

# Brand-driven identity development of places

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to present an interdisciplinary approach for the development and design of place brands, which goes far beyond communication strategies and advertising campaigns. The so-called “Brand-driven Identity Development of Places” (short: BIDP) approach provides a structured three-phase model that can serve as a practical guide for the development of commercial, touristy, urban and rural places.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Longitudinal collaborative action research over a time span of 20 years plus extended case study research supported the evolution of the BIDP approach.

**Findings** – BIDP is a circular three-phase model starting with the definition of the intended place brand identity, which in Phase 2 becomes translated into concrete touchpoint experiences along the main constituents of the place, and finally materialising into the new place format. The case study of the City of Innsbruck is prototypically used to illustrate the application of the designed approach and to report achieved results.

**Research limitations/implications** – Place brand development based on translating socio-cultural meanings into touchpoint experiences to materialise and align place constituents is opening up new avenues to initiate and govern place development. At present, the approach is based on case studies in the western region of Austria and South Tyrol.

**Practical implications** – The three-phase model represents a practical tool for place brand managers, who want to renew and to develop their place format in a structured way. The BIDP model can be applied for all forms of places.

**Social implications** – Foremost, the described place branding collaborations reassure the proposition of Olins (2002) and Schmidt (2007) that place branding is a crucial internal project that unites groups of people around a common strategic vision providing sense and direction besides reaching out to the traditional customer–stakeholder audience.

**Originality/value** – A structured model for brand-driven place development, which evolved during 20 years of longitudinal collaborative action research with executives and representatives of commercial, touristy, urban and rural places, BIDP locks into anthropological research findings where cultural meanings are considered as the main source for the construction of brand identities.

**Keywords** Brand-driven identity development, Cultural meaning systems, Materialization, Place brand identity, Public leadership and management, Touchpoint experiences

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

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## Introduction

The identity of places is an important issue, coming close to being a matter of survival, though not in purely economic terms but rather due to a manifest need to promote identity in times of globalisation, rising competition between territories and increasing churn rates in various regions of the world. This identity need can be partly channelled through the sophisticated use of the traditional concept of the brand. Therefore, brand construction never involves the theming of space; rather, it refers to the discovery and subsequent promotion of its identity roots (de San Eugenio Vela, 2013).

Commentators on place branding agree that it is clearly a multi- and cross-disciplinary field (Hankinson, 2010). The nature of the endeavour is such that the contribution and integration of several areas of study is necessary to explain the application of branding to places (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Furthermore, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005, 2008) and Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010) highlight that the process of place branding should go beyond communication and promotion strategies, involving spatial planning and design to impact the physical embodiment and appearance of the place. Finally, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) propose an interactional view and participatory place branding practices to bring the established and intended place brand to the surface.

Hence, in this paper, an interdisciplinary leadership approach for the development of places – more specifically for the development of urban and rural place brands – is presented. The approach is grounded in anthropological research findings where culture stands as the original source and location of the general abstract categories of meaning from which brands ultimately must draw (McCracken, 1986). These categories represent fundamental coordinates of meanings used to interpret brands and reveal connected associations (Mark and Pearson, 2001; Bauernfeind, 2003; Batey, 2015). These socio-cultural meanings are the main source for the construction of brand identities, which refer to the central, distinctive and enduring tangible and intangible attributes of places (Chreim, 2000; Albert and Whetten, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Scott and Lane, 2000). If citizens, visitors and other stakeholders can grasp their inner meanings and their interpretation creates positive resonance in their minds and hearts, places will continue to exist and attract new populations, thus securing their survival in the long term (Botschen and Webhofer, 2012). Over time, a particular portfolio of meanings becomes attributed to the particular place and becomes the place brand identity.

After a short description of the role and relevance of socio-cultural meanings for brand creation, a slightly modified version of the concept of place brand as “set of resonating cultural meanings” is provided. Then a thorough depiction of the “Brand-driven Identity Development” approach (BIDP) is presented. The BIDP procedure has been evolving over two decades of practitioner–researcher collaboration applying action research approaches and techniques with top executives of public and owners of privately held organisations. For the purpose of this paper, the development of the brand identity of the City of Innsbruck[1] is prototypically used to demonstrate the applied procedure and report selected achieved results.

## Place brand and place brand identities in a socio-cultural perspective

According to McCracken’s (1986) original meaning-making model, culture stands as the original source and location of the general abstract categories of meaning from which brands ultimately must draw. These cultural categories may reach from terminal and instrumental values (Rokeach, 1968), e.g. represented through archetypes (Mark and Pearson, 2001), over functional, relational or symbolic notions to concrete attributes or behaviour, e.g. gestures, mimics or other signals. Applying Gutman’s (1982) means-end theory, these abstract or more concrete cultural categories can be grouped into attributes, benefits and values representing fundamental

coordinates of cultural meanings for the creation of a particular brand. Over time, affected stakeholders attribute particular meaning sets derived from accumulated multisensory touchpoint interactions and experiences (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) to organisations. If these attributed meanings create enduring positive resonance, organisational, respectively place brands evolve. Referring to Aaker's (1996) and Batey's (2015) widely cited definitions of brands such as "a [...] multidimensional construct, consisting of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind" or rather "a [...] is a cluster of associations concerning attributes, benefits, and values", the following slightly modified definition is proposed: a brand, more specifically an organisational brand, can be defined as a set of resonating cultural meanings created through multiple attractive touchpoint experiences during interactions with affected system partners.

This definition:

- moves the brand on the organisational level, which drives the whole existence of the company respectively place (Hatch and Schulz, 2008) on the one hand and uses the brand as an operational device for touchpoint management at the same time (Aaker, 1996);
- relates resonating cultural meanings to the set of mental associations which are driven by reproduced positive touchpoint experiences (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) resulting in established drivers and impeders of the success of brands;
- complements Aaker's and Batey's brand concepts through a crucial process component referring to the claimed dynamic character of the place product (Warnaby and Medway, 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015);
- supports the relational creation of an organisational brand (Lury, 2004) via on-going interactions with the physical, functional, social and symbolic constituents of the particular place (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; Mueller and Schade, 2012); and
- considers the whole brand creation process in a dynamic participatory stakeholder process (Gioia *et al.*, 2013; Mühlbacher and Hemetsberger, 2013).

