might be implemented. Anholt (2007) suggests that central to place marketing and place branding strategies is the communication of a competitive place identity, that is, the features or characteristics of a place which are unique and may provide a competitive advantage. This view is similar to that of Albert and Whetten (1985) who refer to organisational identity as those *central, enduring and distinctive* aspects of an organisation. This point is pivotal to the argument presented in this paper and readers are asked to consider the important distinction which is made between *place identity* and *place brand identity* – the former being fluid and pluralistic, the latter being more rigid and unitary. Keller (2008) in discussing brand identity explains that brands consist of elements which include the name, logos, symbols, spokespeople, jingles and packaging. These elements when combined should support each other and make up the *brand identity* which should communicate ‘how you aspire to be perceived’ (Keller, 2008 p.671). At this point, the possible tensions which may exist between multiples of evolving identities and *the* brand identity should be understood.

Prior to consideration of the link between place identities, competitive identity and brand identity, the concept of brand orientation is introduced.



## **Brand orientation**

Brand orientation is a holistic strategic approach, which encourages consideration of the brand vision in all aspects of an organisation. Urde (1999, pp. 117-118) defines brand orientation as, ‘an approach in which the processes of the organisation revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands’. Further, brand orientation is an ‘inside-out, identity-driven approach that sees brands as a hub for an organisation and its strategy’ (Urde, Baumgarth, & Merrilees, 2011, p.1). In contrast to the internal focus of brand orientation, market orientation has more of an external standpoint (Urde, 1999, p.118) focusing on the needs and wants of the market and used to drive strategic direction (Urde, 1999, p. 120). Despite their different foci, both concepts argue for an organisation-wide and stakeholder approach. Proponents of brand orientation suggest there are risks associated with market orientation, particularly if not aligned with internal resources and capabilities. ‘Unconditional responses’ to market wants and needs potentially confuse both the market and the organisation (Urde, 1999, p.121). A need exists to achieve a balance between maintaining ‘integrity’ of the organisation (Urde, 1999, p.121) and engaging in activities such as ‘market-sensing’ (Day, 1994, p.43), that is, adapting to changes in the market place. The brand orientation approach addresses this challenge being described as ‘market-orientation “plus” ’ (Urde, 1999), or one step further in strategic creation (Simões & Dibb, 2001; Wong & Merrilees, 2007).

Brand orientation recognises the ability to create value for customers through the brand. Wong and Merrilees (2007) explain brand orientation transcends organisational roles from top-management through to general staff. Notably, a brand-orientated organisation uses the brand to drive strategy development and integrate the brand vision throughout the organisation including internal and external communications. A brand orientation assists the

consistency of messages and the development of superior value in the marketplace to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Wong & Merrilees, 2007). When discussing the branding strategy of Nicorette, Urde (1994, p.25) points out the benefits of a brand orientation as relating to the consistency of messages and creation of value for customers. This ultimately results in loyalty to the brand not the product category. Urde (1994) explains the building of the Nicorette brand is not only a part of the strategy but the core of the strategy itself. Urde (1994) suggests the corporate name, corporate identity and brand vision be linked with the target group, product and trademark to 'emerge as a unity' and be the essence of the brand strategy. He also emphasises the crucial role of communication in the branding process and the need to use the brand vision to guide management actions as 'the image of the brand-orientated company can be said to be a reflection of all the actions taken by the organisation' (Urde, 1994, p.26).

The relevance of brand orientation to places is now discussed.

### **Brand orientation and places**

Brand orientation has received limited specific attention in place marketing although its components are present with examples being a bottom-up strategic approach, utilising the brand as a competitive resource (Anholt, 2007) and the need for consistency of internal and external place communications (Mueller & Schade, 2012). Influencing our argument favouring the understanding of place identities as part of an overall place brand strategy, Anholt (2007, p.75) explains place-marketing strategies:

*'[should be an act of] mining rather than forging...it has to be dug out of the history, the culture, the geography, and the society of the place...[as] We are never dealing with a blank canvas, on which it is possible to paint at will: this is a canvas that's already painted, which*

*has been hanging in someone else's home for generations, which they have grown rather attached to.'*

