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The meaning and measurement of place identity and place image of towns and cities

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“The meaning and measurement of place identity and place image”

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“The meaning and measurement of place identity and place image of towns and cities”

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Abstract

It is within the context of the growing level of competitiveness between places, and even the decline of many, that a need has been identified for places to have a marketing focus. As a new and under-researched domain, and also due to some similarities, place marketing research has been guided by the more extensively researched corporate level marketing and destination marketing. Both of these applications emphasise the importance of internal marketing to employees and host populations respectively. If place marketers are to effectively market 'their' place, there is a requirement to be able to define and measure attributes of place identity and in particular, perceived or construed image. This study will make a contribution to this need by first identifying generic attributes of place identity and image. A rating scale is used which will allow for the measurement of each attribute as well as gaps that may exist between identity and construed image. An outcome of this work will be the opportunity for longitudinal studies to monitor changes in place identity and image, as well as for comparisons between places, particularly within a competitive set. This work is of value to place marketers and planners seeking to retain and attract, what are today, the more mobile markets of people and corporations.

The Marketing of Places

Marketing is identified as a “social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” (Kotler *et al.*, 2004, p.8). From its initial application to consumer goods, marketing specialisations have developed in areas such as; business to business marketing, services marketing, social marketing, not-for-profit marketing, international marketing, internet marketing, relationship marketing, tourism marketing and events marketing. More recently, the domain of place marketing has emerged through a recognition that places operate in a competitive environment; that is, competing with other places for resources. In their work on marketing places, Kotler, Haider *et al.* (1993, p. 19) identify the markets for places as being:

- Goods and Service Producers,
- Corporate Headquarters and Regional Offices,
- Outside Investment and Export Markets,
- Tourism and Hospitality Businesses,
- New Residents.

It is important to emphasise that place marketing is broader than tourism marketing as there are not only more markets to consider but the responsibility of appealing to these markets may vary between different government or private sector agencies within the same location (Kerr, 2006). Pursuant to the principles of the marketing concept, place markets can be segmented and the most preferred segments targeted. Apart from the notion of segmenting, other accepted principles of marketing can also be applied to places such as product development and brand positioning.

Kotler, Haider *et al.* (1993) referred to the condition of places in the United States in claiming almost all places are in trouble and their situations fall along a continuum ranging from the “dying or chronically depressed” to the “favoured few.” Their claim still has currency and is just as relevant to parts of Australia. Collits and Gustin (1997) argue whether Australian towns in decline should be helped or to let market forces determine their fate. Authors including Kotler, Haider *et al.* (1993), Collits and Gustin,

(1997), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) and Schultz (2004) identify likely causes of the decline of places. These are summarized as being:

- The loss of the industry base that warranted the very existence of the place,
- The influence of technology making many industries less labour dependant,
- The loss of the younger population, who pursue careers and opportunities in the larger metropolitan areas,
- An aging population resulting in the cessation of some businesses that cannot be sold on or transferred to family members,
- The centralization of industries such as retailing and finance to larger centers at the expense of smaller towns,
- Stronger 'competitor towns,'
- The 'mindset' of many towns people who believe that their town is 'doomed',
- A lack of leadership and a vision for the future.

These issues reinforce the need for those charged with managing a place to be more strategic in their thinking and it is argued that the application of marketing knowledge to places will be of benefit. Gardyn (2002 p. 36) points out:

"...choices of where to live, where to visit and where to do business have expanded over the past decade, as advances in communications technology increasingly enable individuals and companies to operate efficiently pretty much anywhere regardless of geography."

There is now greater competition between places as they seek the attention of more mobile businesses and populations. At a government level, marketing places usually exists within the domain of economic development. It is within the context of the growing level of competitiveness between locations and the decline of many, that a need has been identified for places to have a marketing focus. Such a focus initially requires the application of marketing fundamentals; to identify markets, select segments and develop a marketing mix to position a place within the desired segments.