This definition also fits Zenker and Braun's (2010) understanding of place branding as the process used by public administrations that intend to create place brands, networks of associations in the target groups' minds:

[...] based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design.

"Place branding can even be considered as a "governance strategy for projecting images and managing perceptions about places" (Braun *et al.*, 2014, p. 64).

From these points of view, a construct of brand identity can be derived which consists of externally "free of charge" available socio-cultural meaning fields and the company's driving core competence. The latter matches Collins and Parros' (1986) description of the company's core value and core purpose. It represents the historic and (modified) future central competence of the specific organisation and represents the fundamental base to continuously approach the intended meanings system in the long run.

Hence, place brand identities can be considered as unique combinations of socio-cultural meanings. This means that particular places can represent and be associated with relevant groups of stakeholders in the long term. Embedded into the unique portfolio of socio-cultural meanings is the driving core competence of the place.

This way place brands become carriers of socio-cultural meanings in established and newly created contexts and can be defined as resonating socio-cultural meaning-portfolios

driven by the company's core competence and created through all touchpoint experiences of the particular place (Botschen and Webhofer, 2012).

Through the combination of resonating identity historical roots and promising future meaning paths, any place can create long-lasting competitive advantages (Balderjahn, 2004; Matzler *et al.*, 2011).

Figure 1 shows paradigmatically the interplay between the intended meanings system and the core driver of the future brand identity of Arillas, a village on the Greek island Corfu.

The above conceptualisation is based on the analysis of several touchpoint experiences and interviews with system partners in Arillas during April 2016. As can be seen from the figure, the core has been specified as "harmonising body and soul in natural beauty", representing a crucial competence for any type of system partner, e.g. visitors, citizens or other business partners. The surrounding cultural meaning fields work as the main attractors again internally and externally.

Below the authors describe their applied methodology to develop a structured procedure for the systematic development of the strategic brand identity of places.

### Methodology

This longitudinal research project adheres to the assumptions of social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2005). Transformative researchers felt that the constructivist approach according to which knowledge is constructed through interaction with others needs to be intertwined with a political agenda and an action agenda that may change the lives of institutions and their participants (Creswell, 2003). The latter seems important in the context of place development as well.

Thus, the methodology applied (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) in this longitudinal research is grounded in the basic premises of case study (Yin, 1984) and action research. Longitudinal examination of multiple cases provides a systematic way of observing events, collecting data, analysing data and reporting the results over a long period. In developing the BIDP approach, this multiple-case design permitted replicating cases through pattern-matching, and in this way continuously enhancing and supporting previous results. This helps raise the level of confidence in the robustness of the method. Knowledge produced by action research has "thematic patterns derived from inquiry in one setting" (Argyris and Schön, 1989) and is aimed at describing the change process. The taken action research approach



**Figure 1.**  
Example of brand  
identity of the Greek  
village Arillas on  
Corfu

allowed developing and fine-tuning of theories and approaches about brand-oriented organisational development and about the change processes that derived (Rapoport, 1970; Walton and Gaffney, 1989). The involved researchers intervened into the problem situation to improve the self-help competencies at the managerial level (Susman and Evered, 1978), as well as to facilitate a learning process at the organizational level (Argyris and Schön, 1978, 1996). The researchers' positionality along Herr and Anderson's (2005) proposed continuum can be best described as "insider/outsider teams working in reciprocal collaboration".

The mode of inquiry was cyclical and led to new theoretical insights regarding phases of place brand development and necessary organizational change processes. As stated by Mertens (2007), researchers can choose quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods, but there should be an interactive link between the researcher and the participants in the definition of the problem, methods should be adjusted to accommodate cultural complexity, power issues should be explicitly addressed and issues of discrimination and oppression should be recognized.

Hence, methods for data gathering, diagnosing and action planning were workshops, mind mapping, presentations, discussion rounds analysing the organization's history, qualitative interviews and collaging as well as designs for future actions (Mertens, 1999) where consideration/exploration of future options were seen as part of the inquiry process. The participants consisting of crucial lead bodies, carefully selected members of a microcosm of the particular place and the researchers executed the activities collaboratively. The role of participants was dualistic, they engaged as subjects and as co-researchers, as they actively participated in the generation of the various phases and corresponding results of the framework (Whyte *et al.*, 1989).

A detailed description of the methods and tools applied is given in each phase of the "Brand-driven Identity Development of Places" (BIDP) framework, which is presented in the next chapter. As indicated above, the approach is the result of longitudinal multi-case action research over a period of 20 years. The cases comprise touristic places such as Ischgl, Serfaus, Fiss, Ladis in Tyrol or Zell am See in Salzburg, cities like Innsbruck, rural areas, e.g. the Martell Valley in South Tyrol and the development of commercial places, for example the food-retailer Interspar, a hypermarket chain in Austria; the Bäcker Ruetz, a regional bakery chain; and Mpreis and Baguette, a supermarket and bistro café in Western Austria. In this paper, the recent case of the City of Innsbruck illustrates the framework. It integrates and represents the entire knowledge gained during two decades of collaborative inquiries to conceptualise the present version of the BIDP framework.

