



Lessons from Place Branding in Tasmania

Here I review the development of a [Tasmanian Brand Guide](#) as a transparent and instructive example of place brand identity development that can be informative for place leaders whether working at different geographical scales to capture and communicate the essence of their place. In doing so I focus on the lessons about the rigours of the brand identity process, the achievable focus on internal stakeholders and the distinctiveness of the resultant place branding. I end this assessment by looking at how the Tasmanian brand has evolved since the guide was created.

Showcasing the workings of brand identity

The Tasmanian Brand Guide produced in 2006 was unusual amongst place branding practice in that it shows its workings in public. In particular, the guide showcased some of the methodology and outputs from the place branding identity process that is often hidden behind the scenes.

The approach taken in creating and implementing the Tasmanian Brand Guide also had a strong focus on involving and serving local stakeholders that ran through it and might be considered ahead of its time. This resonates with a current coming together of placemaking and destination management disciplines that focus on improving places as part of a deep-rooted enhancement of brand identity and hence image.

This can be informative to place leaders who want to learn more about the process of developing an authentic place brand. It shows that there is a methodical approach that helps serve the interests of stakeholders in a place and that can also improve the experience of its target markets.

By developing a sophisticated understanding of a place's brand identity in this way, place leaders can go on to present a brand - whether for a country or a town - in a way that will resonate with

both the local community and those that they are seeking to visit or invest in that community. The Tasmanian example addresses a particular bugbear of mine, that place branding is not simply about creating a new logo but is based on a systematic process to identify what is distinctive about a place and reflect how this is subsequently communicated.

Lessons in place brand theory

Before saying more about the Tasmanian Brand Guide, I want to share some of the theory behind place branding practice. This explanation draws on my participation in a recent course led by Dr. Magdalena Florek of the [International Place Branding Academy](#) (IPBA). As a place practitioner who has long seen the local community value in strengthening place brands, this course was very helpful in filling the gaps in my knowledge and helping me to become more precise in how I refer to processes involved.

My recent IPBA course focused on the methods to define place brand identity. Identity is at the heart of branding, cannot be imposed or artificial and underpins subsequent local 'ownership' of the place brand and its communication. Local stakeholders will see through this, and visitors may have artificial expectations



created that cannot be fulfilled. The process of defining place brand identity, therefore, needs to be conducted carefully.

Speaking the place branding language

Capturing a detailed understanding of a place's brand identity is pivotal and can help transform users' original, organic image of a place to create a more desired and representative image. This process is known as developing the place brand identity.

In the context of place branding, image and identity can be distinguished in the following way:

- brand image is the perception of a place held by the user.
- brand identity specifies the meaning, aim and desired image of a place.

Place branding is a relatively new and evolving discipline. As such there is not as yet an 'industry standard' approach for developing a place's brand identity. Instead, there are various methodologies for developing a place brand identity. What is important though is that a systematic approach is followed that assesses key elements including the brand attributes, benefits and core values.

As explained by Magdalena Florek, amongst the best known and commonly used models are those with their roots in product branding. Such place brand identity models include the Brand Prism, Brand Wheel and the Brand Pyramid. The relative simplicity of such models makes them manageable to understand and apply. Places are, however, more complex than a bottle of Coca-Cola and involve multiple stakeholders in 'place'. The

application of these models to place as such has limitations. As we will see later in relation to the Tasmanian example, the Brand Pyramid is an example of an approach that is often applied in place branding with some modifications.

Other examples of place brand identity models have evolved from corporate branding. Approaches such the Brand DNA model reflect that corporations have a much broader offer and involve a wide range of stakeholders.