Syrett (2006) argues the need for cities to develop governance structures that promote their locational characteristics, enhance their competitiveness and allow them to respond rapidly to changing market conditions. He not only recognises the importance of city promotion to communicate an image and vision for a city, but the need to co-ordinate institutions and policy making to develop strategic capacity for the development of urban assets as well as the emphasis upon the provision of good quality services (transport, education, housing, etc.) which underpin broader competitiveness. Van Ham (2001) claims that the unbranded state has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention and Dickinson (2007) refers to the "*competitive state*" where the government intervenes to create competitive advantage, at either a general level or

within specific sectors. What has become apparent during the course of the review of the relevant literature has been the use of marketing concepts in analysing places, albeit deliberate or otherwise, by a number of disciplines, particularly political science, urban geography and town planning (for example see Nassar, 1998; Finucan, 2002; Metaxas, 2002).

Modern marketing requires a holistic approach involving multiple stakeholders, (Kotler and Keller, 2007), and the communication of superior value to existing and potential customers. In the context of corporations, particularly those in service industries, Kotler and Keller (2008) explain the importance of, and linkages between, internal marketing, external marketing and interactive marketing. As shown in Figure 1, employees have an important role in the overall marketing function.

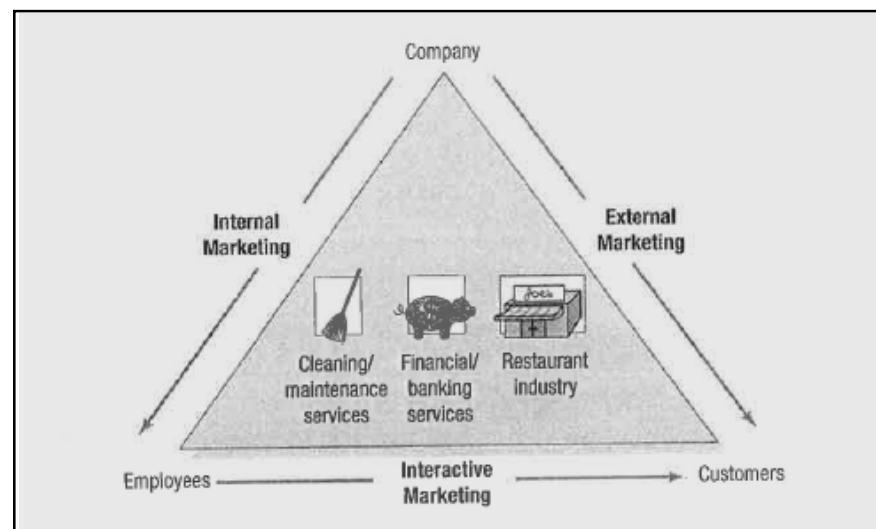


Figure 1: Three Types of Marketing
Source: Kotler and Keller (2009)

Within the place marketing literature, the argument exists that place marketers can learn from corporate marketing knowledge. With regard to brand management, Anholt (2004) argues that a country should not be thought of not as a ‘product brand,’ but a ‘country as corporate brand.’ Large corporations undoubtedly share the conflicts of interests and political agendas of a location, and yet need to effectively manage their corporate brand. Corporations, like places, often have many unrelated industries, products and different cultures. Similar to Hutton’s reference to corporations, places are essentially “social organisations” (Boyce and Ville, 2002).

As shown in Figure 1, employees have an important role in the marketing process. King and Grace (2005) state that as major stakeholders, employees are viewed as playing a crucial role as they facilitate the interface between the organization and the market. It is, therefore, essential that employees' behaviour is consistent and reinforces the stated values and benefits of the corporation. Management support is considered to be the single most important component in guiding employee behaviour (George, 1990; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Pulendran *et al.*, 2000). The ability to link the promise of the corporation (brand strategy) to the corporate culture is a challenge for managers and marketers. A reduced brand-culture gap can be a source of competitive advantage (de Chernatony, 1999). A similar challenge is identified in the tourism marketing literature where destination marketers need to ensure that the host population (e.g. residents and business proprietors) deliver on the brand promise (Buhalis, 2000).