Similarly, Metaxas (2009) believes place strategies should be based on reality and not simply promote desirable aspects. Boisen et al. (2010, p.2) explain the goal of place branding is to add value by 'influencing the perceived qualities of the place' to both external and internal place markets. There is a need to understand how stakeholders currently perceive a place and their vision for the future (Anholt, 2007, 2010; Metaxas, 2009). We argue that place promotion, and indeed place branding, is not likely to be effective if it is not aligned to place identity that is grounded in reality. Therefore, a brand designed for a place should be based upon research into a place's unique collection of identities, referred to in this paper as the identity-set, to help guide the determination of the brand strategy and the identities which are aligned, and those not so, to the brand. The need for research is supported by Zikmund and Babin (2007 p. 80) who state that place marketing has become 'very prevalent'.

*'Even though the stakes are very high, city planners and political researchers seldom conduct research prior to implementing a place management program. Instead they fly by the "seat of the pants"! The more successful programs are backed by months, if not years, of well-planned research.'*

Reflecting on the need for research, we make the important point as to a difference between *place branding* and *place brand orientation*. It would seem that many places have attempted to apply brand principles to places, many by necessity. Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002, p.294) point out these places are on the 'economic sick list'. We suggest 'bolting on' a brand strategy to a place may be doomed. However, a place brand orientation approach provides both theoretical and practical guidelines which will contribute to the success of a brand strategy. Our work supports this argument by showing how the revelation of the identity-set

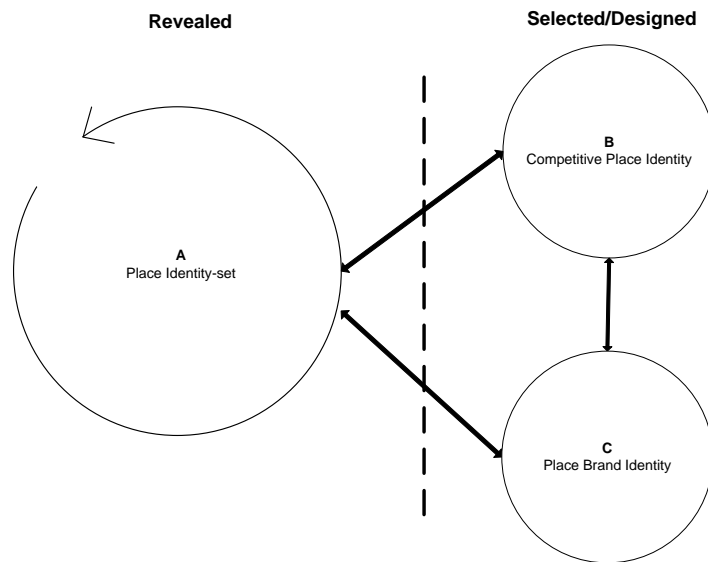
of a place should be the first step in the place branding orientation process, that is, an inside-out, *identities-driven approach* in addition to an inside-out *brand identity approach*. The framework developed to guide the research is now presented.

### **Conceptual framework**

Central to this work is the argument as to the existence of multiple identities within a place (and an organisation). A brand strategy for an organisation or place may focus on one identity, assumedly one that is competitive. A brand might also be aspirational and designed to create a new identity, one far removed from existing identities. In either case, we argue a brand strategy needs to commence with an understanding of existing identities. We refer to this as ‘the voices from within’, that is, what residents (or in the case of an organisation, employees), think and feel about their place (or organisation). Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony (2013) argue strategies should derive from the internal stakeholders of a place as they have a major impact on the way the place branding promise occurs. A case of a place brand is presented later in the paper to demonstrate this argument.

Figure 1 illustrates the associations between place identities, place competitive identity, and place brand identity. As place identities exist, they need to be understood and revealed through the application of appropriately theorized methods. Application of these methods will result in the population of *place identities* shown as ‘A’ in Figure 1. Importantly, the perimeter of ‘A’ conveys the idea that place identity is not fixed but fluid, and dynamic. Consistent with the explanations provided earlier, *the* place competitive identity and place brand identity are selected and designed in order to represent strategic choices on the part of city management. ‘B’ signifies the statement of identity often developed and delivered by senior management in corporate planning documents, termed the *competitive place identity*. ‘C’ is the *place brand identity*, used in formal communications for both internal and external

place markets. The relationship between these concepts is illustrated through the double headed arrows. As place identities are fluid not fixed, the ability of brand communications to influence the identities is recognised. This view is consistent with Brown et al. (2006), referred to earlier in that identity holders take part in the creation of organisational identity but are also shaped by it.