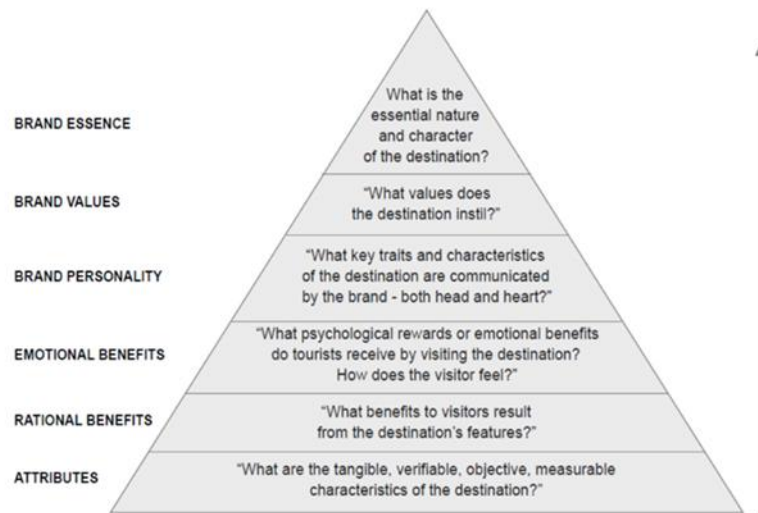
Applying the Place Branding Pyramid approach

The Brand Pyramid is one of the simplest and longest-used approaches. It is the approach adopted and adapted in creating the Tasmanian Brand Guide. The Place Brand Pyramid represents the process as a series of steps that help focus in on the brand essence.

The Place Brand Pyramid creates a brand logically from an assessment of a locality's main attributes to focus in on the defining the essence of the place. The approach has become popular in both destination marketing and for more comprehensive place branding strategies.

It is enlightening for me as a locally-focused, place-maker to understand that the place brand identity process and the distillation of the brand essence, are usually undertaken with the customer or beneficiary in mind. What is more limiting is that this 'marketing-oriented' approach, can limit other aspects of place branding, such as the co-creation of values, if unmodified.





Unlike product brands, successful place brands depend on being created through a “bottom-up” process that grows from and with the community it represents. Co-creation of place identity refers to the meaning-making process involving residents.

Creation of the Tasmanian place brand identity

The Tasmanian Place Guide was developed using a truncated, four stage version of the Place Brand Pyramid.

a. Brand attributes

Brand attributes define the place and the competitive, distinguishing advantages -the unique, tangible and verifiable characteristics of the place. The Tasmanian Brand Guide detailed how the attributes were defined, including physical characteristics such as its island status and more subjective

perceptions such as the strong sense of community and the resourceful, creative, friendly and genuine people.

b. Brand benefits

The Tasmanian Brand Guide took a broad perspective on beneficiaries and describes brand benefits as the “*physical and emotional advantages that Tasmania provides to residents, visitors and customers.*” It blended the assessment of rational benefits such as the island’s “*clean air and water, fertile soil and a disease-free status*”, with emotional benefits such as the apparent “*less complicated island lifestyle*”.

The Tasmanian Guide did not include a stage for the identification of brand personality that is used in extended versions of the brand pyramid.