### **A framework for brand-driven identity development of places (BIDP)**

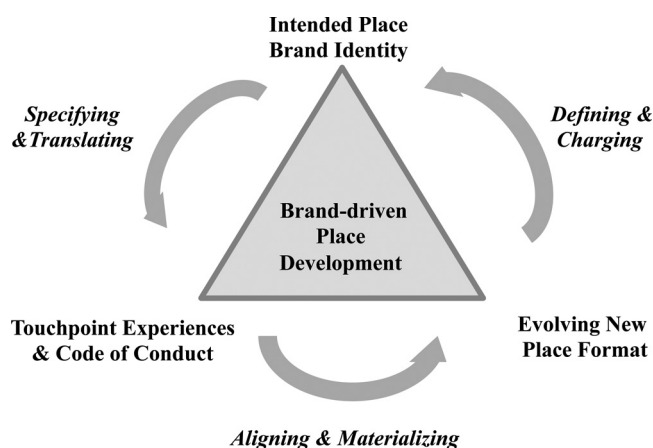
After 20 years of long-term collaborations (Dewey, 1938; Argyris and Schön, 1996) to develop and implement intended brand identities in multiple cases, the BIDP framework reflects knowledge gains from interdisciplinary research fields such as:

- organisational identity forming investigations, which identified and suggest the first stage models for identity development (Gioia *et al.*, 2010, 2013; Kroezen and Heugens, 2012);
- organisational development studies about top management's discourse on identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1996);
- Nutt's (1997) proposal that lead bodies can facilitate the implementation by providing a compelling projected identity;
- political phenomenon research on the concept of soft power, which arises from the ability to create attraction through the meanings of a country's culture (Nye, 2004);

- Senge's (1990) research on the learning organisation;
- Kotter's (2007) and Dannemiller Tyson Associates' (2000, 2005) findings on change management;
- qualitative market research (Geertz, 1994) and creativity techniques (Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010); and
- the insight that brand development is first and foremost an internal project that unites groups of people around a common strategic vision providing sense and direction besides reaching out to the traditional customer–stakeholder audience (Olins, 2002; Schmidt, 2007).

During the first collaborative inquiries in the early 90s, researchers and a small group of top executives/owners jointly developed the future identity of the organization, typically based on the results of market research with existing customers. In the following projects, the collaborative inquiry was extended into a microcosm of the involved organization. The intended future identity development became based on in-depth research with the members of the microcosm, additional employees and carefully selected customers and experts as well. This way the generation of a shared mental picture across the whole system was supported and the acceptance for the implementation of derived projects increased. The participatory translation of the intended identity – in the meantime consisting of a driving core competence and attracting socio-cultural meaning fields – into concrete touchpoint experiences further increased the engagement and implementation likelihood of specified projects by affected employees. The originally mainly content-driven approach expanded into a content- *and* process-driven approach where branding turns into a holistic management principle that serves as a tool to govern any type of organizational process such as product development and distribution, marketing or human resource management (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008) in a holistic way (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

At present, BIDP provides a systematic approach for the formation of a place format that is the physical, functional and symbolic embodiment of intended socio-cultural meanings. Figure 2 shows the BIDP framework as a continuous circular process which links the intended brand place identity with the touchpoint experiences and the materializing place format, and in this way continuously “charging” the place brand in a positive way.



**Figure 2.**  
Phase model of  
brand-driven identity  
development of places

Typically the BDP circle starts with an analysis of the historically grown and established identity of the particular place. Based on these results, the intended place brand identity – composed of attracting socio-cultural meanings and the driving core competence of the particular place brand – is created and defined. During Phase 2, the newly defined intended identity becomes translated into concrete multisensory touchpoint experiences and corresponding behavioural rules. At these touchpoints, citizens, visitors and other place partners interact with a particular facet or at a specific encounter of a place constituent, whether it is person-to-person, through a service, an app or any form of place design or communication. During these moments of truth, they consciously or unconsciously judge the quality of the perceived multisensory, emotional and cognitive stimuli and form an opinion (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). In Phase 3, necessary alignments for the fulfilling of the corresponding code of conduct and the enduring achievement of multisensory experiences are designed and implemented. The intended place brand identity becomes materialised and multisensory perceivable. Typically, these alignments concern structural and procedural adaptations and role and behavioural modifications. Positively resonating touchpoint interactions and experiences based on these materialisations and alignments continuously charge the intended place brand. The circular process moves to its next stage, further supporting the evolving of the “new” place brand.

Alongside the three main phases, various tools – instruments or techniques – support the creation of high-quality place brand content and the process of smoothly engaging representatives and members of affected place organisations. This way affected individuals of the particular urban or rural territory have the opportunity to engage with the place’s existing and future brand identity to develop an understanding of them. These interactions allow them to build a shared understanding of what behaviours will be expected when the new intended place identity is being lived (Urde, 2003).

How these three main process elements interconnect in detail and what methods and processes are at work is explained below and prototypically accompanied by the case of the City of Innsbruck, capital of Tyrol, Austria.

### **Phase 1: Determine the intended place brand identity**

In Phase 1, the grown identity of the place is revealed. Based on identified patterns of resonance and underlying meanings, the future place brand identity is conceptualised (Gioia *et al.*, 2010).

#### *Prerequisites*

A crucial prerequisite for the development of the intended brand identity lies in a core team with committed, empowered and – ideally – long-term secured key players of the particular place. If these requirements are absent, a successful initiation and continuation of the brand-building process is rather unlikely. Often the initiator is one person, e.g. the mayor, the head of the tourism board or another important player of a place. If the initiator comes from a lower hierarchical level, he or she needs support from the top level.

In the case of the City of Innsbruck, the governing mayor and the head of the tourism association were the main initiators of the brand-building process.

The next step is the formation of three groups who accompany the three phases of the BDP approach during the entire collaborative inquiry.

*The core group.* The members of the core group act as the steering crew during the whole process; they conduct the collaborative inquiry together with involved researchers and facilitators. They are in charge of quick decisions, which are demanded during the identity-seeking process. In the case of Innsbruck, the core group consisted of the governing

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mayor, the vice-mayor, the head of the tourism association, the head of city marketing and three facilitators.

*The microcosm.* A microcosm follows the idea that you can model the culture and knowledge of a place system in a team of 10 to a 100 representatives (see also: [en.oxforddictionaries.com](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com)).