**Figure 1: Relationship between place identities, competitive place identity and place brand identity**

**Source: The Authors**

We argue those in charge of managing a city need to first understand the identities that exist within the place (shown as 'A' in Figure 1). This would show differences and similarities within the place identities ('A'), as well as between the place identities, the stated competitive place identity ('B') and the place brand identity ('C'). Place marketing strategies may be at risk if the competitive place identity and the place brand identity are unknowingly far removed from the identities held by residents. It needs to be mentioned that while the competitive place identity 'B' and the place identities 'A' should be aligned they need not be the same. This might be particularly important if the place brand strategy is aspirational, that is, not within the revealed place identities. If a competitive place identity and place brand identity are selected and designed and are not embedded in the identity-set, managers and marketers need to be aware of the additional challenges arising from the place identities-place brand gap. This argument is in line with those put forward by Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) and King and Grace (2005) who refer to the brand-culture gap and the role of employees (or in this paper, residents of a place) to live and deliver the brand. We propose place brand management is the process of designing and communicating the place brand identity to deservedly influence the meaning of the location in the minds of the people who matter to the future of the location. This process needs to include consideration as to how residents (or in the case of an organisation, employees), think and feel about their place and is integral to a brand orientation approach. This research supports this argument. We point out that brand orientation needs to be holistic and include all stakeholders, particularly customers. This work focuses on the internal identities of a place. It is acknowledged a market analysis needs to be undertaken although as stated by Urde (1999), there needs to be alignment with internal resources and capabilities and unconditional responses are not made confusing both the place and the market.

## **Research objective**

The aim of this research is to show *how* the identities of a place can be revealed and also *how* these identities relate to a place brand strategy. For reasons of convenience as well as relevance, the city of Wollongong, Australia was selected as a suitable case. Some relevant details about the city are provided.

## **Wollongong**

Similar to some industrial cities throughout Europe and the United States of America, Wollongong has faced the challenges of economic decline and image problems. Wollongong is a coastal city having a population of approximately 200,000 people and is 100 kilometres south of Sydney. The city is made up of a number of towns and has a mix of industrial, commercial and residential areas with national parks on its north and south boundaries. Throughout the 1900s, the city's industrial base was dominated by the Port Kembla steelworks and coal mines. These and associated industries contributed to the working class character of the city. Wollongong today is a city in transition moving from a heavy industry economy to a service-based economy including education, technology, research and development, retail, tourism, health and aged care. Attempts to alter the industrial and negative perceptions of Wollongong (such as industrial unrest and crime) included a City Image Strategy (Valerio, Baker, Gulloch, & Wollongong City Council, 1999), whereby the city adopted a brand identity and implemented the tagline, 'city of innovation' as shown in Figure 2 (for more detail see Kerr, Noble, & Glynn, 2008).





**Figure 2: Wollongong's Logo and Brand Tagline**

The ‘city of innovation’ was put forward at the time as being both aspirational for and reflective of Wollongong’s history and current strengths (Valerio, et al., 1999). This strategy has received praise for positively influencing the city’s image (Garrett-Jones, Gross, Kerr, Kotevski, & Zaeemdar, 2007), and criticism for not reaching the aspirational goals aimed to reposition the economy (Gibson & Waitt, 2009). It may have been that the ‘city of innovation’ brand identity did not give enough credence to the existing identities of Wollongong. While we argue an identity study should be undertaken to aid the development of a brand strategy, later in the paper we point out an identity study is also appropriate after brand implementation to gauge the relevance of the brand identity to the existing identity-set; an approach taken in this study. It is the post-brand identity study that forms the basis of this research.