The corporate marketing-place marketing analogy argues that community leaders are the senior managers (Kerr *et al.*, 2007) and residents have a similar role to employees in an organisation, as they are often the first and sometimes only point of contact with the 'place market customers'. Similar to corporations, the challenge and the ideal for places, is that there is alignment between marketing strategies (including branding) and the culture that exists with community leaders and residents. The concepts of brand, identity, image and reputation, which are addressed in the next section, are explained in this regard.

Brand, Identity, Image and Reputation

There is confusion in the literature between the terms brand, identity, image and reputation. This confusion is both intra-disciplinary and interdisciplinary. Corti (2003 p. 1142) explains:

“When confronted with concepts such as corporate identity, communications, image, reputation and branding, practitioners and scholars, as well as managers and consultants, still encounter major difficulties”

Given this situation, a work suggesting an interdisciplinary framework and terminology is proposed by Brown, & Dacin *et al.* (2006). This framework addresses the potential relationships between the organisation and stakeholders and identifies four viewpoints of an organisation as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

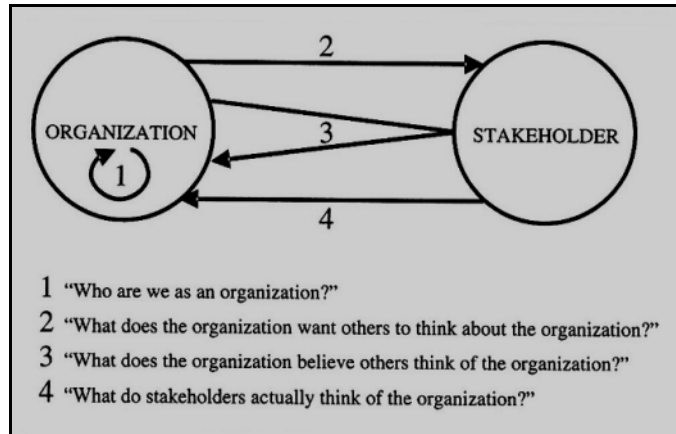


Figure 2: Key Organisational Viewpoints
 Source: Brown *et al.* (2006 p. 100)

Using what Albert and Whetten (1985) refer to as the *central, enduring and distinctive* aspects of an organisation (CED), Brown *et al.* (2006) distinguish and define identity, intended image, construed image and reputation (actual image).

Viewpoint	Brief Description	All Aspects	CED Aspects
"Who are we as an organization?"	Mental associations about the organization held by organizational members	Member organizational associations	Identity
"What does the organization want others to think about the organization?"	Mental associations about the organization that organization leaders want important audiences to hold	Intended associations	Intended image
"What does the organization believe others think of the organization?"	Mental associations that organization members believe others outside the organization hold about the organization	Construed associations	Construed image
"What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?"	Mental associations about the organization actually held by others outside the organization	Corporate (organizational) associations	Reputation

Figure 3: Proposed Unifying Terminology – Identity, Image and Reputation
 Source: Brown *et al.* (2006 p. 102)

They advise that identity is a 'self-definition' of the organisation as to 'who we are' while the image involves internal stakeholder considerations while the reputation (or actual image) is what stakeholders think of the organisation. Figure 4 has been conceptualised to suggest the relationship between identity, image and reputation. Importantly, this shows that not only can reputation be influenced from inside the organisation but also from the outside. Media, competitors, activist groups and governments for example are capable of delivering 'other images' which may be influential upon reputation or actual image. The influence, and indeed power, of 'externals' suggests that organisations must be proactive in managing their reputation otherwise, others will do it for you.