Thereby representatives who play a decisive role for the particular place need to be identified and motivated to participate. The size of the microcosm varies. In a small village, the microcosm might be less than ten persons. The microcosm serves as a co-creator of the company's future brand identity, promoter of the future shared picture and transmitter of any important step throughout the on-going brand development.

For the City of Innsbruck, the microcosm reached 120 participants covering all areas, e.g. politics, education, chambers, sports, gastronomy, traffic, culture, handicraft, retail, industry and private households.

*The facilitating team.* This team consists of the involved researchers or consultants who guide and moderate through all phases of the BIPD process. Three facilitators accompanied the place development of the City of Innsbruck.

### *Process and method[2]*

The process starts with a *meeting* with all members of the microcosm. The meeting is designed in an open and emergent way and should allow reflection on the history of the place brand. The aim is to craft a big picture about the historically established drivers and impellers of place brand resonance. Selected members of the microcosm hold short *presentations* around the history of the particular place. The role of the researchers is to facilitate an open *discussion* and *reflection* in the plenary.

Then researchers conduct *in-depth interviews* (Creswell, 2003) with members of the microcosm and other relevant system partners of the place. An interview lasts, on average, 2 hours and is conducted and transcribed by the researcher who carries out the content analysis afterwards. Additional interviews will be performed with experts, loyal or critical customers to perform validity checks of the microcosm data afterwards.

*Projective techniques* are used to gain a differentiated understanding and deeper insights into how the brand associations, respectively brand meanings, evolve over time (Soley and Smith, 2008). *Stories and anecdotes* of contact-point experiences are ideally suited to create a deeper understanding of underlying *patterns of positive, negative or missing resonance*. A pattern of resonance evolves through the reproduction of the same contact-point experience over time. The main objective of the application of the various methods and tools lies in the identification of the historically established patterns of resonance and their underlying socio-cultural meanings (Botschen and Webhofer, 2012). Socio-cultural meanings can be any attribute a place wants to be associated with. In the case of the City of Innsbruck, examples of socio-cultural meanings are “in the centre of the alpine world”, “winter sport highlights”, “very good quality of life”, “urban” or “university city”.

The analyst can identify the most promising patterns of resonance in his/her data and conducts a first convergent validity check by comparing the identified stories and patterns throughout his/her conducted interviews. In the Innsbruck case, every researcher conducted and analysed 30 interviews.

Then the researchers compare and reflect on their identified patterns. At this stage, inter-rater reliability typically ranges between 60 and 80 per cent across patterns identified by involved researchers. Conflicting and new views about additional patterns of resonance are intensively discussed and reflected before a new pattern is added, or existing patterns are modified or eliminated. In case of insecurity among researchers, the original interviewee is



contacted or the members of the core group are consulted for additional insights. Every pattern of resonance, positive and negative, becomes formulated as a proposition – including illustrative examples or pictures of contact-point experiences of customers, employees and other stakeholders. All resonance propositions are further described with photos and videos of observed contact-point experiences or statistical data to strengthen the validity and objectivity of the observed pattern. The whole analysis is transformed into an aesthetical power point presentation. During a final “internal” presentation with all involved researchers plus two additional researchers, the consistency and plausibility of all historical resonance drivers is checked and the formulation of the propositions fine-tuned. All propositions describing the central positive and negative resonance patterns unfold the established brand reality of the organisation.

The members of the microcosm reflect on the identified positive and negative patterns of resonance in small teams. Typically, during these *feedback loops*, the success patterns enrich the proudness and patterns of failure, sometimes not conscious due to crowding out effects, increase the level of dissatisfaction with the present situation and create personal consternation, which impacts on intellectual and emotional buy-in.

All three effects – increasing proudness and/or dissatisfaction plus personal consternation – form a beneficial base for the next step, the creation of the future brand identity for the organisation (Dannemiller Tyson Associates, 2000; Kotter, 2007). Thereby, the *designing of collages* in sub-groups of three up to five people of the microcosm evolved as an efficient and effective mechanism for finding meaning fields for the new brand identity (Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010).

Based on the identified patterns of resonance, the future place brand identity becomes developed. Creativity techniques like collaging with the members of the microcosm, *benchmarks, studies and interviews with experts* allow the identification and attraction of new or modified meanings for the intended place identity. Within the collage, tasks groups are asked to apply Kim and Maubourgne’s (2005) *four actions framework* of the blue ocean strategy. There teams have to explore and decide which of the established patterns of resonance should be strengthened, modified/reduced or eliminated and which new ones should be added in the future, including their underlying reasoning.

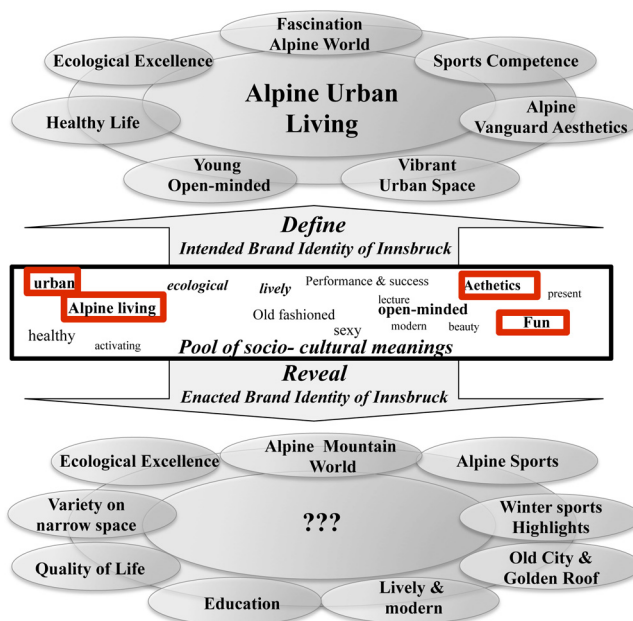
In an *iterative process* of adding, modifying and eliminating socio-cultural meanings, the researchers try to compose a brand identity, which optimizes its resonating power for the next decades. Together with the identification of the future meanings, the formulation of the core drive emerges. The future driving core competence delivers the basis to successfully occupy the intended meaning-system. The integration of core driver and intended brand meanings bears the new strategic brand identity. Via applications of *heuristic reasoning techniques*, the most attracting set of socio-cultural meanings together with their core driving competences are created and reflected, respectively, fine-tuned with the members of the core team.

