

## Strategic design to foster City-Citizen Interactions

### Design estratégico para promover Interações Cidade-Cidadão

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#### Abstract

Just as people are crucial to places' existence, they are also essential to their brand. Motivated by the curiosity to explore the role of citizens in city branding, this research was undertaken by investigating extant theories, practices and – most importantly – citizens' opinions on participating in the city branding process. The key research finding was that citizens' perceptions of the city are formed by their experiences: in the city, including the physical and virtual space of the city, and with the city, through their interactions with its other inhabitants. This presented an opportunity to provide pragmatic guidelines to city marketers and governments to assist the development of citizen-centric branding initiatives led by strategic design. An Interactions framework was developed, placing citizens' perceptions at its core and mobilising interactions across three levels: where the interactions can take place, who can aid the interactions and how designers can facilitate interactions to invoke participation. It became evident that design-led interactions can generate innovative ways of city branding.

**Keywords:** city branding, city brand management, City-Citizen Interactions, strategic design.

#### Resumo

Assim como as pessoas são cruciais para a existência de lugares, eles também são essenciais para a sua marca. Motivada pela curiosidade de explorar o papel dos cidadãos na marca da cidade, esta pesquisa foi realizada investigando as teorias existentes, práticas e sobretudo as opiniões dos cidadãos sobre a participação no processo de marca da cidade. O principal resultado da pesquisa foi que as percepções dos cidadãos sobre a cidade são formadas por suas experiências: na cidade, incluindo o espaço físico e virtual da cidade, e com a cidade, por meio de suas interações com seus outros habitantes. Isto apresentou uma oportunidade de fornecer diretrizes pragmáticas para os comerciantes da cidade e governos para auxiliar o desenvolvimento de iniciativas centradas no cidadão lideradas pelo design estratégico. Uma estrutura de Interações foi desenvolvida, colocando as percepções dos cidadãos em seu núcleo e mobilizando interações em três níveis: onde as interações podem ter lugar, quem pode ajudar as interações e como os designers podem facilitar as interações para invocar a participação. Tornou-se evidente que interações direcionadas pelo design podem gerar formas inovadoras de marca da cidade.

**Palavras-chave:** marca da cidade, gestão da marca da cidade, Interações Cidade-Cidadão, desenho estratégico.

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#### Introduction

The twenty-first century is often understood as the century of cities because increased globalisation and urbanisation have positioned cities centre-stage in urban life. This trend has both speeded up the pace of life and growth of cities and prompted the rat-race, where cities, regardless of size, geography or history, must constantly differentiate themselves to attract tourists, investments and talent (Baker, 2007). Bloomberg (2012) notes that while "maintaining public safety and delivering public services, the global economy has generated a new responsibility for city mayors: staying ahead of the competition";

here the application of branding techniques can make a difference to places. In this context, branding is understood as a strategic process for developing a long-term vision for a place, which is both relevant and compelling to key audiences (Anholt, 2003), and which ultimately influences and shapes positive perceptions of that place (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006; Olins, 2004).

This stress on the 'perception of the audience' has been deliberated even in early theories of place marketing (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Grabow *et al.*, 1995; Hubbard and Hall, 1998; Kotler *et al.*, 1999), and forms the very core of branding principles. Brands derive meaning from people's perception of them. Anholt (2005) even points

out that such perceptions are key in giving a competitive advantage to the place and its populace. Thus, branding places can both increase the potential for industrial and economic growth, raising the potential of the populace in terms of job opportunities, living standards and through improvements in the public realm, nurture local prosperity (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Oliveira, 2014).

With this awareness, a remarkable number of cities have recently experienced the benefits of investing in branding (Kavaratzis, 2005; Zenker *et al.*, 2013). However, the application of its fullest potential remains unexploited. The common misconception is that branding is merely about designing the visual identity, most commonly a logo, catchphrase and promotional campaigns, aimed at holiday and business visitors (Anholt, 2007; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2007; Collett, 2014; Pike, 2005). However, viewing cities as brands can lead to strategic management of the city's various objectives: fostering pride in residents, establishing the city as a commercial hub and maximising tourism revenue (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Thus, effective city brand management can be a catalyst to cohesive strategy development in which the city thrives on people's beliefs, internally, and alter externally held perceptions.

While 'value addition' is admittedly the prime function of branding (Baker, 2007; Hankinson, 2004; Kemp *et al.*, 2012), this research views the application of branding principles to cities as a means of strategic city management. Design is acknowledged as a key tool for enhancing competitiveness and economic success in the face of rapid change, mobility and increased global competitiveness (Choi *et al.*, 2010). However, its contribution to the field of place branding is yet to be fully explored. Therefore, the research tasks itself with (a) uncovering innovative ways of citizen participation in place branding, and (b) developing a conceptual Interactions framework to help cities meet their own unique needs.

With the core belief, "How can you plan for somebody if you plan without them?" (Zenker and Seigis, 2012), this paper first investigates theories and current practices of citizen participation in city branding, revealing that people's perceptions of a place are central to the success of its brand. A deeper understanding of people's views on places reveals that their perceptions are formative of their experiences in and with the place. Thus, reinforcing that every interaction or point of contact with the key audiences (citizens, tourists, investors and talent) is an opportunity either to enhance or denigrate the brand (CEOs for Cities, 2006) and ultimately the competitive identity of the place.

## Methodology

Design is an integral part of this research, and its principle contribution is reflected throughout the methodological framework. The framework is adopted from Design Council UK's Double Diamond – a tool which has been used to solve a number of real-world challenges and business innovation problems (Design Council, 2015). This framework was chosen owing to its diverge-converge design thinking approach and consists of four key stages – Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver.