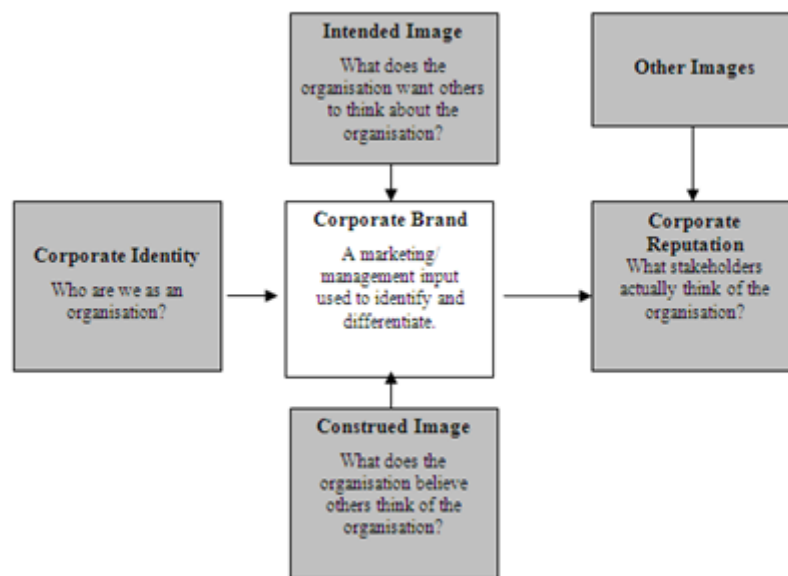


Figure 4: The Concepts of Identity, Brand, Image and Reputation

Figure 4 shows the important role of the corporate brand and corporate brand management. In the general marketing literature, a brand is defined as “*a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify...and to differentiate*” (American Marketing Association 2005) Based on this definition, a corporate brand should be pivotal in defining identity (to identify) and to differentiate by managing the meaning of the facets of image and reputation. Corporate branding should be pivotal in aligning identity, intended image, construed image and reputation. Kerr (2007) argues that a similar goal should be a priority for those charged with place marketing explaining that place branding is:

“The act of communicating the place brand in a manner to deservedly influence the meaning of the location in the minds of the people who matter to the future of the location”.

As with organisations however, places can have multiples of image, identity and reputation; some complementing and some competing. Understanding and managing identity and image is important as not only are their multiples of each, but as Balmer & Greyser (2003 p. 173) state, “humans have to rely on images”, and “there is an *a priori* link between an individual’s image of an organisation and that person’s behaviour towards the organisation”. Positive images can contribute to competitive advantage

(Balmer & Greyser, 2003), reaching corporate goals (Gregory and Wiechmann, 1999) building long-term relationships (Hsieh, 2002) communicating core values and implement effective marketing strategies (Kotler and Keller, 2008).

An important consideration with those involved in corporate marketing, and indeed place marketing, is dealing with multiples of image, identity and reputation very much recognising the pluralist view of organisations and societies. It is the objective of this work to focus on the management of internal stakeholders with a focus on identity and image. To be effective a corporate brand manager needs to be aware of the multiples of identity and image but also understand how each has been formed.

Continuing on from the definitions provided earlier, Hatch and Schultz (2000) state that organisational identity is how organisation members understand “who we are and what we stand for” (p.15) as an organisation, and the degree to which a “member defines him/herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organisation” (p.15). In corporate level marketing, senior managers are faced with a number of challenges, essentially dealing with perceptions of identity from within the organisation as well as dealing with perceptions of image both internal and external to the organisation (shown as 1 to 4 in Figure 2). Notwithstanding the importance of external stakeholders, notably customers, employees, as has been established, have an important role in corporate marketing. For instance a brand-culture gap (de Chernatony, 1999) might be a result of employees not sharing the organisational identity or not believing the projected image.

Managing organisational identity can be achieved through internal branding, which is defined as the shaping of employee’s brand attitudes and behaviours (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) to ensure they successfully deliver the brand promise. A similar objective has been recommended for places with Virgo and de Chernatony (2006) emphasizing the need for checking and validating a place’s vision with its citizens. Places can assist the formation of their reputation through the management of image and identity (Anholt, 2007). However, a place’s identity will not transfer into place image if it is not reinforced or shared by the communities who live there.

Similar to corporate marketing, place marketers need a comprehensive understanding of their target market's needs, attitudes and behaviours in order to develop the marketing strategy. In line with the strategic planning process, target segments are grouped on the basis of certain measurable, actionable and attractive characteristics (Cravens and Piercy, 2009). Without an understanding of the place consumer, place marketers take on greater and unnecessary risks, particularly if they spend large sums of taxpayer funds on inadequately planned promotional campaigns (Mataxas, 2009).