In a final step of Phase 1, the new brand identity is presented to the microcosm and *officially acclaimed* – ideally supported via creative rituals – as the place’s steering wheel for the next decade.

#### *Results of the Innsbruck case*

Figure 3 shows the results of the established [3] and the mechanism for the future identity of the City of Innsbruck on an aggregated level, the so-called big picture (Kim and Maubourgne, 2005).

The creation of the intended identity is based on established, partly modified meanings and on attractive new meanings, which are drawn from the “endless pool” of cultural codes, indicated through question marks in the middle of Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Defining present and future brand identity of City of Innsbruck

The future driving core competence is called “Innsbruck fascinates through alpine-urban impressions and experiences and inspires an active and vital style of life”, or rather as short version “Alpine Urban Living”. Innsbruck’s driving core is linked to seven meaning fields, which should keep existing citizens, system partners and visitors and attract new ones in the future. The following seven socio-cultural meanings were identified as being the most promising attractors of the future City of Innsbruck:

- (1) Fascination Alpine World;
- (2) Sports Competence;
- (3) Alpine Vanguard Aesthetics;
- (4) Vibrant Urban Space;
- (5) Young Open minded;
- (6) Healthy Life; and
- (7) Ecological Excellence.

Each of the seven meaning fields is described by a short reasoning with some examples and principles that explain why the specific meaning field will attract citizens, visitors and other stakeholders in the long term. As an example, the meaning field “Fascination Alpine World” disposes of the following descriptions:

This meaning will attract citizens, visitors and other partners in the future because:

- The alpine nature has fascinated people for centuries. The Alpine region represents nativeness and a valuable balance for civilisation stamped life.
- The immediate and direct embeddedness of Innsbruck into the alpine mountains represents a unique sensation worldwide. This creates extraordinary attracting power.

*Guiding strategic principles – examples*

- (1) Innsbruck offers the fascination of the alpine mountains in all possible facets to its citizens and visitors at the same time, e.g.:
  - forces of nature, nativeness, mystics, customs, tradition, deceleration, Wow-effects, “Memorial-Tattoos”
- (2) Through appropriate offers and activities, incomparable experiences and adventures are created, e.g.:
  - alpine entertainment, extreme- and fun-sports, dramaturgy of alps experiences: river Inn, Alpenzoo, Seegrube and Hafelekar

All other meaning fields together with the driving core competence are described in a similar way. This description of the new brand identity provides the frame for all decisions and activities for the intended place developments. The main steps of Phase 1 can be summarized as follows:

- *Step 1:* Identifying socio-cultural meanings that were relevant in the past.
- *Step 2:* Defining a pool of socio-cultural meanings that should become relevant in the future.
- *Step 3:* Selecting the most promising socio-cultural meanings.
- *Step 4:* Defining the core competence.
- *Step 5:* Constructing, reflecting and acclaiming the intended place brand identity.

**Phase 2: Translating the intended place brand identity into multisensory touchpoint experiences**

Yet, a place brand is only as valuable as it is perceived to be. From the customer’s perspective, the brand can be considered as a network of meaning associated with the particular place that helps to differentiate the place from competing ones, and influence citizens’, visitors’ and system partners’ perception (Aaker, 1996). From place representatives’ perspective, the brand is the meaning proposition (Sherry, 2005), the intended place brand identity, which must be materialized to become an active partner in a relationship with the place’s partners (Fournier, 1998).

If this meaning set expressed in the place brand’s identity is to be perceived by its relevant stakeholders, it must be materialized in some sort of manifestation that supports the interaction between the customers and the brand. As such, the two meanings of the branding concept are strongly interrelated. To deliver a brand-identity-driven experience to its system partners, affected brand developers need to know what their concrete experience propositions are. Correspondingly, to interact with the citizens and visitors, the intended touchpoint experiences must be manifested (Filho, 2015).

The second phase is concerned with transforming the meaning set of the intended place brand identity into multi-sensory touchpoint experiences along important place constituents. Constituents that typically embody touchpoint experiences of a new place format of a city can be, but are not limited to, quarters and places, traffic and mobility, education and research, sports, shopping, lodging and gastronomy, sightseeing, district development, public services, business and congress, culture and music.

*Process and methods*

During this phase, the carefully developed meaning system of the intended place identity becomes translated into concrete multisensory touchpoint experiences along specified place constituents. Without this translation mechanism, the meanings still remain too abstract and

do not have any relevance for those not involved in the microcosm or core team. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) propose a mechanism termed “digging deeper”, which is used here to specify the concrete results and connected “rules of conduct” for important contact points (Botschen *et al.*, 2012). It is at these contact points that the intended brand identity will be perceivable for different interest groups of the particular urban or rural area. Touchpoint experiences combining sensory, cognitive and affective stimuli have the highest probability to initiate and maintain positive resonance in the minds and hearts of customers and other stakeholders (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). If the translation of the meanings is not clear and multisensory perceivable, this will result in disappointing contact experiences for the various parties of the place.

The *translation exercise* is a good opportunity to directly confront affected individuals and potential prospects with the implications of change for established routines and behaviour and to reflect on how the new identity impacts concrete touchpoint experiences. The place brand identity acts as the steering wheel for a self-similar translation of their meanings into touchpoint experiences of the chosen city constituent. For this self-similar translation mechanism, extended microcosm teams, so-called *brand teams*, are created. Two or three members of the microcosm search for suitable new team members. Then they present and explain the intended place brand identity to their new team colleagues and discuss how these meanings can be translated into concrete contact experiences and behavioural rules for daily work and activities for the agreed constituent. This way more players and experts become involved and start to share the mental picture about the place’s intended future.

