

CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE ROLE OF THE LOGO

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Within corporate visual identity research, the logo has been highlighted as a key element which can represent the organisation to internal and external stakeholders. This paper investigates the role of the logo as part of corporate visual identity in a not-for-profit context. The focus of the research is local government. As part of an exploratory piece of work, content analysis of all the logos used by local councils in Tasmania, Australia, took place. A typology is drawn up which highlights the elements present within logos. The occurrence of these elements, and the consequences of this for logo design and corporate visual identity, is also discussed. It is shown that various commonalities and differences can be observed within the units of analysis. The implications of this piece of work for practitioners are set out. Further research is suggested which builds on this visual audit and uncovers the perceptions held by those that are employed in local government and their various constituencies.

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Within corporate visual identity research, the logo has been highlighted as a key element which can represent the organisation to internal and external stakeholders. This paper investigates the role of the logo as part of corporate visual identity in a not-for-profit context. The focus of the research is local government. As part of an exploratory piece of work, content analysis of all the logos used by local councils in Tasmania, Australia, took place. A typology is drawn up which highlights the elements present within logos. The occurrence of these elements, and the consequences of this for logo design and corporate visual identity, is also discussed. It is shown that various commonalities and differences can be observed within the units of analysis. The implications of this piece of work for practitioners are set out. Further research is suggested which builds on this visual audit and uncovers the perceptions held by those that are employed in local government and their various constituencies.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Corporate visual identity (CVI) has been recognised as important in business (Bromley, 2001), representing as it does the organisation's attempts to communicate with its broader publics. CVI includes various constituent parts, including the logo, colour and typeface, company name, and tagline (van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving, 2006). Attention to the various elements of CVI can be expected to assist the organisation in communicating effectively, and through standardisation, a clearer message may well be conveyed. This requires that firms pay attention to how identity is represented and reproduced. Due to visual elements often being common throughout organisations—for example on products, buildings, vehicles, stationery and other collateral—large capital outlays often accompany corporate change or rebranding programmes which involve the formation of a new CVI. These various factors suggest that detailed attention to the elements of CVI are deserving of attention. Related to CVI is the concept of brand identity, which involves those facets of the brand that represent it visually and verbally (Wheeler, 2006). Importantly, these facets are constructions of the organisation concerned. As with CVI, brand identity is a message 'sent' by the organisation to the consumer, to be decoded, with organisations using brand identity to establish an intended brand image (Nandan, 2005). This takes place through what can be called 'touchpoints': the various instances of contact between a brand and its constituencies (Wheeler, 2006). Clearly this implies that problems can arise in the communication process—the consumer may well not receive the message intended by the organisation.

The logo is one of the most obvious representations of CVI and brand identity used by organisations, but under some circumstances the desired consumer responses may not be occurring (Henderson and Cote, 1998). Firstly, the logo may be difficult to store in memory, due to it being overly complicated, for example. Secondly, it may simply not be 'liked' by the consumer, in as much as it might not be 'pleasing to the eye'. Finally, a logo may fail to create any sense of meaning, because it is made up of irrelevant design elements, or perhaps elements that do not connect to the market.

This paper places CVI theory in a not-for-profit context, that of local government. Specifically, the role of the logo in an Australian setting is explored. To date, there is little evidence of logos having been investigated in this context, despite recognition in the marketing literature of their importance (Henderson and Cote, 1998). Using the 29 local government areas (LGAs) of Tasmania as data sources, the paper uses a content analysis technique to explore how regions use the logo as an element of their corporate visual identities. It reinforces the idea that not-for-profit entities such as local government can more effectively connect to their broad constituencies with an identity that communicates the desired corporate image. Following a review of the literature pertaining to CVI and marketing in local government, the research context is set out. The methodology is then detailed and a typology is presented which illustrates the design elements of logos in the Tasmanian local government context. In the findings section, the incidence of these elements is set out, whilst in the final section, conclusions are drawn and areas for future research are suggested.