Compared to corporations, because of the broad scope and wide geographic coverage and often the inability to exclude some place consumers, the target markets for a place may be more difficult to define. Also internally, places do not have the same structures as corporations and can be best described as a 'melting pot' with varied beliefs, perceptions and opinions regarding their own consumption of the place and how they portray it to others. Also differing from employees in corporations, is that residents of a place, are to a greater extent, both deliverers and consumers of the place brand (Florek, *et al.* 2006). As internal stakeholders, the marketing concept supports the acquisition and understanding of residents' needs, expectations and attitudes, if a holistic marketing approach is to be applied.

The Research Need

This research contributes to a better understanding of place identity and place image. To achieve what Anholt (2004) refers to as competitive identity, places need to know how they compare on the facets of place identity and what might be unique facets. Secondly, place marketers need to be aware if there is a gap between place identity and place image as ultimately, depending on the size and nature of the gap (see Figure 5) take corrective action and additional confirmatory research. The focus in this research will be on the role of residents and will examine their attitude towards their place identity and how they consider members of target markets (outsiders) think about their place (construed image as shown '3' in Figure 2.).

While the facets of place identity and construed image will be discussed in the next section, an example of possible gaps and the implications of each is shown in Figure 5 which considers the level of alignment between place identity and construed place image using the facet of 'friendliness'.

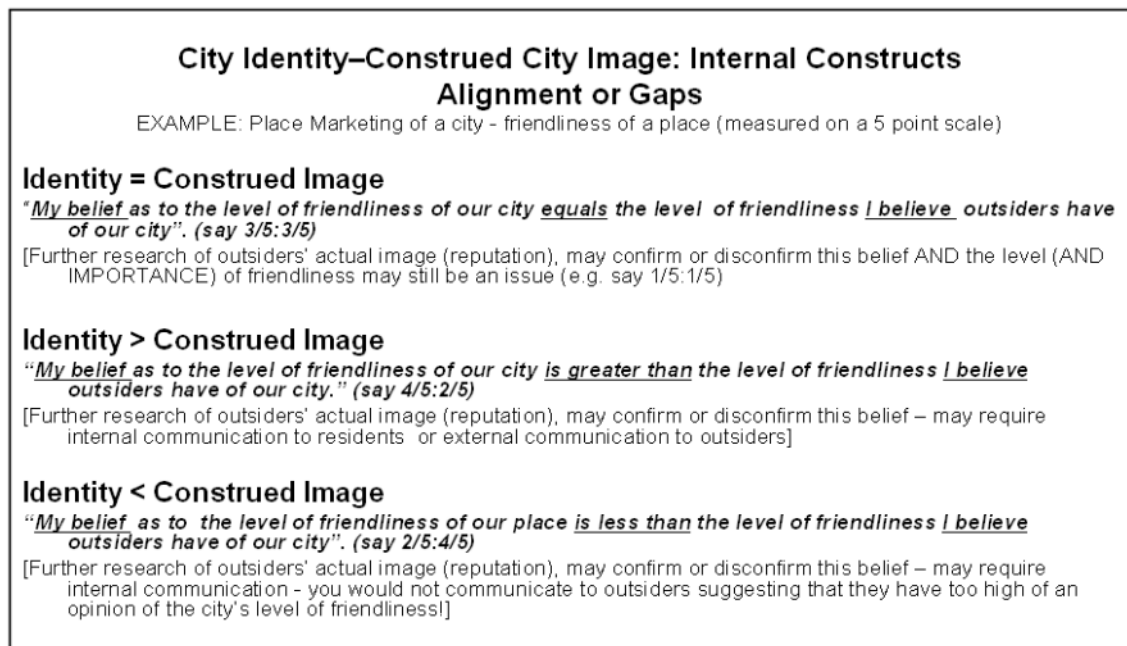


Figure 5: City Identity –Construed City Image: The facet of friendliness

The objectives of this research are:

1. To apply constructs of identity and construed image to places,
2. To identify generic facets of place identity and construed place image,
3. To develop a survey instrument which can:
 - i. measure and identify gaps between facets of place identity and construed place image of a place, at a point in time,
 - ii. identify differences between internal segments as to place identity and construed place image , e.g. long-term -v- short term residents, professions, (multiple identities),
 - iv. monitor changes in facets of place identity and construed place image of a place, over time,
 - v. compare facets of place identity and construed place image between places at a point in time, and over time [Particularly places within a competitive set e.g. cities of the same size],
 - vi. identify place specific facets of place identity and construed place image,
 - vi. be the basis of recommendations to place marketers to be able to recommend corrective actions internally or confirmatory research to establish facets of actual image (reputation) of a place held by relevant external stakeholders.