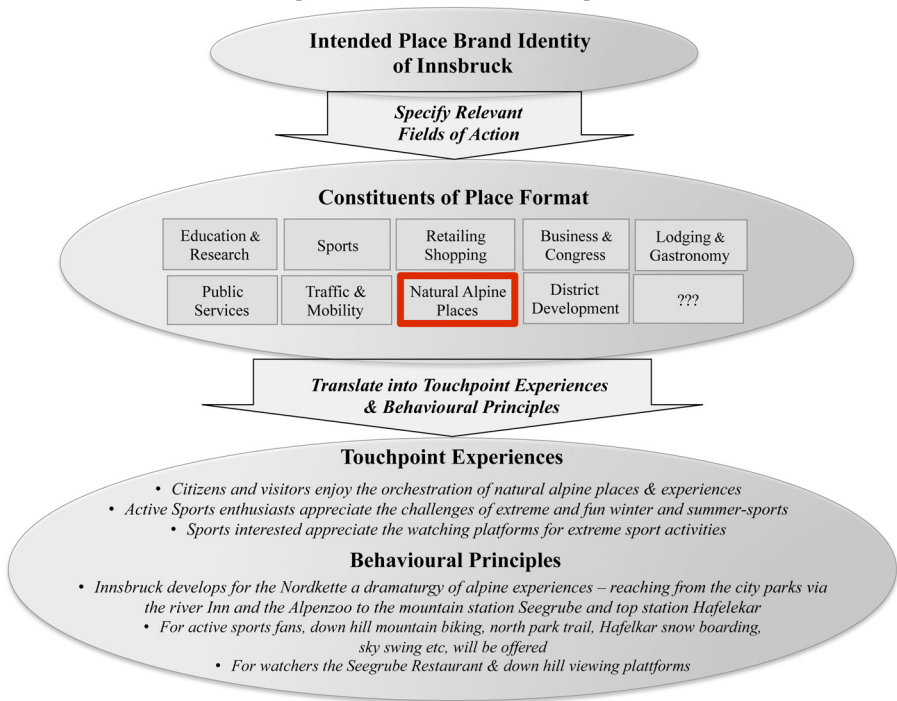
During these workshops, facilitators help team members to identify multisensory, affective and intellectual stimuli for the intended touchpoint experiences. *Facilitators* then *screen* this catalogue of customer experiences before it is presented for additional comments to the extended microcosm. After this feedback-loop, all agreed touchpoint experiences and connected behavioural rules are summarized into a booklet for action fields with the strongest leverage towards the new place identity. The booklet is handed to everybody involved in the process and builds the bases for the materialisation activities of Phase 3.

#### *Results of the Innsbruck case*

In the case of the City of Innsbruck, the members of the microcosm went into the formation of several brand teams. Under the guidance of the external facilitators, the concrete formulation of derived sensory touchpoint encounters together with the corresponding rules of behaviour for selected constituents and action fields took place. Figure 4 depicts Phase 2 showing the progression from the intended place brand identity of Innsbruck via the specification of relevant constituents or action fields to the touchpoint experiences and behavioural rules for the prioritized constituents of the City of Innsbruck.

In several reflection meetings with the core group, up to five attracting and differentiating touchpoint experiences per action field for a place constituent were chosen and defined during a feedback loop with the microcosm.

In Figure 4, three examples for derived touchpoint experiences together with three behavioural principles for the chosen constituents of “Natural Alpine Places” for the City of Innsbruck are given. The three examples of touchpoint experiences for the constituent “Natural Alpine Places” demonstrate the intended benefits for citizens and visitors who are (actively or passively) interested in sports and alpine places. The three behavioural principles already indicate what kind of activities and integration between the urban place of Innsbruck and its surrounding mountains need to be developed to achieve the proposed touchpoint experiences.



**Figure 4.**  
Specifying fields of action and translating into touchpoint experiences and behavioural principles

The derived multi-sensory touchpoint experiences together with supporting behavioural rules of all important city constituents are collected and summarized in a brand booklet of the City of Innsbruck. They drive any modification and development of a particular place component during the materialisation in the following Phase 3.

### Phase 3: Materializing the touchpoint experiences into the new place format

Phase 3 is concerned with materializing the intended touchpoint experiences and the accompanying behavioural principles, the code of conduct, to modify and develop the constituents of the new place. Based on these mutually agreed touchpoint experiences and behavioural principles, the alignment of established structures, processes and behaviour is necessary (Filho, 2015). Any modification and optimisation of structure, processes and behaviour are driven by the intended touchpoint results of the action field of a particular constituent and not the other way around.

Structure comprises elements such as offered public services and retail-mix, architecture, location, infrastructure, webpage, parking availabilities, opening hours as well as the existing organogram and communication structure of the place's lead bodies and representatives. Similar to structural conditions, processes affect the effective design of intended agreed touchpoint experiences of selected action fields.

Behaviour refers mainly to people's behaviours (Hull and Zacher, 2007) such as style of interaction and appearance, advising, responding or bargaining procedures, welcoming or greeting. Typically, they can be managed through a number of techniques including trainings, codes of conducts, cultural workshops or the careful selection of new employees according to predefined principles.