2. CVI:

According to van Riel and Balmer (1997), three components of the corporate identity mix are believed to influence image and reputation: organisational behaviour, communication and symbolism. As part of corporate identity, CVI has several functions within business. It can symbolise the organisation, both internally and externally (Bromley, 2001). It provides a source of visibility and recognisability (Balmer and Gray, 2000) and at the same time it can express its structure. As an internal marketing tool, it can also enhance the extent to which employees might identify with the organisation (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). It should also be something that is congruent with actual reality within the organisation, as experienced by the employees (Kiriakidou and Millward, 2000). Research into CVI has focused on a number of aspects in recent years, including the design criteria for selecting a logo (for example Henderson and Cote, 1998), the tools used to evaluate design elements (Gabrielsen, Kristensen and Hansen, 2000) and the potential for using visual elements in argumentation (Birdsell and Groarke, 1996; Blair, 1996; Flemming, 1996). The importance of standardising CVI has also been raised (Melewar and Saunders, 1998). This is presumed to have positive effects on consumers' awareness of advertising, recruitment, their familiarity with the organisation and its products/services, as well as sales, market share, goodwill, and the receptivity of local inhabitants to the organisation's operations in a particular area. At the same time, a weak visual identity may be considered to be a symptom of corporate malaise (Baker and Balmer, 1997).

Through their research in the Netherlands, van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving (2006) looked at the consistency of CVI, maintaining that too many visual cues will create an "unfocused impression" (p. 140). They found that CVIs were perceived to be more consistent in profit-making organisations. They also stressed the importance of CVI for government organisations which may not have a competing service provider. Even though such bodies are not typically competing for customers, their visual identity is one way they can still be recognised as of use to society. In a related paper (van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong, 2006), the authors point to the freedom that communications managers have in how they manage CVI. An important caveat pertaining to this research relates to the fact that the focus was on perceptions of CVI. As such, the authors suggest that further research should concentrate on a visual audit of the elements

which go to make up CVI, alongside analysis of stakeholders' perceptions, in order to establish the consistency of visual identity.

In their *Journal of Marketing* paper, Henderson and Cote (1998) point to the lack of research into the effects of design on consumers' evaluation of logos. They provide guidelines for the design of logos, suggesting that they should be moderately elaborate, with elaborateness consisting of complexity, activity and depth. They also encourage naturalness, but caution against the use of logos which are 'excessively natural, as a photograph would be' (Henderson and Cote, 1998, pp. 20-21). 'Familiar meaning', which correlates with naturalness, is also recommended and may be enhanced by choosing a familiar object whose design is incorporated in a distinctive fashion. Since then there has been some further investigation: Janiszewski and Meyvis (2001) used an experimental procedure, for example, in order to test the effect of logos on consumers' processing fluency. What other work that is being done on logo design generally is more in the way of 'how to' manuals (see, for example, Silver, 2001.) This dearth of research is surprising. As Keller (2003) has noted, the visual aspects of a brand can be a crucial element in building brand equity, particularly as it relates to awareness. The logo is visual, and as such can be a useful way to identify products. It is, in effect, a shorthand for the consumer. This is particularly significant in the local government sector, where budgets for advertising and promotion can be restricted. In these low-budget situations the logo can contribute actively to identity, that is, identity can be directly inferred from the logo design, with the symbolic function of the logo of importance (Riezebos, 2003).

3. MARKETING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

As marketing as a discipline has developed, its relevance to areas outside the for-profit field has become increasingly recognised. Kotler and Levy (1969) sought to widen the applicability of marketing to encompass organisations which are not focused on the bottom line, recognising that various other organisations, including churches, schools and other public services, can adopt marketing principles as part of their operations. Since then, academics have considered marketing's role in various not-for-profit contexts. In her comparative review of literature in the US and UK, for example, Rees (1998) identified work which had considered, amongst other things, the role of marketing in charities, performing arts, churches, health care provision and local government. In terms of the last of these areas, research into the role of marketing was until the mid-1990s perhaps somewhat limited, reflecting the limited application of marketing in such contexts. Since then, according to Cervera, Mollá and Sánchez (2001), there have been numerous studies, although their foci would appear to be somewhat fragmented. Part of this pertains to the fact that it is hard to establish what the 'product' provided by local government actually is (Butler and Collins, 1995).

In an early UK study, Walsh (1994) pointed out that marketing has been limited to the use of particular techniques, as opposed to the adoption of an overt marketing orientation. Also in the UK, Rees (2000) interviewed local government officers as part of her research, finding that for many, marketing was somewhat limited and frequently conflated with advertising. Nevertheless, it was recognised by her subjects that marketing as a philosophy did have value. The partnership approach, which is now prevalent across local government in the UK and other developed economies, emphasises the importance of local councils working in tandem with communities and the private sector to deliver 'best value' (Geddes and Martin, 2000). As such, Rees and

Gardner (2003) have emphasised the relevance of a relationship marketing orientation to the field. Evidence of a ‘higher order’ approach is also apparent in the work of Cervera *et al.* (2001) who have established the antecedents and consequences of market orientation in their study of local government in Spain. Importantly, market orientation was shown to have an influence on performance.