## **Methodology**

An objective of the research is to show *how* to reveal the different identities of a place. To this end, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 Wollongong residents with interviews ranging between 30 and 60 minutes duration. A maximum variation sampling method (Patton, 2002) was adopted as participants were purposively selected according to their length of residency, gender, age, occupation, and postcode. Table 1 shows the varied characteristics of the participants. The logic behind this approach being to obtain a diverse group and avoid homogenous contributions (Patton, 2002); an important issue when investigating a broad population of interest such as residents or in the case of a corporation, employees. The participants held a broad range of roles in the community; examples being leadership positions and members of organisations such as charities, churches and clubs.

**Table 1: Participant's Characteristics**

Participant	AGE					OCCUPATION					LENGTH OF RESIDENCE			POSTCODE								
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+	PROFESSION	RETAIL	TRADE	STUDENT	RETIRED	1-3yrs	4-9yrs	10+yrs	2500	2505	2506	2515	2516	2530	2528	2530	
1		X							X				X									X
2			X			X							X	X								
3	X					X							X								X	
4	X					X							X		X							
5	X								X		X			X								
6					X					X			X	X								
7				X			X						X	X								
8			X			X							X				X					
9			X			X							X	X								
10	X								X				X						X			
11			X						X				X	X								
12		X						X					X			X						
13					X	X							X					X				
14	X					X						X		X								
15		X							X				X							X		

A semi-structured interview protocol covered set topics but allowed flexibility to explore the responses (Rowley, 2006). Heeding the advice of Aaker, Kumar et al. (2005, p.129) the interview commenced with a question designed to get the ‘respondent thinking about the topic of interest’. In this case, it was: *How would you describe Wollongong?* The protocol facilitated discussion relative to a resident’s cognitions and emotions towards the place they live and why they felt that way. For example: *What do you like the most about Wollongong? Why do you have this view?* As place identity is formed in relation to noticing similarities and differences between places, it was important to determine the reference points for descriptions of Wollongong, including other places the participant previously or desired to live or visit. Other questions within the protocol elicited information regarding the participant’s weekly activities and what they would like to see change or remain in Wollongong in the future. In addition to brief notes, the interviews were digitally recorded to aid data analysis and leave the researcher free to guide the interview. The interviews took place in locations that were convenient for the participants, including local restaurants, coffee shops and in homes.

### **Place identity and Systemic Functional Linguistics**

From a social constructivist perspective, identity is ‘neither a given nor a product’, but one which is contextual, pluralistic, results from negotiation, is social and is discursive (de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006, p.2). There are many precedents of social constructivist investigations of identity using linguistic strategies (see Irwin, 2010). Importantly, such research addresses the social action of identity processes rather than transcendentalist conceptions which focus primarily on psychological constructs (de Fina, et al., 2006). As interaction is central to social constructivism, Irwin (2010) argues so too is language. Due to the functional link between language and identity, a linguistic approach is appropriate to

analyse the language in the place identity transcripts (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Fairclough, 2003; Young & Harrison, 2004). Tuan (1991, p.685) specifically recommends a linguistic approach when investigating place identity, as the ‘grammar of language can tell us something about what aspects of an object (of place) are emphasised’. Importantly, due to the functional role language in place identity processes (Relph, 1976), selected methods from a school of socio-linguistics called Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) were employed to conduct the data analysis. SFL is a theory of language concerning how language functions to convey semiotic meanings and provides a range of techniques to recover and represent such meaning. Although an unorthodox approach in place marketing, the application of SFL to the analysis of transcripts is a received approach in the field of linguistics (Eggins, 2000). The selected analysis techniques recovered Wollongong’s identities from the interview transcripts.

The analysis proceeds by applying reference analysis to a transcript, recovering references through a reference chain, systemising the reference chains into a network for each transcript, and concluded by amalgamating networks from each transcript into one master classification system to depict the identities of Wollongong. These steps are explained in further detail.