The starting point of the research – 'Discover' was motivated by a curiosity to explore the role people play in

place branding. Extensive literature review of place marketing and branding set the theoretical foundation of the research, especially 'Citizen Participation in City Branding'. An exploratory case study of recent successful city brands was drawn from books, journal papers, discussion forums, newspapers and magazine articles. The analysis focused on identifying underlying success factors that were common to all, success factors that were unique to each place and lastly, the level of citizen consideration and participation in each of the places' management and branding efforts. The result highlighted that city branding is an integral aspect of strategic city management and exposed the challenges faced in practice.

'Define' began with the aim of ascertaining a clear key research question, based on findings from the previous stage. An investigation into people's place perceptions was carried out by reviewing literature from interdisciplinary fields, such as place marketing and branding, place governance and environmental studies. Key themes that affect place perceptions were identified as Dimensions of Place. With the knowledge that place perceptions are crucial to the success of a place brand, the key research question emerged – *How can cities interact with its citizen to elicit citizen participation in its branding efforts?* The Dimensions of Place helped in designing the structure of primary research tools that furthered the research.

During 'Develop', a questionnaire survey and collaborative workshop were conducted. The aim of the survey was to validate the relevance of Dimensions of Place globally, by testing it across various geographical locations. Considering the research aim, the questionnaire was distributed in countries including India, Macedonia, Germany, Iran, United Arab Emirates and South Korea, in order to understand wider perceptions in different cultures about one's own city and its brand. The questionnaire circulated among the general public via the internet recorded totally 132 respondents (belonging to 27 nations and 49 cities ranging from small to megacities). Both, the ratio of male to female respondents, and the ratio of students to employed and self-employed respondents, were found equal. However, it was noted that the majority of the respondents were: aged 18-34 (88%), single (75%) and had attained at least university level education (87%). Based on these findings, the majority group was classified as 'upwardly mobile'. This group exhibited the potential to raise their economic and social status, owing to their youthful and well-educated attributes, accompanied by a low level of familial commitment. A significant number of these respondents lived in metropolitan cities (61%) in developing countries (73%) and aspired to move to even larger opportunity-driven cities such as Mumbai, London and New York, to name a few. To check for the disparity in views of the group that fell out of the 'upwardly mobile' classification, respondent profiles were isolated based on their age (ranging from 35-50 and above), marital status (married, with or without kids), educational qualification (limited to high school or lower level) and occupation (self-employed). However, there was not much difference between the responses from the 'minority group' and the 'upwardly mobile'.

Based on the survey findings, a collaborative workshop was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of

citizens' perceptions of their cities and establish the relationship between the Dimensions of Place. The workshop was organised as a brainstorming session with nine creative professionals, from varied disciplines (including graphic design, product design, communication design and fashion design) and cultural backgrounds (including Indian, Macedonian, Greek and Chinese). Customer journey mapping and Personas were identified as the apt ideation tools to empathise with citizens and visualise their experience within the city. Equally divided into teams of three, each team played a two-part role. Firstly, as citizens of their city, teams were asked to create a persona and envision how the personas would navigate the city within the Dimensions of Place. Secondly, as creative professionals they were asked to identify points of interaction with the personas, using their customer journey maps. Each persona represented a crucial segment of the populace, distinct in terms of age, gender, profession, interests and lifestyle. Cumulatively, the data collected from the survey and workshop was analysed and reflected upon with an emphasis on recurring themes of interaction between the city and the citizens. These were recorded as key inferences, revealing the nature of positively received interactions and aided the development of the Interactions framework.

In the final stage, 'Deliver', a conceptual framework started taking shape. All findings from the research thus far, along with personal insights from the researchers revealed opportunities for designers and design contribution in this field of practice. The empirical data analysis called for the consideration of multiple design disciplines in place branding. The convergence of these disciplines finally enabled the delivery of the City-Citizen Interactions framework, with citizens at its very heart.

### Citizen Participation in City Branding

Understanding the impact of brands on civic life and vice versa provides a strong base from which to exploit the relationship between people and place brands. While there is some literature available on the role of citizens in place branding, in practice, most attempts to invoke citizen participation are limited to destination branding. Citizens are observed as mere recipients of brand communication, where the 'place actors' – city governments, marketers and businesses – send promotional messages to target them (Eshuis *et al.*, 2014). Allan and Hanna (2015) emphasise the need for a paradigm shift from the communication dominant approach, which is merely an exchange of information, to an interactive approach where actions impact all involved. However, there are challenges inherent in the concept of citizen participation in city branding that need to be acknowledged.

(i) The root cause of the gap between the theoretical definition of place branding and its practical application is identified as the ambiguity surrounding city brand management. From brand development to implementation, there is no consensus among practitioners on a standardised methodology (Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). The guidelines provided by theorists are based on commercial marketing principles, which have led cities to practice city brand management as if it were

a corporate or consumer brand (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). However, the varied nature of place economies means that no single model can be effectively applied to all places. In response, a conceptual framework that can be tailored to the specific needs of cities can substantially contribute to this practice.