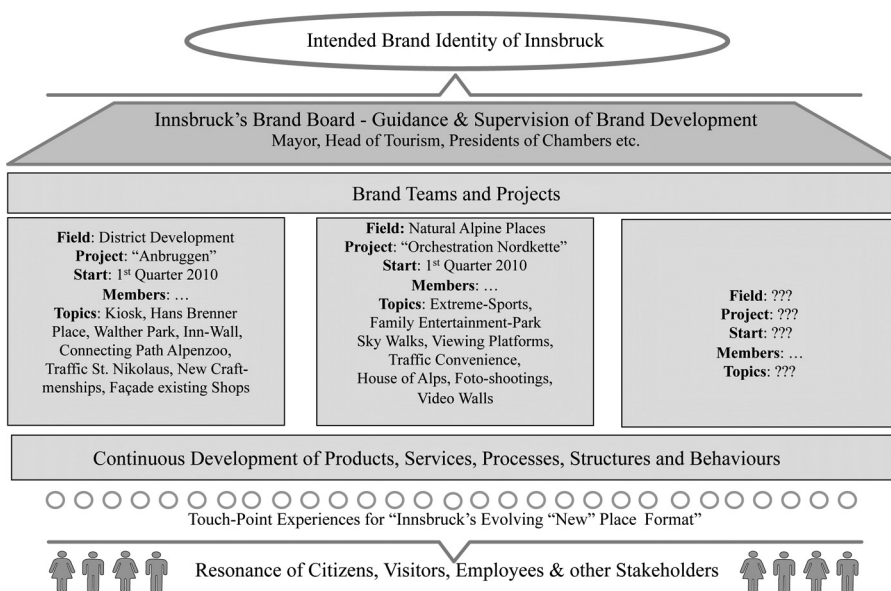
*Process and methods*

All existing *routines, processes and structures need to be analysed* under the light of the specified touchpoint experiences and behavioural principles (Patricio *et al.*, 2011). If they fit, no change is necessary. If there is a significant deviation, then structural conditions, processes or behaviour need to be modified, eliminated and/or substituted by new ones. This implies that new touchpoint experiences can become core drivers for significant and deep changes in structural conditions, organizational processes and employee behaviours.

Some of the behavioural rules can be implemented directly after their acceptance without any specific trainings or additional resources. Many of them will need additional resources to modify existing organizational structure and processes. Some others will require the development of new skills and capabilities. Others again will have an impact on the existing roles and responsibilities of involved city bodies and managers. The installation of a “Brand-Board” facilitates continuous implementation of on-going projects of involved brand teams and the stimulation of new ones. It works as a steering wheel for the enduring development of the place identity and as a feed-back loop for the transacting brand teams. It consists of the members of the core team plus external facilitators, if necessary.

*Results of the Innsbruck case*

Figure 5 summarises the materialisation procedure for the achievement of touchpoint experiences and agreed behavioural rules through selected brand teams and Innsbruck’s brand board. One Team is in charge of the development of the district “Anbruggen”, one of the oldest and somehow eroded quarters of Innsbruck. The team consists of ten cross-disciplinary members ranging from local entrepreneurs, head of Innsbruck Tourism to architects and ecologist and town planners. Based on the intended experiences, the team determines particular projects, necessary resources and a time frame, which are presented to the “Brand Board”. The members of the brand board evaluate the appropriateness of the proposals and provide, in case of conviction, the requested resources and the permit to go



**Figure 5.** Materializing Innsbruck’s intended brand identity

ahead. [Figure 5](#) lists some of the projects, which became initiated during the first quarter of 2010. Among them were the refurbishment of the Walther Park through the design of a new kiosk, a children's playground and new plantings. Better start-up conditions and additional space capacities supported the opening for new shops and craftsmanship and the designing of more aesthetically pleasing facades. A modified path, connecting the quarter with the Alpenzoo, attracts locals and visitors; a farmer's market provides organic and very tasty fresh produce on weekends; new speed limits increase the road safety. The "Anbruggen" brand team is still developing new projects, which charge the brand identity evolution of the City of Innsbruck. Another ten members of the brand team took care of the orchestration of the Nordkette, the mountain chain bordering Innsbruck in the north. Together with the support of the brand board, the brand team focused on projects like:

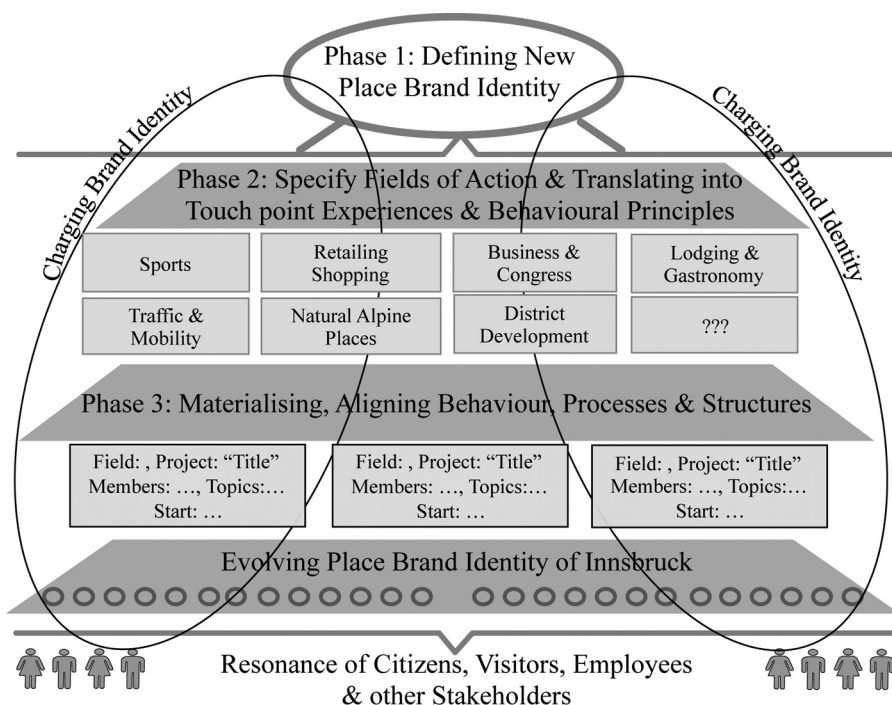
- extreme sports, e.g. downhill biking, paragliding, the biggest indoor climbing wall in West-Austria and the broadcasting of these activities or races onto video walls in the city;
- an entertainment-park for families with summer and winter programme, close to the Alpenzoo;
- sky walks and viewing platform to watch activities in a relaxing and culinary environment;
- signposting for better orientation; and
- house of Alps, orchestration of unique alpine themes and events in avant-garde architecture.