To extract the identities of Wollongong, a reference analysis was undertaken to identify references to what was spoken about in each transcript. These include people, places and things (Eggins, 2004). In this study, only references to Wollongong were identified. Once all references were identified, a reference chain was created that traced all mentions of that reference throughout the transcript to form a linear pattern. In practice we included a line number next to each referent providing an ‘audit trail’ to clarify or reconfirm issues and thereby contributing to data integrity (Bonoma, 1985). The reference chains were then organised into a classification system so as to recognise that some references are more general than others. In SFL classification systems are represented using a notation called

system networks. At the end of this stage the analysis provided a system network for each transcript. Once all transcripts were analysed, a master system network was created to represent all references to Wollongong with the aim of modelling the identity relationships. To illustrate these methods Figure 3 depicts how the identity, *liveable* was recovered from one transcript and integrated into the master system network. In an extract from Transcript 1, *liveable* is identified as a reference to Wollongong in Figure 3(a); the *liveable* reference chain is recovered from Transcript 1 in Figure 3(b); the *liveable* reference chain from Transcript 1 is classified in a system network in Figure 3(c); finally an extract from the master system network is depicted Figure 3(d) which, exemplifies the position of *liveable* after amalgamation of all 15 system networks. A system network, read from left to right, shows the least delicate of options on the left through to the more delicate options on the right.

(a)	"Wollongong is <i>liveable</i> ..."
(b)	(3) Retirees — (6) Adequate Shopping — (303) Schools — (7) Opportunities for Education
(c)	<pre> graph LR     Wollongong --- Liveable     Liveable --- People     Liveable --- Offerings     People --- Retirees["Retirees P1:3"]     Offerings --- Schools["Schools P1:303"]     Offerings --- Education["Opportunities for education P1:7"]     Offerings --- Shopping["Adequate shopping P1:6"] </pre>
(d)	<pre> graph LR     Wollongong --- Liveable     Liveable --- People     Liveable --- Offerings     People --- Retirees["Retirees P1:3"]     People --- Families["Families P5:10"]     Offerings --- Schools["Schools P1:303"]     Offerings --- Education["Opportunities for education P1:7"]     Offerings --- Shopping["Adequate shopping P1:6"]     Offerings --- Entertainment["Entertainment P10:5"]     Offerings --- Health["Health and transport infrastructure P6.11"]     Offerings --- Employment["Lacks employment opportunities P4:24"] </pre>

**Figure 3: Data analysis stage exemplified**

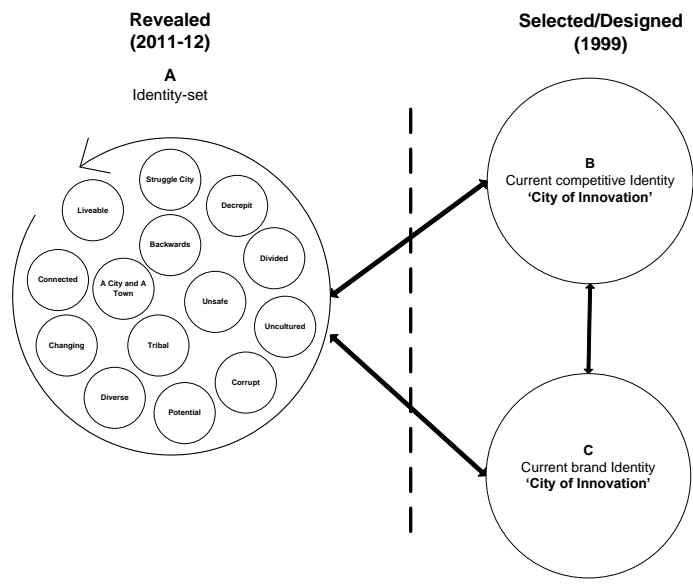
In Figure 3(d), Wollongong [category 1] is identified as *liveable* [category 2] due to the characteristics of people and offerings [category 3] as determined by each respondent's grammatical choices [category 4]. It should be noted there were both positive and negative associations with the identities. For example, Wollongong was *liveable* for families and retirees but there were challenges and limits to this liveability, including employment opportunities.

System networks were effective in revealing a place identity taxonomy which can be easily read, shared and discussed. Importantly, these taxonomies can be compared in longitudinal studies to reveal new categories, movement between categories, and even deletion of categories.