(ii) A strong view often held by city management is that all activities are undertaken to improve the realm of public life in the city (Oliveira, 2014; Zenker and Seigis, 2012). Translating this view to city branding practice means realising that cities are ultimately made by and for their citizens. Leaving out the people who make the city from the brand mix would result in the loss of authenticity and true identity of the place (Braun *et al.*, 2013; Kavaratzis, 2012), with brand management becoming a one-way communication process. Zenker and Erfgen (2014) point out that, in practice, residents are considered at the onset of the branding effort, mainly to derive brand associations. Such a participation is not participation at all, it is a 'lipstick process', carried out to make them feel important (Colomb and Kalandides, 2010). Allan and Hanna (2015) implicate that true participation is not only about asking for approval or advice but about letting the people be actively involved, viewing them as partners in the process. By others who recognise these possibilities, the key benefits have been identified as greater civic consciousness, a sense of pride and belonging and the retention of creative individuals, ultimately eliciting voluntary contributions to societal wellbeing and growth (Kemp *et al.*, 2012). Right from the onset, cities should seriously consider, 'Who takes charge of the branding activities? Who is involved? How do the people involved manage themselves and their activities?' to unleash new ways of city brand management. The stress on the 'who' factor has a striking resemblance to the key considerations across design disciplines, 'What we design, how we design, and who designs?' (Jernsand and Kraff, 2015). Hence, contextualisation of design principles to place branding can help innovate means of citizen participation in city branding.

(iii) The goals of participation may be easy to justify in theory. In practice, however, arriving at a socially, environmentally and economically feasible solution is a complex matter. There is an urgent need to realise the benefits of citizen participation, on behalf of the place actors: city authorities and marketers (Zenker and Erfgen, 2014). From development to implementation, by vesting power with the people, where it rightfully belongs, city brands can encourage citizens to join their efforts. When people feel truly involved and that their views are respected, they move from being consultees to becoming brand ambassadors, brand architects, brand investors and brand exemplars (Allan and Hanna, 2015). There is an opportunity for the application of design thinking in this field of study, by involving creative individuals in city branding efforts. In such a scenario, the role of designers would be that of facilitators, guiding the process with creative imagination and constant iterations based on past lessons.

(iv) Braun *et al.* (2013) notes that, by far, the biggest challenge for place managers is viewing the residents as citizens, who can 'make or break' the brand. Vasudevan (2008) notes that the main challenge arising from the citizens' point of view is the absence of any direct benefits

to join the branding efforts. There is a need to realise that such efforts are not the responsibility of any one group of place actors, but dependent on multiple groups – governments, place marketers, designers and, most importantly, ordinary citizens. The relationship between cities and its citizens is symbiotic, such that the action of one constantly influences the other. Changes in a city's ecosystem not only alter its physical aspect but also the social structure, in the form of people's experience of the city and with the community at large. Then why do most branding efforts fail to consider the social aspect of city life while planning and managing the city?

**Review of the cases of successful city brands**

To better understand the key considerations of place actors while planning and branding, four places – Dubai, Singapore, Adelaide and Barcelona – were selected for investigation because of their surging brand reputation in recent times. While Dubai and Singapore have rapidly established themselves as global hubs, Adelaide has broken free from its earlier negative associations and Barcelona has revitalised the very essence of urbanism.

Desk research on the various initiatives of these places revealed a strikingly similar model of place brand development, as depicted in Figure 1. In all cases, the city branding process started with a clear vision for the city and focused on transforming the vision into reality. By clearly identifying the city's long-term objectives, branding principles were integrated into the aspects of city management, such as, governance (predominantly in the case of Singapore), infrastructure development (Dubai), cultural activities (Adelaide), and opportunities for business and industry (Barcelona). These aspects gradually became the respective city's core competencies, giving it a distinct identity (Belloso, 2011; Swope, 2015; Kattan, 2013; The Economist, 2015). These objectives were iden-

tified and fulfilled by robust leaders (like Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Dubai's Sheikh Maktoum), who continually pro-actively strove for visibility (most evident in the construction of Dubai's Palm Islands).

However, on investigating the level of citizen participation in the branding initiatives of these places one issue became evident. The strongest criticism for most of these cities, time and again, has been the lack of consideration for their own people. Koh (2011) articulated a critical nation branding challenge for Singapore – the people themselves and how they perceive their role as internal brand ambassadors – and suggested that more attention should be paid to Singapore's internal rather than external branding, to boost its soft power. Similarly, Belloso (2011) indicates that while Barcelona's city authorities have carried out many strategic plans for revitalising the city's impoverished neighbourhoods, they have been heavily criticised for their lack of consideration for the resident population, in turn tarnishing the social and cultural fabric of the area (Sutton, 2014). Dubai is no exception: while boosting global recognition for its architectural marvels, its strong position in retail, fashion, leisure and the cultural scene, Prakash (2011) argues that much of Dubai's branding is done to attract capital investments and visitors, with little weight given to internal consensus. Among the four cases, Adelaide stands out owing to its public space activation, triggered by the liberalisation of small-bar liquor laws to create a lucrative atmosphere among young food and bar entrepreneurs. While the city council's efforts were applauded on various forums, its open fairs and street retail have drawn criticism from heavily regulated traditional businesses (Rojc, 2015).

These concerns indicate that to sustain the success of their brands, these cities, like many others, need to ask themselves, *What can we do to further resonate with our own populace?*



**Figure 1.** Pre-requisites for City Brand Management.

## Models of place perceptions

Insights from the previous section revealed that foremost, cities must create a resonance with their own populace. This requires understanding what citizens feel about the cities they inhabit and how these perceptions are formed. The theoretical foundation on this subject was set by, primarily, identifying components that affect place perceptions, altering the image, satisfaction and attitudes towards the place; next, by reviewing place marketing measures proposed by prominent theorists in the field; and finally, by examining the effect of sense of place on place-people relationships.