Despite the growing prevalence of work in the local government area, there is little systematic research which illustrates how, from a general perspective, local councils communicate with their end-users and other stakeholders¹; let alone how CVI and its elements might be considered (although see van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving, 2006; and van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong, 2006; whose comparative research did include local government organisations as part of a larger study). As critical elements of CVI, and an important brand touchpoint in themselves, the logos used by local government provide citizens of an LGA with a ready image of the organisation; one which they may encounter on a daily basis (such as when crossing municipal boundaries, for example). It is difficult to ascertain the use of logos in LGAs across the world: however, in many countries, including Australia and the United Kingdom, they are ubiquitous. They can also be a source of local ire: in a recent case in Worcester, England, for example, local ratepayers complained at the £24,000 (€35,642) cost of designing a new logo for the city (see Edwards, 2006). The lack of research in this area and the apparent prevalence of the phenomenon suggest that greater understanding of the design, content, and use of logos as part of CVI would be appropriate.

4. RESEARCH CONTEXT:

The focus of the current research is the island state of Tasmania, 200 kilometres to the south-east of the Australian continental mainland. In 1901, the six states of Australia (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia) agreed to federate and became the Commonwealth of Australia. Prior to federation, the states had existed as separate colonies within the British Empire. By joining together in this manner, a bicameral federal parliament was created which now forms the top tier of government in Australia. The Northern Territory achieved autonomy from South Australia in 1911 and the Australian Capital Territory came into existence in 1938, although neither has assumed the status of full statehood, and thus equal representation to the states in the Federal Parliament². At the next level of government, the six states and two territories maintain a large degree of autonomy within their jurisdictions and are responsible for areas such as health, education, land and property rights, transport and various others. The third – and lowest – tier of government currently consists of 702 councils across the 6 states and the Northern Territory³, according to the most recent data available from the Federal Government’s Department of Transport and Regional Services (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). At this level of government, a variety of terms exist for these LGAs, including municipalities, shires, cities, counties, regional councils, districts and boroughs. Traditionally these councils have been characterised as being concerned with the so-called ‘three Rs’: rates

¹ The work of Proença (2005) on the use of the Internet by the Office of Citizen Services at Oporto City Council is an exception to this, however.

² It should be noted that Australia also maintains a number of external territories, including Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Island, Norfolk Island and the Australian Antarctic Territory.

³ The Australian Capital Territory does not have a system of local government.

(local taxes), roads and rubbish (Newnham, Parker and Spall, 2000). However, it is still the case that populations within LGAs have a high degree of exposure to, and contact with, their local councils, such as through the use of leisure and cultural facilities, the payment of bills, and the provision of various other services.