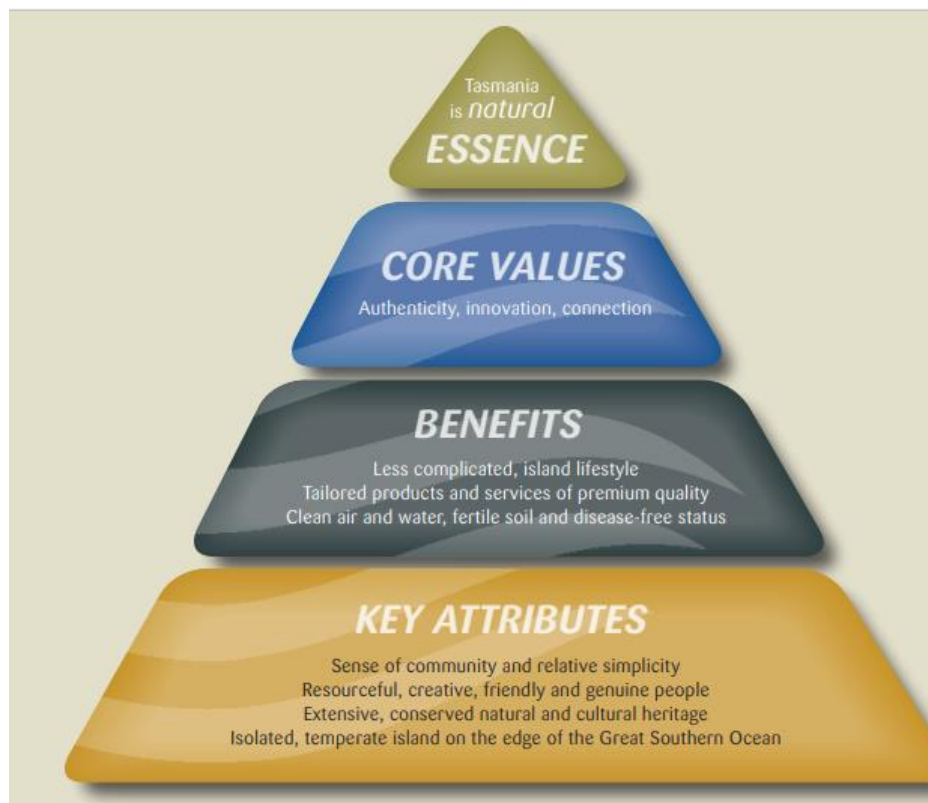
c. Core values

The Tasmanian Guide stated that core values need to “reflect the brand’s most prized characteristics and describe its tone and style”. Interestingly, an important emphasis was placed on local perspectives. The guide said that core values are the unique characteristics of the place and its people that “*both internal and external stakeholders value above all else*”. Tasmania’s stated core brand values were authenticity, innovation and connection.

d. Brand essence

The Tasmanian Guide defined the brand essence as “*the stakeholder’s simple summary of what the brand stands for. It is what makes the place distinctive - it is the promise of the place.*”





The Brand Guide reported how research over a number of years has confirmed that “*Tasmania owns natural.*” This was taken as natural not just in the physical sense, but also emotionally and culturally.

The guide related this back to the core values of authenticity and the connection that creates a strong sense of community. The conclusion was that values, benefits and attributes ascribed to the Tasmanian brand can be summed up with the simple though inspirational statement: “*Tasmania -your natural advantage*”.

The role of internal stakeholders in the Tasmanian brand

From a place-making perspective, the 2006 Tasmanian Place Guide is illuminating for how it started by defining the two reasons to engage in branding a place: “*The first is to project a positive image to the global marketplace; the second is to encourage pride by its citizens*”. Arguably the guide focused first on the latter.

The Tasmanian Guide sought to help deliver a strong and coordinated brand for the region that engages an internal and external audience. Place branding it concluded, “*is about aligning the messages a place already sends to the world with a strong, shared vision, and moving towards achieving that vision using the skills of people who live in the place, and investment from outside*”.

The Tasmanian Brand Guide explained how branding a place is much more than general promotion. It set-out how a place can communicate with its stakeholders through a number of channels; the most obvious channel being a tourism strategy that markets the place as a visitor destination. The guide went onto say that “*places also communicate through their culture, investment and population recruitment strategies, their people, public policy and the strong brands that are associated with a particular place.*”

Beyond serving as an aid to destination marketing, the guide advocated that the development and management of the Tasmanian brand can be seen as the strategic communication strategy for a broader government and community vision represented through “*Tasmania Together*”. As such, it was part of delivering an essential strategy for “*creating a proud and*



confident society where our people live in harmony and prosperity”.

By showing the workings of its place brand identity process in public, the Tasmanian Brand Guide was practicing what it preaches to bring local stakeholders with it on a journey. For a wider audience of place leaders grappling with encouraging high value visitors or inward investment, whilst seeking to boost local ‘pride in place’, it is an example of how to achieve this in a methodical and engaging way. In this regard, the intent in developing the Tasmanian Brand Guide might be considered ahead of its time.