### Place attributes

In order to understand how people's place perceptions are formed, models pertaining to place image, satisfaction and attitudes were found the most pertinent to this research. The City Brand Hexagon by Anholt (2000) centrally positions the perceptions of people, who contribute to the flow of business, cultural and tourism activities in a city. The six distinct brand aspects are enlisted as: Presence (based on the city's international status, standing and global recognition); Place (pertaining to the physical aspects); Pre-requisite (determinant of the basic service quality); People (revealing the nature of the inhabitants); Pulse (exploring the interesting and exciting things to do in a city); and Potential (measuring the economic and educational opportunities on offer). Meanwhile, the Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI) by Zenker *et al.* (2013), is devised on the premises that citizens' commitment and loyalty to a city is built as a consequence of satisfaction with the city. The CSI is based on four factors: Urbanity and diversity (ranging from services offered to the general atmosphere, consisting of the vibe and tolerance in the city); Nature and recreation (constituting the natural environmental aspects and outdoor activities); Job chances (components of general economic growth and opportunities); and Cost-efficiency (constituent of the general price level and financial considerations). Finally, the Brand Associations model by Merrilees *et al.* (2009) adopts a multidisciplinary approach (from the fields of marketing, urban studies, tourism and sociology) to understand residents' attitudes towards their city brand. The model provides a clear diagnostic function on the attitudes of the residents towards the various aspects of the city, identified as: Nature, Cultural activities, Shopping facilities, Brand personality, Social bonding, Business creativity, Transport facilities, Clean environment, Safety and Government services.

### Place marketing

Models rooting from the early literature on place marketing and governance present a managerial and promotional view point to place brand implementation. Grabow *et al.* (1995) via their Soft Location Factors, postulate that cities contain four categories, labelled as pictures, namely: Business picture (dominating the economic sector and functions of a place); Cultural picture (including festivals and events, but also the mentality of the inhabitants); Historic picture (constituting functions, events and spaces);

and Spatial picture (the physical and geographic structure of the place). Likewise, Ashworth and Voogd (1990) suggest a Geographical Marketing Mix, where the effectiveness of city marketing is determined by the selection and application of an appropriate combination of the following measures: Promotional (referring to the advertising and PR activities carried out by cities); Spatial-functional (pertaining to the natural and built environment, including infrastructure development); Organisational (referring to the hierarchical architecture within the board of management); and Financial measures (constituent of the investment made in the previously mentioned aspects of city marketing). By adopting the general marketing mix, Kotler *et al.* (1999), lay the Foundation of Competitive Advantage in four distinct strategies for place improvement. These are: Design (via the physical character); Infrastructure (via changes to the environment); Basic services (via the provision of public and private services); and Attractions (via entertainment and recreation). Finally, Hubbard and Hall (1998) describe an entrepreneurial Model of City Governance. They identify the main goal of this model as re-imagining localities and the transformation of previously productive cities into spectacular cities. The achievement of these goals is pursued, according to the same authors, via: Advertising and promotion, Large-scale physical development, Public art and civic statuary, Mega-events, Cultural regeneration and Public-private partnerships.

### Sense of place

Sense of place is the social phenomena that exists independent of any one individual's perceptions or experiences, yet dependent on human engagement for its existence. Its omission from place branding would deprive places of significant social and psychological considerations, resulting in an inconsistency between brand identity and image. Campelo *et al.* (2013) position sense of place, as it is constituted and experienced by residents, at the centre of the brand strategy to create an inclusive, collaborative, and effective brand. Sense of place is a combination of social constructions interacting in the physical settings. The intangible aspects operating within the social environment (formed and affected by personal and collective experiences, social interactions, and affective engagements) give meaning to the physical environment (geographic location and physical landscape) they engender. Further, determining the constructs of Time, Landscape, Ancestry, and Community that collectively create the habitus of the place (sometimes intangible in terms of emotional bonds, but very tangible when expressed by the ways things are done), Ardoin (2006) views place as a well-rounded and multifaceted construct and presents four consistent dimensions of sense of place: the biophysical environment (the physical environment that provides context for the following elements); the psychological element (constituting place identity and dependence, contributing to place attachment); the socio-cultural context (providing a community context in which to interact with places and creating a cultural backdrop for understanding and interpreting places); and the political economic milieu (the larger milieu in which places exist, maintain global

relations and compete for power, including the people and power structures that operate within them).

**Comparative analysis: Dimensions of place**

While each of the above models was developed for a distinct purpose with distinct benefactors in mind, the striking similarities between them help in the identification of place dimensions that are significant to people (for an overview refer Table 1).

- **Social:** Fundamental to this dimension are the people, constituting the social environment and context (Campelo *et al.*, 2013; Ardoin, 2006). The individual nature and mentality (Grabow *et al.*, 1995), diversity and tolerance (Anholt, 2000) and bonding (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009) are the main considerations. Thus, the social dimension is formative of individual citizens, in relation with their friends, family, colleagues and fellow inhabitants, and includes the wider world community and visitors.
- **Aesthetics:** Primarily, people make sense of places by their physical characteristics (Campelo *et al.*, 2013), like the natural environment (Zenker *et al.*, 2013; Mer-

rilees *et al.*, 2009) and spatial design (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Grabow *et al.*, 1995) in terms of the architecture and urban design of public spaces.