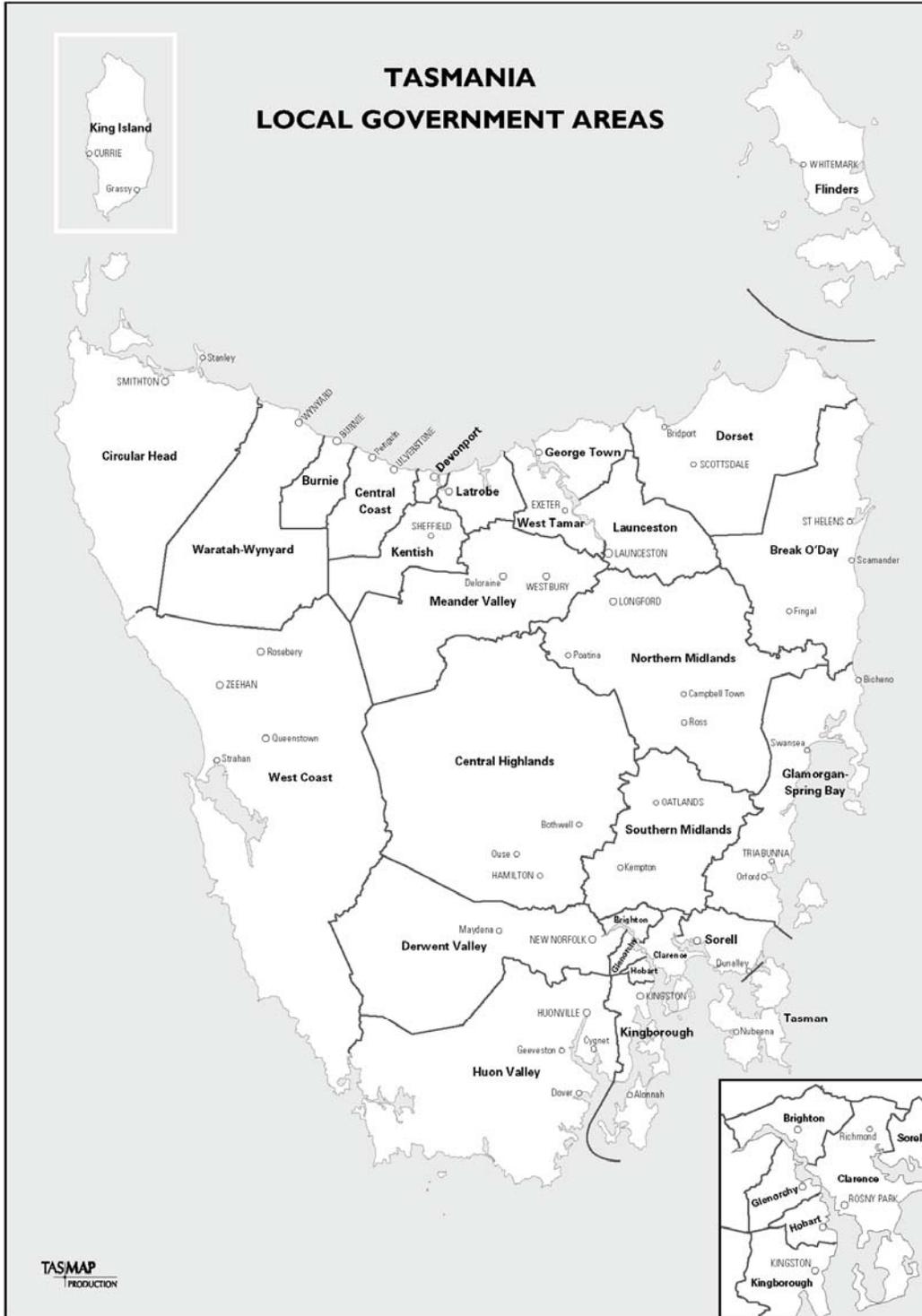
Tasmania, the focus of the current study, is Australia's smallest state in terms of both land area and population. It extends to 68,332 square kilometres, which is almost the size of the Republic of Ireland, and is home to roughly 488,900 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). In terms of the organisation of local government, at present there are 29 local government areas in Tasmania, as shown in Figure 1. A period of local government re-organisation occurred in 1993, which reduced the number of councils from 46 (Haward and Zwart, 2000). In spite of this rationalisation, there is still great variability in the populations of each area: the LGAs in the main urban centres of Hobart and Launceston have populations of over 48,000 people, whilst some of the smaller councils have populations which barely reach four figures. This lack of scale has a direct impact on the staffing and services provided by each council, and indeed, the resources, both financial and human, which are directed at marketing.

5. METHODOLOGY:

For the purposes of this research, a content analysis procedure was developed and applied. The emphasis was on building understanding of the nature and content of logos used in local government. As such, the research focuses on a visual audit of CVI within the sector, with a view to carrying out further research in future regarding the consistency of perceptions. Content analysis is an established research technique which has been used in various areas of social science, including business, since the middle of the last century (Neuendorf, 2002). Krippendorff (2004, p. 18) defines content analysis as: 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use'. It should be noted that, as Krippendorff's (2004) definition implies, content analysis can be applied to forms other than the written word. Further, Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998, p. 24) state that '[appropriate] [v]isual communication for study might include photos, graphics or display ads.' As has been established by Barnard (2005), graphic design is central to the communication process, thus implying that investigation of design elements is apposite.

A research assistant was employed who contacted every Tasmanian council by telephone, using a copy of the *Tasmanian Local Government Directory 2006* (Local Government Office, 2006). The nature of the project was set out and a copy of each logo was requested, preferably in electronic (jpeg) format. When co-operation was not forthcoming, logos were sourced directly from the council's websites, using the web addresses contained in the *Tasmanian Local Government Directory 2006*. Interestingly, every council had a logo, even the smallest island ones, suggesting that council members and/or employees had at some point recognised a need to have one. The analysis followed Krippendorff's (2004) recommended process and can be considered as being problem-driven in nature. Such analyses "[derive] from epistemic questions, from a desire to know something currently inaccessible and the belief that a systematic reading of potentially available texts could provide answers" (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 342-343).