The process undertaken to achieve these objectives is explained in the next section.

The Research Phases

This project consists of four phases which are explained below. The fourth phase of implementation has yet to be undertaken.

Phase 1 was to identify the generic attributes (or facets), which can be used to describe the identity and image of a place. This was done by an extensive review of the literature from a number of disciplines. These are summarised in Table 1. From the list, those which could be generic were identified. This was done by the researches and the advice of academics and practitioners. The facets selected are provided in the next section which also deals with measurement.

Descriptive Words	Reference
Safe - unsafe; Clean - dirty; Friendly - unfriendly	Zikmund (2007)
Distressing; Relaxing ; Gloomy; Exciting; Sleepy; Arousing; Unpleasant - Pleasant; Isolated - Accessible; Cold; Friendly; Lively; Stagnant; Interesting - Boring; Quiet - Noisy; Overcrowded - Sparse; Contemporary; Modern; Sophisticated; Traditional; Conservative; Refined; Civilised; Eccentric; Down to earth; Honest; Welcoming; Romantic; Open-minded; Unorthodox; Vibrant; Creative.	Ekinici & Hosany (2006)
Innocent; Feminine; Friendly; Romantic; Old; Safe; Interesting; Vibrant; Pretty; Sophisticated; Natural Harmonious.	Kotler (1993)
Exciting - Boring; High status - Low status; Calming; Distressing; Safe - Unsafe	Nassar (1998)
Laidback; Friendly; Strong; Proud; Sense of humour; The real thing; Honest; Rugged; Wise; Straightforward; Soul-searching; Change of pace; Out of the way; Different way of living and looking at the world; Original	Housego (2006)
Creative; Unpretentious; Energetic; Eclectic; Hard-working; Resilient; Smart; Innovative; Cosmopolitan; Open; Welcoming; Receptive; Encouraging.	Wollongong Image Strategy (1999)
Built Environment; Concrete jungle; Valuable Workers, Value-added employment	Virgo and de Chernatony (2006)
Self-serving; Exciting - boring; Caring - uncaring; Relaxed - tense	Consultation with academics/practitioners

Table 1: Descriptives of Place Identity – Place Image

Phase 2 was to determine the most appropriate scale to measure perceptions of residents with regard to identity and construed image. Ekinci and Hosany (2006) recommended the use of Osgood's (Osgood, *et al.* 1957) semantic-differential scale. Aaker *et al.* (2008 p.221) explains the semantic-differential scale as able to "describe the set of beliefs that comprise a person's image of an organisation or brand". The semantic-differential scale has the ability to gather "cognitive and affective data for any given factor" (Hair, *et al.* 2000), produce reliable quantitative data and facilitate profile analysis (Aaker *et al.* 2005; Evans, 1980; Zikmund, 2003). The selected facets were measured on a 5-point semantic-differential scale.

	Very	Moderately	Neither one nor the other	Moderately	Very	
Unfriendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Friendly
Dirty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Clean
Unsafe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Safe
Boring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Exciting
Uncaring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Caring
Stressful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Relaxed
Unromantic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Romantic
Lazy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Hard- working
Noisy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Quiet
Old	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	New
Unhealthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Healthy
Uneducated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Educated
Declining	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Thriving
Unsophisticated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Sophisticated

Figure 6: Generic Facets of Place Identity and Construed City Image

Phase 3 was to develop the questionnaire. Care was taken in the construction of the questionnaire to ensure the language and questions used could be easily deciphered by a general respondent regardless of their location, education or age. As image and identity is subjective in nature and the meanings of words may differ across individuals or remain consistent within a collective (Szalay and Deese, 1978) questions to identify each respondent's demographic characteristics such as profession, age, location and length of residence were collected. As the facets of image and construed identity achieved are the same the questionnaire was structured to ensure that there was a break (by the insertion of the socio-demographic questions) between identity questions and construed image questions. Also, two open-ended questions regarding residents' *likes* and *dislikes* about their place were included. These questions were added to identify place specific facets of identity and image (although some may be later found to be generic). A sample questionnaire for the City of Wollongong has been prepared and is attached.