- **Amenities:** People experience places based on – public services (Kotler *et al.*, 1999), such as education, transportation, safety security (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009), health and sanitation; and the abundance of utilities provided by the local businesses (Hubbard and Hall, 1998).
- **Cultural:** Places get a distinct character from activities such as shopping and nightlife (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009), leisure and entertainment (Anholt, 2000), mega-events (Hubbard and Hall, 1998) and festivals that take place in the city, and its inhabitants’ lifestyle, the level of tolerance and diversity in the city (Zenker *et al.*, 2013). This dimension is inclusive of both, traditions that are a part of the city’s history and heritage (Grabow *et al.*, 1995) and characters that the place has come to exhibit, like the cosmopolitan vibe.
- **Political-economic:** Chiefly derived from Ardoin’s (2006) political economic milieu, this dimension refers to the opportunities arising in education and job market, potential for industries and businesses

**Table 1.** Dimensions of Place, a comparative analysis.

Themes	Place Attributes			Place Marketing				Sense of Place		Analysis
Models	City Brand Hexagon (Anholt, 2000)	The CSI Model (Zenker <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	Critical City Attributes (Merrilees <i>et al.</i> , 2009)	Soft Location Factors (Grabow <i>et al.</i> , 1995)	Geographical Marketing Mix (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990)	Foundation of Competitive Advantage (Kotler <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	Model of City Governance (Hubbard and Hall, 1998)	Dimensions of SOP (Ardoin, 2006)	SOP Model (Campelo <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	
Dimensions	People		Social bonding					Socio	Social	Social
	Place	Nature and urbanity	Nature	Spatial picture	Spatial-functional measures	Design Infrastructure	Large-scale physical redevelopment	Biophysical	Physical	Aesthetics
	Pre-requisite		Transport and clean environment Safety and government services			Basic services	Public-private partnerships			Amenities
	Pulse	Recreation and diversity	Cultural activities, shopping	Cultural picture Historic picture		Attractions	Mega-events Cultural regeneration	Cultural		Cultural
	Potential	Job chances and cost-efficiency	Business creativity	Business picture	Organisational and financial measures		Public art and civic statuary	Political economic		Political-economic
	Presence		Brand personality		Promotional measures		Advertising and promotion	Psychological		Brand image

to grow (Anholt, 2000), creativity (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009) and innovation in cities, the political landscape and cost efficiency (Zenker *et al.*, 2013).

**Brand Image:** The final dimension, drawn from Anholt's (2000), 'Presence' in the City Brand Hexagon that refers to the city's international status and standing, the reputation and recognition in terms of familiarity and knowledge of the city globally. It captures the visual identity, the brand personality (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009) and the values of the city, as well as the promotional activities (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Hubbard and Hall, 1998) and mention in the media, and the psychological dimension of place perception (Ardoin, 2006). This dimension is the consequence of all the other place dimensions acting in unison, to shape perceptions both internally and externally.

### From perceptions to interactions

Once the theoretical foundation of place perceptions was set, findings from design research tools revealed that people attributed the uniqueness of their city to culture, fellow inhabitants and the city's vibrant atmosphere. When asked about their favourite aspects of the city, the respondents referred to cultural events and the variety of things to do – shopping and nightlife. Additionally, the collaborative workshop revealed that sports societies and events create unity and pride in the citizens; organised fun activities and events such as bazaars brighten the atmosphere of the place, provide leisure and entertainment, and satisfy basic utilitarian (purchasing local products) and communal needs (socialising). This led the researchers to infer that (i) aspects of culture, including diversity, events and activities and multiculturalism form the primary consideration set of citizens' perceptions of their place.

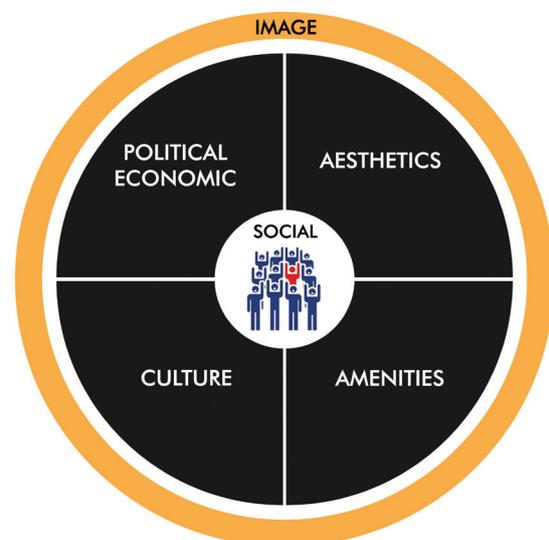
It's also noteworthy that more than 3/4th of the survey respondents attributed their reason for staying in their city to its proximity to their social circle, closely followed by their occupational engagement (amounting to 62.6%) and the metropolitan nature of their city (amounting to 42%). These attributes could be circumstantial with little or no control on the citizens' part. However, as established earlier, the majority of the respondents were 'upwardly mobile' and more likely to make an informed choice rather than a circumstantial decision. The workshop identified that the pressure to provide top-notch infrastructure and utilities was especially high in metropolitan and megacities. However, people were also more forgiving and likely to adjust to the idea of congestion and high prices. This was attributed to the metropolis atmosphere, where individuals were drawn to match their lifestyle with the metropolitan lifestyle in the city. To this extent, validating the veracity of the data and identifying that (ii) people care about social life in the city, the most influential factor in retention of existing residents, followed by the opportunity-driven nature of the city.

The workshop participants further suggested collaborating with personnel working at public and private institutes and businesses. To tap into social connections, the chief constituents were identified as: city officials (museum staff; receptionists at civic centres, public hospitals) and service and care providers (bus-drivers, train

conductors). It was inferred that (iii) integrating different experience providers aids social interactions, by providing consistency in services and further enhancing the overall experience.