As Magdalena Florek writes about regularly and explained to our cohort of international students, the internal perspective of place is key, followed by the related external perspective which comes second. This is because local people are key co-creators, components and beneficiaries of the place brand. Their involvement is key in both identifying and implementing brand identity.

Places have a vision which results from the locals’ needs and aspirations. A place’s mission and vision should not be disregarded in a place brand identity model because they can contribute to an understanding of brand values and the intended direction future direction of travel.

Evolution of the Tasmanian brand

One of the measures of an effective place brand identity process is the longevity and adaptability of the emerging brand. Authentic place brands can be adapted in the way they are communicated to different audiences. Image and captured

brand identity will usually evolve gradually alongside investment and place-making on the ground. We should though expect to see a constant and recognisable thread through such an evolution.

Reading Brand Tasmania’s own assessment of the evolution of its brand, we can see a thread running through the evolving sophistication of the brand identity process, the distinctiveness of the resultant brand essence and its growing strength of focus on its internal stakeholders. The current branding guidance is less overt about the place branding identity process, though one of Brand Tasmania’s four organisational objectives is to “create a new model of place-branding”.

Brand Tasmania says that its evolving approach reflects that contemporary place branding is about feelings, emotions, and community action. This is an approach that fits more readily with the role of place branding in supporting community-led place-making. It is music to my ears to read the perspective in one of Brand Tasmania’s most recent annual reports, that while place branding “is still about image and reputation, it is not a blend of logos, slogans, labels, taglines, and colour palettes.”

The current place brand values and essence still reflect the importance of nature though as part of a more distinctive and extensive Tasmanian brand identity. There is a stronger focus on the province’s people as attributes and beneficiaries of the Tasmanian brand. As the [Brand Tasmania 2021/22 annual report](#) comments, while it is not wrong to describe Tasmania as “clean and green”, it is a motto we share with places such as New



Zealand and Ireland, along with businesses and city councils all over the world. Evolving the brand means adding a missing element: the Tasmanian people and their values, explaining what makes them different, and articulating what they want to achieve together.”

“*Quietly pursue the extraordinary*” equates to the new brand essence. This is broken down into the following components that are based on the brand values:

- **Quiet:** Tasmanians are humble, quietly confident, and cool while the rest of the world is increasingly loud and hot.
- **Pursuit:** We’re isolated, so we’ve had to be inventive. We were underestimated, so nothing is ever “good enough.” We’ve had to work harder together, to make determination a core of our culture. The Bass Strait means everything from here is more expensive, so we have learned to focus on the boutique, the bespoke, on “better, not more.”
- **The extraordinary:** This is about quality taking precedence over quantity, on privileging the unusual, and on our choice to protect the wilderness and our environment.

The current Tasmanian brand has extended the earlier strong focus on local stakeholders in a way that offers continued synergies for place-makers. This is for three reasons that can be shared with collective approaches to place-making:

- The realisation that a place brand has to include its people and what makes them different to be authentic.
- The realism that with limited resources, partnering with private, public and community stakeholders, is cost-effective in empowering residents to tell their story.
- The core philosophy that the place brand is a shared public asset to be nurtured, enhanced and promoted collectively.

Applying our lessons from Tasmania

The development of place brand identity in Tasmania offers encouragement and an example for place leaders struggling in balancing external marketing whilst seeking to boost local ‘pride in place’. It underlines how to achieve this in a methodical way that captures place brand identity, engages local stakeholders and enables the communication of an authentic brand.

Credits:

Cover photo is from *Brand Tasmania Strategic Plan 2019-2024*.

Brand Pyramid on page 4 is from a *Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management* (2009)

The example Brand Pyramid on page 5 is taken from the *Tasmanian Brand Guide* (2006)