## **Findings**

In addition to the goal of demonstrating *how* to reveal the identities of a place, it was found that after fifteen interviews very limited new information was forthcoming and therefore some saturation (Pandit, 1996) had been achieved. The findings are shown in Figure 4, as the revealed identities, where 'A' is the identity-set held by place members (residents)





**Figure 4: Wollongong’s identity-set, competitive identity and brand identity**

**Source: The Authors**

The results show the complexity of a place identity-set ranging from complimentary, non-complimentary and even contradictory. Although six identities contained entirely negative associations, there was no one identity constructed of entirely positive associations.

Due to the sampling method, diverse responses of Wollongong were elicited from participants, especially regarding their language choices. Importantly, participants used colloquial language to describe their interpretations of place. For example, an older participant referring to the elitist attitude of some residents used the word ‘toffy’ whereas a younger participant referring to the behaviour and appearance of people in one suburb claimed the people are ‘dero’ (derelict in this context meaning rough and uncouth). Reference analysis enabled the meaning of authentic language choices to be systematically revealed as opposed to approaches in which identities are inferred by the researcher.

## **Discussion**

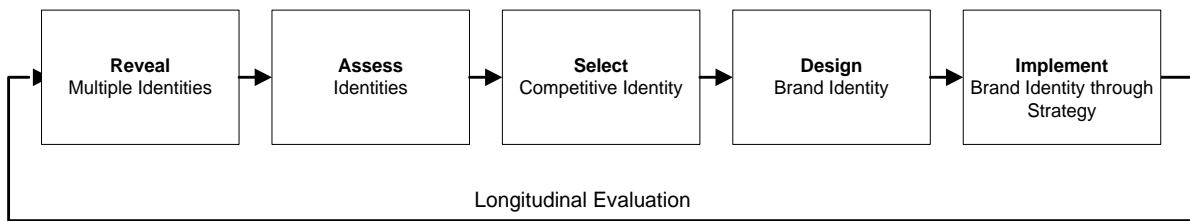
The Wollongong case demonstrates a gap between the *identity-set* and the adopted *competitive identity* (city of innovation) and as well the *brand identity* (city of innovation). It is emphasised the identity-set exists and has been *revealed* by way of research involving residents – the voices from within. In 1999, a *competitive identity* and *brand identity* for Wollongong was selected and designed by consultants, and adopted by the local council on behalf of the city. Despite the small, albeit purposefully selected sample, not one participant specifically mentioned innovation as an identity – despite over 10 years of extensive and costly promotion of the ‘city of innovation’ tagline and the evident diversification of the local economy during that time. This suggests the existence of a ‘*place identities-place brand identity*’ gap and that a brand orientation approach has not been applied.

Figure 4 shows incongruence within the identity-set (‘A’), for example, ‘*backwards*’ and ‘*changing*’. As well, there is no alignment, or buy-in, with the designed ‘city of innovation’

competitive identity ('B') and brand identity ('C'). From a practitioner viewpoint, even with a small sample, the effectiveness of the brand strategy in engaging internal stakeholders should be questioned.

As mentioned previously, although the competitive identity 'B' and the brand identity 'A' should be aligned, they need not be the same. In the case of Wollongong for instance, the brand identity and associated communication might use more creative approaches that deliver the message of innovation. This might be particularly important if the place brand strategy is aspirational, that is, not within the revealed identity-set. Place marketing strategies may be at risk if the competitive identity and the brand identity are unknowingly far removed from the identities held by residents (organisational members). If a competitive identity and brand identity are selected and designed and are not embedded in the identity-set, managers and marketers should be aware of the additional challenges arising from the identities-brand identity gap. This argument is in line with brand orientation literature which highlights the risks if the brand is not aligned with internal resources and capabilities and does not maintain the integrity (Urde, 1999) of the place. This view is consistent with that of King and Grace (2005) who refer to the role of employees as 'living the brand'. We claim this is similarly applicable to residents of a place.

It could be argued Wollongong's branding attempts followed a market-orientation approach, seeking to appeal to new external markets and adjust to the competitive environment. We classify the 'city of innovation' as a brand strategy rather than a brand orientation strategy. Revealing the existing identities of the place should be the first step, and an ongoing process, in place brand orientation. In keeping with Balmer and Greyser's (2003) argument for corporations, a need exists for constant place identity management. To understand and monitor changing place identities and the internal effectiveness of the brand, it is necessary to continually investigate the identity-set of a place. Figure 5 suggests such an approach.