When asked about their favourite place in the city, the respondents enlisted locations they visited on a daily basis: their intimate surroundings (home, neighbourhood) and local businesses (cafes, pubs, malls). Correspondingly, designers at the workshop found it most advantageous to interact with their target Personas at points they visited daily, such as, streets, markets, workplace and schools. Thus, reinforcing the need and benefits of delivering ultimate and positive experiences at places where the public went daily. Additionally, 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the participants mentioned that historical and culturally significant places (churches, old squares, etc.) are vital to an individual's perception of the place image and identity. Collectively held views on a place's importance could strengthen the citizens' sense of place and community, and the same principle can be applied to other symbols and iconic aspects of the city. Hence, cities should boost interactions at points they want to be known for, or features they want to highlight. A group of designers particularly enthused that once motivated, citizens can be engaged to boost the food culture, the history, services offered by the place, and the iconicism unique to the city. This led the researchers to conclude that (iv) interactions should take place on a daily basis at commonly visited places and that interaction points should shed light on the city's core competencies.

An opportunity was also identified for at-home communication, aided by digital media. Digital collaboration with the latest trending mobile applications and local on-line services can aid experiential branding. The workshop revealed that people were meticulous and niche in their choices of places to visit, people to associate with and the kind of messages they were exposed to. They were also more likely to be engaged via more non-traditional media channels. Thus, it was inferred that (v) digital media can aid at-home personalised interactions and effectively influence citizens, using non-traditional communication channels.



**Figure 2.** Dimensions of Place model.

Based on the inferences, a clear Dimensions of Place model was drawn, as depicted in Figure 2. It was concluded that citizens primarily care about the cultural and social dimension of the city because improvements in these dimensions are perceived as direct benefits to their personal lives in the city. While infrastructure development and basic amenities are the tangible and experiential dimensions of the city respectively, the political-economic dimension forms the backdrop of life and determines the standard of living in the city. All these dimensions cumulatively determine the atmosphere in the city, mainly deriving vibrancy from the cultural events and offerings, but also dependent on the city's infrastructure, the political setting, and adeptness of services. It is the most experiential aspect of the city and constitutes the image of a place by affecting perceptions, internally and externally.

### Developing City-Citizen Interactions

Basis the empirical analysis in the previous section, it became evident that people's place perceptions are influenced by their experiences in the city, and understood via social, aesthetic, amenity and political-economic dimensions, which cumulatively shape the image of the place. Favourable perceptions of a place arise from positive experiences delivered at touchpoints (CEOs for Cities, 2006), operating in one or all dimensions of the place. Notably, positive experiences in a city can create a strong sense of place (Campelo *et al.*, 2013) and encourage active participation in the city's various objectives. Since people primarily make sense of places on the basis of its aesthetic dimension, interactions in the cityscape seemed the most advantageous way to get citizens involved (Hankinson, 2010). Place physics became the starting point of exploration, leading the researchers to ask the question, *Where can interactions take place?*

The research suggests 360° interactions approach, implying that interactions should be initiated at all points citizens visit every day. A clear understanding of the citizens' perceptions will enable cities to visualise an 'interactions journey' and deliver positive experiences at all identified touchpoints. This would require meeting them at places as intimate as their homes, and public places such as the mall. Based on the citizens' interests, professions, etc., social arenas, such as clubs and societies, can provide a common ground for interactions. While addressing a heterogeneous group with varied interests, public spaces can effectively engage citizens on a daily basis. Finally, citizens can be reached in their intimate surroundings, like home, schools and offices, through digital media.

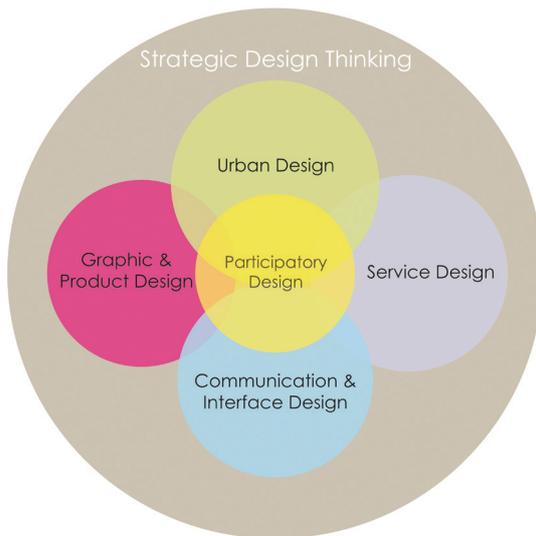
Design can facilitate interactions in the urban space by application of its various disciplines. Thoughtful, well-implemented graphic and product design can help reflect the place brand identity in the cityscape via signposting, street furniture, etc. Through intuitive interface design, the widely popular digital screens can capture the imagination of digital native citizens and motivate them to join the branding efforts. The scope of design contribution is not just limited to visual communication. Design can make cities more navigable, for residents and tourists alike. It can help in the realisation of city's objectives such as urban planning, renewal, sustenance, etc. Architectur-

al design can create iconicism and highlight features of the city which people are proud of. Well-designed cities inspire better citizen behaviour, motivated by the betterment of infrastructure and policies, and enable smoother economic growth. It can also act as a guide to regenerate pride in the local heritage and make residents realise the potential value of local resources (Lau and Leung, 2005).