Phase 4 will be the implementation of the research which has yet to be undertaken. It is proposed to implement the questionnaire in a number of small towns of similar size within NSW. These are smaller units of study compared to larger cities and best suited to pilot this research.

Conclusion

This work has established the importance of identity and image in place marketing and the important role local residents play in place marketing. What *they believe* about their place and what *they think others believe* about their place are important considerations for a place marketer. By establishing a generic set of facets of place identity and place image, marketers are able to identify gaps between place identity and construed place image and take appropriate action. An analysis of respondents may identify differences between groups within a place. Importantly the survey instrument can be used to between places at and over time.

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Attachment 1 - Questionnaire
Place Identity and Image Questionnaire
School of Management and Marketing
University of Wollongong

Dear Respondent,

We are undertaking a research subject at the University of Wollongong. The aim of our research is to learn about the perceptions of residents and non-residents towards Wollongong.

Your name is not recorded and no attempt will be made to match any answers with an individual's name.

*Thanks for your support,
Jess Baxter,
School of Management and Marketing,
University of Wollongong.*

The purpose of this research is to collect information from persons who are residents of the City of Wollongong and over 18 years of age.

1. Are you over 18 years of age
(Please tick appropriate answer)

☐ Yes. Please proceed to Q2.

☐ No. There is no need to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your interest.

2. Are you a resident of the City of Wollongong?
(Please tick appropriate answer)

☐ Yes. Please proceed to the next page.

☐ No. What is your home town or city? _____

What is the purpose of your visit to Wollongong?

*There is no need to complete the rest of the questionnaire.
Thank you for your interest.*

Part 1

3. How do you rate Wollongong with regard to the following?

(Please place a tick in the box you consider the most appropriate)

[illegible]

Part 2

4. How long have you been a resident of Wollongong? *(Please tick appropriate answer)*

- ☐ less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 to 2 years
- ☐ 3 to 5 years
- ☐ 6 to 9 years
- ☐ 10+ years

5. What is your postcode? _____

6. Which category best describes your employment situation? *(Please tick appropriate answer)*

- ☐ Professional
- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Trade
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Domestic Student
- ☐ International Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* _____

7. What is your gender? *(Please tick)*

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

8. What is your age category? *(Please tick)*

- ☐ 18- 25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56+

9. Which of the following best describes you? *(Please tick correct response)*

- ☐ Single – no dependent children
- ☐ Single – dependent children
- ☐ Married/partnered – no dependent children
- ☐ Married/partnered – dependent children

10. Where were you born? *(Please tick appropriate answer)*

- ☐ Wollongong/Illawarra
- ☐ Another part of NSW
- ☐ Interstate (Within Australia but outside of NSW)
- ☐ Overseas

11. How satisfied are you living in Wollongong? *(Please tick appropriate answer)*

<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Moderately Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Moderately Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>
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☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

12. What do you like most about Wollongong?

13. What do you dislike most about Wollongong?

Part 3

14. How do you think people **LIVING OUTSIDE** of Wollongong would rate Wollongong with regard to the following?

(Please place a tick in the box you consider the most appropriate)

	<i>Very</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Neither one nor the other</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Very</i>	
Unfriendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Friendly
Dirty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Clean
Unsafe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Safe
Boring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Exciting
Uncaring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Caring
Stressful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Relaxed
Unromantic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Romantic

Again, how do you think people **LIVING OUTSIDE** of Wollongong would rate Wollongong with regard to the following?

Lazy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Hard-working
Noisy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Quiet
Old	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	New
Unhealthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Healthy
Uneducated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Educated
Declining	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Thriving
Unsophisticated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Sophisticated

THANK-YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.