Figure 1. Local government areas in Tasmania.



The logos, which form the units of analysis, were compiled into a single document by the research assistant. An analytical procedure was developed by the principal researchers which initially entailed scrutinizing the contents of each logo, in order to identify the presence of various design components. These design components were derived with a view to their applicability to the case organisations and the wider business environment. Each component was deemed to be both representative of consistent themes within the sample and indicative of wider concerns found in the logo design and graphic design literature. The logos were analysed further by each researcher separately, according to the analytical procedure, and then viewed again as a team to ensure uniformity in ascribing the design components to the units of analysis. The resultant typology, which reveals the various elements present in the 29 units of analysis, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of design components identified in council logos.

Design component
a Water (river, sea. or lake)
b Landform (fields, mountain, coastline)
c Seaside lifestyle (boat, lighthouse or beach)
d Country lifestyle (trees, rural images)
e Sun or sun rays
f Birds (generic)
g Tasmanian flora or fauna
h References Tasmania (map or word)
i Includes a local feature
j Includes tagline
k Includes the word 'council'

6. FINDINGS:

The incidence of the design components in the sample councils is set out in Table 2. There is no doubt that for the LGA, ascertaining what are relevant design components to include in a logo may not necessarily be an easy task, given their multiple and competing stakeholders. In some cases, though, it is hard to imagine the motivation behind their use. For example, 2 out of the 29 councils had a generic bird shape in the logo. 17.2% had an image of the sun or its rays. If the theory behind the logo is that it 'represents' the council, such generic images do not add to the council's brand statement. Nevertheless, using design components that are relevant to the target market, as suggested by Henderson and Cote (1998), is something that the councils appear to have taken on board, with 41.3% incorporating local landmarks/features in their logo. The Break O'Day Council includes a recognisable coastline and landform, for example, as shown in Figure 2 (a).

Table 2. Incidence of design components in council logos.

Council	Design component (as per Table 1)										
	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
Break O'Day Council	•	•	•		•				•		•
Brighton Council	•	•		•							•
Burnie City Council	•	•	•		•						•
Central Coast Council							•	•			
Central Highlands Council								•			•
Circular Head Council	•	•							•		•
Clarence City Council	•	•			•					•	
Derwent Valley Council		•		•					•		•
Devonport City Council			•						•		
Dorset Council							•	•			•
Flinders Council	•	•						•	•		
George Town Council			•		•				•		•
Glamorgan Spring Bay Council	•		•								•
Glenorchy City Council										•	
Hobart City Council	•	•	•						•		•
Huon Valley Council							•				•
Kentish Council	•	•		•					•		
King Island Council	•	•	•				•	•			
Kingborough Council	•									•	•
Latrobe Council											
Launceston City Council							•				•
Meander Valley Council		•		•					•	•	•
Northern Midlands Council	•	•							•		•
Sorell Council	•		•								•
Southern Midlands Council		•		•							•
Tasman Council	•		•							•	•
Waratah - Wynyard Council		•	•		•	•			•		•
West Coast Council	•			•			•				•
West Tamar Council	•					•			•		•
Total	16	15	10	6	5	2	6	5	12	5	21

Previous research has suggested that logos need to be distinctive (Henderson and Cote, 1998), which, in the business world, would set them apart from their competitors. With no competition as such, LGAs need not concern themselves overly with distinctiveness. The typology presented here indicates that there are design components that are quite commonly used. For example, 55.1% use water as a design component (see Table 2, a = Water: river, sea or lake), and 51.7% use a landform (see Table 2, b = Landform: fields, mountain or coastline). Similarly, 34.4% use a seaside lifestyle as a motif (see Table 2, c = Seaside lifestyle: boat, lighthouse or beach). Interestingly, only 20.6% of council logos use a country lifestyle as a motif (see Table 2, d = Country lifestyle: trees or rural images), perhaps reflecting Tasmania's island status. In a further strategy to align the council with its region, many have used distinctive Tasmanian design components. 20.6% used Tasmanian flora or fauna, and 17.2% used either a map or words to reference Tasmania.