While well-designed urban spaces help citizens to understand and navigate places, place attachment comes from a more humane aspect of city life. Humans are social beings whose lives thrive on daily social interactions. As established earlier, individuals form their experiences in the city via interactions with people in their social circles; they are influencers, and in turn are influenced by fellow inhabitants. Hence, to deliver positive experiences within the servicescape and encourage ownership of the brand, cities must identify all possible stakeholders who can become brand exemplars (Allan and Hanna, 2015; Hankinson, 2010). The question cities need to ask themselves is, *Who can aid interactions with the citizens?*

Primarily, people interact with and are influenced by their intimate social connections, including friends, family and colleagues, on a daily basis. Additionally, a set of proactive citizens, identified as the 'active city dwellers', can widely affect the experiences of other inhabitants in the city. This group of social actors passionately participate in the city's various activities and can be imperative in turning ordinary citizens into brand ambassadors, by their ambassadorial behaviour. Owing to their involvement in civic affairs or recognition by the public, they comprise of influential groups of people, such as artists, celebrities, sports persons, activists, volunteers, even bloggers and social media influencers. Another group of key influencers are the public service and care providers who affect experiences by smoothing the turmoil of civic life. Interactions with them can influence opinions about the city's core services. This research identifies them as 'key players', who are responsible for maintaining the city's health and safety, security, transportation and education facilities. Utilities provided by mainly local, but also national and international, businesses affect citizens' opinions on diversity, opportunity and economic growth. Finally, local media plays a vital role in people's construct of a place, particularly the political-economic and cultural dimension, which are widely influenced by their mention and criticism in the media.

At this level, service design can enable cities to enhance service points and understand the social implications of interactions. A unified sense of place can be built by designing a social platform that aids interactions with key players, active city dwellers, and local media. Communication designers and interface designers can help cities develop attractive and interactive solutions for the delivery of at-home personalised experiences. While designing these interactions, cities need to remember that citizens are not just at the receiving end of it, but proactive initiators. This approach would benefit from the application of participatory design principles, where citizens themselves get involved in the process and contribute. However, the task of citizen activation via social interactions is not the remit of any one kind of design expertise, but of the various creative individuals who employ design thinking for problem-solving every



**Figure 3.** Converging design disciplines.

day. Strategically designed interactions can elicit public interest in a wide array of city's objectives and activities. To achieve this, disciplines need to converge and generate innovative tools and processes, with participatory design principles at its heart, as depicted in Figure 3.

As the complexities of socio-physical interactions become clear, the main objective of the research comes into view, i.e., *How can citizen participation be elicited?* Here, the need to apply design thinking was felt the most, which called for a multidisciplinary learning approach to generate innovative ways of citizen participation in city branding. The following principles came into view, to guide cities in meeting their own unique needs while highlighting the role of designers,

- *Creating relevance:* Above all, citizens must believe in the brand's core values and identify with its initiatives, to support it. The underlying assumption is that, if citizens perceive the brand efforts as relevant, they will contribute. Particularly when addressing a widely opinionated audience, it would be beneficial to interact with specifically targeted audiences based on their interests. Citizens become brand exemplars when they feel connected to the cause, in this case, city's objectives, and when they feel its impact on their lives. This can be ensured by proper segmentation at the beginning of the process, to identify key stakeholders who will naturally connect with the city's objectives. By using 'interactions journey' and 'mental maps' cities can imagine how segmented groups navigate the complexities of life in the city through association formation. Design tools, such as persona development, interview and collaborative workshops, are other cost-effective ways to identify and interact with the citizens.

- *Providing motivation:* Once an interest in the city's management and branding exists, citizens must be motivated to proactively participate and contribute to it. Emotional incentives – recognition or better social prospects – can motivate individuals to get involved. While offering direct monetary benefits might pose a serious threat to the city's economy, if citizens are shown that the city is invest-

ing in developmental activities, bettering their life in the city, they may want to contribute to it. Transformations in the 'brandscape' and 'servicescape' can create favourable experiences in the city's environment through place-making, public place activation and signposting. Better designed place infrastructure and services create favourable experiences, ultimately ensuring positive interactions. In the new age, 'phygital interactions', that refer to physical changes in the brandscape communicated through digital engagement can be particularly effective.

- *Being imaginative and creative:* Interactions must capture the audience's imagination and get them excited to partake in the branding efforts. Experiential design can personalise and authenticate interactions, adding value and uniqueness to the brand, creating experiences beyond functionality, and converting passive consumption into active participation, through 'storytelling'. Imaginative thinking and authenticity can get citizens' attention, creating fond remembrances. Citizens can aid the co-delivery of the brand experience via gamification tools and social media interactions, which enable real-time participation. Digital report cards can enable citizens to evaluate and prioritise various project activities, and questionnaire surveys can be used to validate and quantify feedback.

- *Ensuring consistency and continuity:* Consistency in what the brand says (through communications) and what the brand does (through its behaviour) can engage citizens for a prolonged period. This can be monitored and ensured by conducting audits to assess the current situation and determine where the brand is headed. Tools including workshops, conferences and training programmes for personnel can ensure brand consistent behaviour. City leaders must take responsibility for, encouraging public-private partnerships, facilitating stakeholder involvement and providing platforms where civic engagement thrives. Tools including expert think-tanks and best-practice catalogues can enhance the knowledge and competence of the leaders and their contemporaries' city branding efforts. Successful city branding requires commitment from leadership, support from key stakeholders, and resonance with the citizens. Here, 'designers as facilitators' will be primarily responsible for inducting the various stakeholders on the application of strategic design thinking for problem-solving. Next, by assuming roles of leadership at all levels, designers can observe, iterate and innovate ways of interacting with the citizens.

## Framework and guidelines

The proposed framework aids interactions at three levels: the identification of key points where cities can interact with its citizens; identification of persons who can aid the interactions process; and ultimately how City-Citizen Interactions can invoke citizen participation in city branding, as depicted in Figure 4.

- (i) Firstly, cities must clearly identify and understand the group of citizens they want to address to achieve its branding objectives. Basis this segmentation, the citizens' journey through the city can be visualised.