**Figure 5: Managing multiple identities over time**

Commencing with the ‘voices from within’, the revelation of the identity-set should be the starting point from which an assessment can be made to guide the selection of a competitive identity, the brand identity design and implementation. The implementation of the brand is a process requiring a different skill set to the earlier stages in Figure 5. Morgan and Pritchard (2004 p. 4) refer to the ‘political act of place branding’. Van Ham (2001 p. 2) refers to the changing role of politicians.

*‘To do their jobs well in the future, politicians will have to train themselves in brand asset management. Their tasks will include finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing, assuring customer satisfaction, and most of all, creating brand loyalty.’*

In his thesis, Kerr (2009) identifies the stages of *activating, energising, concepting, expanding* and *re-energising*. It is the role of politicians in particular to expand the brand identity from its institutional base (often a government department) throughout the community and beyond. An evaluative process is shown by the return arrow in Figure 5 which is a further revelation of the identity-set aimed at showing changes in place identities over time.

## **Conclusion**

As referred to earlier, Anholt (2007) recommends place marketing and branding needs *to understand* the place (‘mining rather than forging’). As well, Metaxas (2009) believes place strategies should be based on reality and not simply promote desirable place aspects. We subscribe to these views and provide arguments supported by literature and research. As seen in the case of Wollongong, managers should be equipped with current and accurate

knowledge of the identity-set as the basis for selecting a competitive identity and brand identity. Disconnections between Wollongong's identity-set, competitive identity and brand identity became apparent. This may be attributed to limited understanding of the identity-set prior to implementation of 'city of innovation' brand and tagline in 1999 and perhaps the ineffectiveness of this strategy. The current study exemplifies why a brand orientated approach should acknowledge the existing identities. Urde's (1999) definition of brand orientation requires the brand identity be integrated within the organisation's strategic direction. In the case of places, a brand identity which is not founded on the identity-set may risk rejection by internal stakeholders. Place managers need to be aware of the challenges which may exist if an aspirational brand identity is beyond the current identity-set.

This study is limited by the scale of the research, that is, we used only one entity, the city of Wollongong to investigate these issues. The study does not consider the perspectives of community leaders as managers (notwithstanding some are residents) nor does it deal with the external perspective of place, that is, the image. Our emphasis in this work has been to focus on brand orientation from an internal perspective. Furthermore, while arguing the benefits of Systemic Functional Linguistics to guide data analysis, we recognise the opportunity exists to utilise additional relevant techniques.

Our work has drawn on parallels in the corporate branding and place branding literatures and on analogies that can be drawn between the roles of employees and residents. While both parallels are useful, like Olin's (1999) earlier work, homogeneity should not be assumed. Both residents of a place and employees of an organisation have multiple identity regions that shape identity (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has important implications for marketing and branding of places and indeed corporations.

First, the study makes the important distinction between the existence of multiples of identity and that of a selected and designed brand identity.

Second, the communication-based research approach and the framework put forward in this study provide a coherent methodology to reveal existing identities.

Third, revealing identities through the use of this framework provides a foundation upon which competitive identity and brand identity can be selected and designed – even if these are rejected in favour of an aspirational brand.

Fourth, the framework allows managers to become aware of misalignments that may exist within the revealed identity-set and the designed brand identity. We argue this is particularly important when the selected and designed brand identity is outside the existing identity-set.

Fifth, the framework can be used for longitudinal studies to reveal the evolving nature of identities and alignment with the brand identity. This provides a means to assess the internal effectiveness of place brand implementation.

Finally, the framework and methodology offers place managers a means of applying brand orientation and increasing the likelihood of deploying an effective place brand strategy.

It is our objective to extend the framework developed in this study to include an assessment of external perspectives, that is, images; ensuring a more holistic place brand orientation. We subscribe to the views put forward Konecnik Ruzzier and de Chernatony (2013) that place branding strategies should derive from the place's internal stakeholders – the voices from within.

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