In many respects the choice of logo components falls into the rather subjective area of 'good design'. While there is no doubt that this is an important point, in the CVI context it is significant in relation to how a design communicates to the target market. That said, a number of Tasmania council logos were clearly poorly designed. How this has come about is hard to determine, but it could be theorised that councils have traditionally not paid attention to the 'marketing' aspects of the organisational imperatives and the concept of having an appropriate logo has not been addressed. In a similar vein, budget constraints and competing priorities may mean there are simply not the resources. The result here is that some logos are simply not 'pleasing to the eye'. The logo for the Sorell Council is an example (see Figure 2 (b)), with indiscernible features and a lack of clarity. However, there are instances where design criteria have clearly been applied. An example here is the Meander Valley Council (see Figure 2 (c)). However, while the rather subjective notion of a 'good' design can be applied, it is also apparent that other, vital, design components are integral to the overall effect; for instance the Meander Valley logo also incorporated a tagline, a significant local feature and evidenced local lifestyle images.

However, incorporating too many design components may render logos that are overly complicated, making them potentially difficult to store in memory (Henderson and Cote, 1998). Such complicated designs perhaps may come about as the organisation tries to connect to too many different segments at the same time. Waratah-Wynyard provides an instance of such a logo (see Figure 2 (d)). A further issue with overly complicated logos relates to technical considerations. A logo needs to be reproducible (not have features that are hard to print, photocopy or fax); they need to look good in black and white (all instances of use are unlikely to be in colour); and they also need to be scalable—there will be instances where a logo will need to be simultaneously reproduced on a name badge, and 2 metres high on a marquee. In the researchers' estimation the Derwent Valley Council's logo would not meet any of these criteria—see Figure 2 (e).

There is some evidence here that the sample councils were incorporating CVI concepts into the design of their logos. With 17.2% of logos incorporating a tagline, which can be an element of CVI (van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving, 2006), it could be said that councils are considering the logo as part of CVI, and not just 'the council's logo'. However, 27% did not mention the word 'council' in their logo. The implication of this is that the logo could be confused with a regional tourist or promotional body. In other words, the organisation's logo is not considered to be indicative of the organisation, but rather the region or area. This may be a problem with how

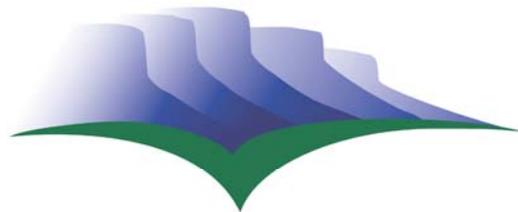
Figure 2. Example council logos.



(a) Break O'Day Council.



(b) Sorell Council.



Meander Valley Council

WORKING TOGETHER

(c) Meander Valley Council.



(d) Waratah-Wynyard Council.



DERWENT VALLEY COUNCIL

(d) Derwent Valley Council.

local government perceives itself generally. Such a perception permeates the local government units under analysis here. Overall, the majority of Tasmanian council logos do not appear to link to any other market than the regional/local. As for ‘meaning’ or ‘representing’ something, as theory suggests is vital, logos presume local knowledge. Therefore any recognisable landmark may be only locally known. This may be satisfactory if one considers the LGA’s stakeholders to be limited to rate-payers. However, if the logo is used on promotional collateral, as is increasingly the case, design components do need to be aimed at non-locals as well. Certainly, competition for inward investment between LGAs means that they do need to view their logo as an important part of their CVI.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

In summary, this paper has taken an exploratory look at the role of corporate visual identity in local government by focusing on the role of logos. It has been shown through the formulation of a simple typology that commonalities and differences can be observed in the case of Tasmanian councils. The implications of this piece of exploratory research for practitioners are manifold. Logos should be designed so that they are reproducible in various formats: on letterhead, boundary signs and large banners, for example. Considerations of scale must therefore be paramount. Logos should also appear pleasing to the eye in black and white, given that colour reproduction is not always possible or even desirable. In addition, and following Henderson and Cote (1998), they should be neither too complex nor too simple, and nor should they be too natural. In summary, greater adherence to the principles of good design should help to foster the adoption of logos that fit more closely with the message(s) that they are wishing to convey. This may be of most value in future when rebranding exercises are proposed.

Future research in this area should concentrate on measuring internal and external stakeholders’ perceptions of CVI. Within Tasmania, this could include local inhabitants, public stakeholders, for example at the state government level, and businesses who deal with councils. The aim of this would be to ascertain the consistency of CVI amongst the various constituencies of local government. In a wider context, work should also concentrate on auditing visually other examples of logos used in the sector. With the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) representing 674 councils across Australia, with 659 of those having some sort of online presence (Australian Local Government Association, 2007), there is the potential to investigate the vast majority of Australian local government logos through the ALGA’s online portal. As such, research analysing the logos of these councils would be a further useful area for work to concentrate on. Following this, it may be the case that international comparative research is appropriate.

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