As indicated in [Figure 5](#), these are the materialisation activities of just two brand teams. There have been and are at present several more teams who deal with projects to develop other constituents of the intended brand identity of the City of Innsbruck. Since 2010, many of the projects have been implemented under the engagement of cross-disciplinary brand teams and the guidance of the brand board, several are on-going and others will come in the future. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the generic three-phase model, and [Figure 6](#), the more detailed description of the brand-driven phase model, the process is circular and on-going, and aims to develop the intended brand place identity in the long term.

### **Implications and limitations for management and research**

A number of managerial implications on the strategic and operational level can be derived from the development and applications of the BIDP approach:

- The new place brand identity functions as "the steering wheel" and guiding principle for all type of decisions and activities across the entire place system. The brand becomes the central link across all constituents, functions and roles of the particular place.
- The transfer of the new place brand identity into concrete multisensory experiences enables the design of a unique place brand profile. The intended place brand identity becomes feasible and perceivable for involved and concerned citizens, visitors and other stakeholders.
- The identification of behavioural rules initiate and support the dissolving of historically established behaviours and processes and facilitates necessary and important changes.
- The BIDP approach is applicable for the development of urban and rural places independent of size and location.



**Figure 6.** Model of brand-driven place format development

From the longitudinal multi-case action research used, several implications and limitations for the suitability and effectiveness of the applied methodology and methods along the different BIDP phases can be derived.

The formation and role of the core group, the microcosm and facilitating team allows the identification and representation of all drivers and impeters of resonance throughout the entire place brand development process. The members of the core team, typically the mayor, head of tourism and other long-established key players, like owners of hotels, family companies or the head of cooperatives, drive the whole process. As members of the Brand Board, they support the implementation of branding activities in the long term and are in charge of immediate decisions as well. The main challenge lies in the long-term security of these people and the identification and attraction of "all" crucial members for the microcosm. Ideally, the involved researchers and facilitators obtain a long-term perspective as well, as they part of the process over a time span of several years.

The mixed-methods approach of presentation and reflections in workshops together with in-depth interviews including projective techniques with all members of the microcosm plus validity checks through additional interviews with citizens, tourist and other experts allows a thorough and holistic identification of relevant patterns of resonance and underlying socio-cultural meanings for the particular place. The interviews and analyses exclusively done by involved researchers, the reflections in the core group and microcosm plus necessary validity checks with interviewees support the robustness of the results. The application of creativity techniques such as collaging together with the four actions framework to create the intended future place brand identity created strong engagements among the participants and provided a rich fundus of potential future attractors for the place. The determination of the intended identity



needs to be done in reflective meetings between the members of the core group and the team of researchers before it becomes discussed and reflected in the microcosm. The biggest challenge for the official acclamation of the new place brand identity often lies in convincing representatives of constituents, which should be reduced or eliminated.

The translation exercises during Phase 2 turned out to be welcomed by all engaged people, although some of the teams and team members felt overcharged to turn the meaning set of the place brand into self-similar multisensory touchpoint experiences.

Not too surprisingly, the biggest challenges and obstacles for continuous place development reside in Phase 3. Many members of the microcosm participate on a voluntarily base in place development activities such as BIDP. They engage in part as experts and representatives of key components of the place and they are interested in co-creating the future of their places. When it gets down to the actual implementation of an action field, the brand team in charge needs a strong and appreciated leader, supporting experts and thorough knowledge of project management plus a good amount of stubbornness.

These observations are in line with the fact that in contrast to organisational branding, lead bodies for developing place brands must work in partnership with other organisations on a common platform to develop and maintain a consistent place brand (Hankinson, 2010). The participatory process along the three main phases of the BIDP framework helps lead bodies to engage the minds and hearts of citizens, visitors and representatives of involved organisations in the particular place (Sullivan *et al.*, 2001). The latter group might include local government, major corporations, hotels, restaurants and place associations and infrastructural services, among others.

In summary, the chosen multi-method combination provides a holistic understanding of the historic and future drivers of resonance for the particular place. The on-going integration of participants and facilitated reflections among them supports the intellectual and emotional buy-in.

### Summary and outlook

This study provides a brand-driven framework to place identity development that is centred on creating meaningful positively resonating touchpoint experiences for all stakeholders. Under this view, any modification of place constituents is determined by derived touchpoint experiences.

Figure 6 depicts the three BIDP phases in more detail, from the definition of the intended place brand identity via the translation into multisensory touchpoint experiences and behavioural rules along prioritized actions fields towards their materialisation into modified or new constituents. This described mechanism contributes to the continuous development of the intended place brand identity, promotes the creation of positive resonance across affected system partners and provides the charging and strengthening of the particular place brand.

The chosen case illustrates how an action research methodology can be used for developing a framework that is applicable to all domains of place development. It was found that a core driver for the successful research process is an integrated social experience for all participants, requiring continuous interaction between representatives, key players and the facilitating researchers in an open and supportive environment. A number of practices were discovered, which are crucial for a successful action research and organizational change process. These include a facilitating core team, an additional team comprising members from all hierarchical levels (microcosm) and the application of collaborative and creative research techniques. This inquiry also found that members of the core team and the microcosm are not only informants in a shared research process, but that they are valuable co-creators and

co-researchers that contribute significantly to the design of the BIDP framework and consequently to place development.

The BIDP process is co-creative by nature, and explores the views of multiple stakeholders, developing touchpoint propositions that are grounded on the place brand identity. More than 20 projects in different contexts of commercial, tourist, urban and territorial place development, over a period of 20 years, have shown that the framework of the present study is applicable to various domains of place development where lead bodies and other key players want to strategically design and operationally implement the way citizens and other relevant stakeholders interact with them.

### Notes

1. The Tourism Association of Innsbruck and the City of Innsbruck, Austria, granted the Project “Development and Implementation of the Brand Profile of the City of Innsbruck”.
2. All applied methods and tools use *cursive* letters in the text.
3. Due to confidentiality reasons, not all identified meanings of the established identity of Innsbruck are shown in [Figure 3](#).

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