- (ii) Level 1 of the interactions framework provides a holistic view of all the dimensions in the place physics of

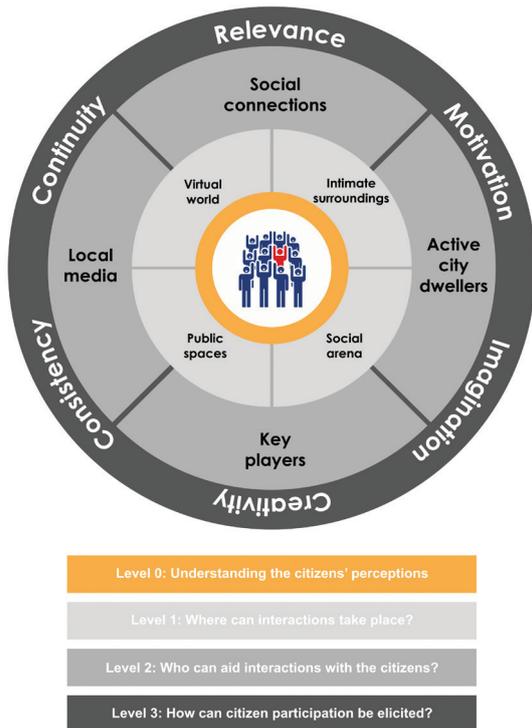


Figure 4. City-Citizens Interactions framework.

the city where interactions can take place. From places as intimate as the citizens' home to as public as parks, squares and malls, cities are urged to deliver positive experiences.

(iii) Making real changes in the cityscape can encourage people to participate in their city's efforts, whether the aim is urban regeneration or simply making the city more navigable. Public places can be activated via place-making and signposting, both simple tools which uncomplicate the nuances of daily civic life. Further changes to the city's brandscape, evident in the form of better infrastructure facilities, smoother seamless public services including transportation, sanitation, safety, etc., can motivate people to get involved in the city's efforts.

(iv) A city behaves through the actions of its stakeholders: the people who run it, take care of it and inhabit it. Key players can be trained via workshops, conferences, etc., to deliver better experiences throughout the city, which will inherently shape how individuals feel about the place.

(v) Level 2 of the Interactions framework identifies the various stakeholders groups who can elicit citizen participation in city branding by exhibiting brand ambassadorial behaviour.

(vi) Owing to the wide proliferation of digital media and social networks, an additional sphere – virtual – can create immersive brand experiences using engagements tools, including gamification. Table 2 provides a compre-

Table 2. Guidelines for City-Citizen Interactions.

<i>Where can interactions take place?</i>		
	<b>Key components</b>	<b>Design contribution</b>
Intimate surroundings	Home, school, offices	Urban design
Social arenas	Clubs, societies, cafes, pubs, theatre	Architecture and Interior design
Public spaces	Markets, shopping mall, civic and leisure centre, streets, parks, square	Graphic design
Virtual world	Via digital devices, at and out of home	Product design
		Interface design
<i>Who can aid interactions?</i>		
	<b>Key components</b>	<b>Design contribution</b>
Social connections	Friends, family, colleagues	Service design Communication design
Active city dwellers	Sports stars, celebrities, artists, activists, opinion leaders, bloggers, volunteers	
Key players	Service and care providers – teachers, nurses, librarians, police, bus drivers, museum staff	
Local media	Publication and broadcast channels	
<i>How can citizen participation be elicited?</i>		
	<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>Design tools</b>
Relevance	Segmentation	Journey and mental maps Persona development Interviews Collaborative workshops
Motivation	Brandscaping	Placemaking Sign posting Gamification
	Phygital engagement	Social media Digital report cards
Imagination & Creativity	Storytelling	Crowdsourcing
Consistency	Tonality	Design and brand audits
	Integration	Workshops Conferences Training programmes
Continuity	Leadership	Expert think-tank Best practise catalogue

hensive list of design disciplines and tools that can aid the process, allowing cities to interact with citizens in a more personalised way.

(vii) Level 3 contextualises the key guiding principles of design to place branding. These are charted out as: relevance, motivation, imagination, creativity, consistency and continuity.

(viii) The inclusion of designers as facilitators and leaders at all levels of interactions can ensure continually innovating ways of interactions that can redefine citizens' experience in their city.

## Conclusion

This research was primarily motivated by a curiosity to explore the contribution people can make to cities and their brands. Preliminary research investigation through a literature review and case study analysis revealed that citizens are central to a place's existence and thus vital to its brand's success. Thus, the research focused on the inhabitants of cities, who contribute to the aesthetic, utilitarian, cultural and economic aspects of the city. Findings from secondary research presented an opportunity to innovate citizen participation in city branding, via design intervention. A thorough investigation into people-place perceptions revealed that positive experiences could be delivered by engaging citizens at places where they went daily and integrating the people who they interacted with in these places. Suggestions were made on how design and designers can create relevant, creative, motivational, consistent and continuous interactions, enabling citizens to become active participants in their city's branding efforts. As a result, a conceptual City-Citizens Interactions framework was developed. Guidelines supporting the framework were drawn out, urging cities to involve creative individuals throughout the process and at all levels of interactions.

While primarily developed to elicit citizen participation in city branding, the resultant framework and guidelines can be effectively used to meet any city's objectives of city planning and management. This research gives a fresh design perspective to the field of place branding, which few researchers have done before. The incomplete list of design disciplines in this research serves as a starting point for cities to explore the possibilities design contribution can create. Further researches may benefit from an in-depth investigation into one of the proposed disciplines or exploration of uncharted design applications, to innovate citizen participation in city branding.

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