

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, featuring several illuminated skyscrapers. In the foreground, a bridge with a metal railing spans a body of water, with the city lights reflecting on the water's surface.

# THE GLOBAL IDENTITY OF CITIES

**Seven steps to build reputation and visibility for  
competitiveness and resilience**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Launched in 2011, the Global Cities Initiative (GCI) aimed to strengthen the international economic connections and competitiveness of city-regions through research, demonstration projects, advisory support, and peer networking.*

*GCI activities included generating more than 25 original research products and tools for practitioners, convening over 50 summits and working sessions in 16 U.S. states and 12 countries, and working directly with cross-sector coalitions in about 45 U.S. and international metropolitan areas to create and implement locally tailored strategies.*

*Melding think tank insights to real world action, GCI helped metropolitan areas assess their position and assets in the global marketplace, develop comprehensive approaches to boost trade and investment, share promising practices, forge partnerships within their regions and with international counterparts, and advance supportive program and policy changes.*

### GLOBAL IDENTITY PROJECT - MOTIVATION

How can a city-region achieve visibility and distinguish itself in the international marketplace? This question emerged as the most consistent challenge identified across nearly 30 metropolitan trade and investment plans created through the Global Cities Initiative. Whether in Des Moines, Iowa or San Diego, the ability to define and project a distinctive global identity is critical in connecting trade, investment, and talent opportunities in an increasingly competitive environment. As defined in [“The Ten Traits of Globally Fluent Metro Areas,”](#) the metropolitan areas with the best records at working globally possess a combination of appealing identity, high standards and reputation, and global relevance in specific markets.<sup>1</sup> To be heard, they project a unique, consistent, and authentic message that differentiates them from other cities.

**Responding to this need, GCI undertook a pilot project to develop a replicable process and menu of strategies for metropolitan leaders to more effectively define and communicate their region’s global identity.**

Disruptions from increasingly rapid globalization, urbanization, and technological change have demonstrated the importance of identity, particularly among midsized U.S. metropolitan areas. For much of the second half

the 20th century, U.S. city-regions enjoyed the fruits of rapid domestic growth, quickly adopted innovations, attracted enterprising migrants, and invested in research. These cities had little need to look abroad for growth opportunities. Instead, many focused their attention on internal competition for jobs and tax base. “America” was the brand, and metro areas felt little imperative for global recognition. Only a few were hosting global functions, including New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

In other parts of the world, cities were already proactively competing to attract international investment, firms, talent, and tourists. Lacking a robust domestic market, they instead looked outward for economic assets and opportunities. Cities in the four “Asian Tiger” nations began to develop their global identities in the 1970s and 1980s. European cities started similar initiatives due to deindustrialization around this time.

Amid economic turmoil of the 2010s, it became obvious to U.S. metro areas that other cities around the world profit from their intentional efforts to be global. However, decisionmakers in Asia, Europe, Africa, or the Middle East are far less familiar with the U.S. system of metropolitan economies, regional differences, inherited assets, or sports franchises. Due to sheer numbers and diversity, they frequently cannot name significant U.S. city-regions with fewer than 3 million residents, let alone identify



their location on a map. For many U.S. metro areas, then, appearing on the global radar of capital, talent, and ideas demands a new effort to position themselves within a global network of locations. The pivot toward such globally oriented competitive efforts requires an adjustment in both communication strategy and content.

To establish that position, city-regions increasingly seek greater international visibility that conveys their local assets and competitive advantages. They also seek to assemble diverse stakeholders around a cohesive, consistent narrative of their own global position and ambitions. These activities require new approaches to communicate sector-specific strengths, which differ from traditional city marketing tactics such as slogans and tourism promotion.

The names of Paris, San Francisco, London, New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Sydney, and Singapore resonate beyond their national boundaries. They have strong global recognition and conjure a powerful set of ideas as a place to visit, study, innovate, and do business. But other places that are recognizable by name, such as Philadelphia, send only blurry signals about their true offer. Many cities like this have limited visibility to foreign audiences due to their smaller size, limited resources, or lack of intentional efforts. For other cities, myths and existing narratives often misrepresent reality. And within a region, metropolitan leaders and residents can have a set of preconceived ideas about what their city is about that fails to reflect its actual assets.

Most cities are not yet equipped for that global competition. They do not yet have a clear sense of their comparative advantages against cities on other continents or how they are perceived. They have limited knowledge of their competitors' strategies, with only the understanding of their visibility, their reputation, or their identity as seen from afar. Many cities run multiple campaigns that add up to a confused picture. Moreover, at the metropolitan level, the fragmentation is usually intensified as neighboring local government jurisdictions tell a different story about the same region. Most cities have not yet unified their tourism marketing, investment attraction, student recruitment, or trade promotion around a single set of coherent ideas or propositions. These coordination failures can lead to limited impact

on the intended audiences and substantial resource waste.

Establishing and communicating a unified presence not only positions the metro area for global opportunity and competition, but it also helps shape a common purpose for the region's actors. More than effective external marketing, identity development provides city leaders with the glue that bonds people and institutions in a common spirit. A clear global identity helps maximize scarce resources in branding and marketing by aligning outward messaging from the city's stakeholders to exploit and leverage free exposure rather than paid.

In this sense, city-regions share a similarity with businesses. Companies build strong identities and brands as an asset for growth and profitability. Firms with strong brands grow faster and are more resilient in case of hardship.<sup>2</sup> Metro areas can also gain advantages from a strong reputation and a clear brand. They can grow faster, attract more mobile economic activity, raise external confidence, and accrue the benefit of the doubt in times of challenge.<sup>3</sup>

However, unlike businesses, city-regions need to go beyond selling or advertising their image. They must tell a story that unites local stakeholders, generates civic pride, and ultimately improves residents' lives.

*"I am proud that the Louisville Regional Airport Authority and the city of Louisville are supportive of changing the name of the Louisville International Airport to reflect Muhammad's impact on the city and his love for his hometown. I am happy that visitors from far and wide who travel to Louisville will have another touch point to Muhammad and be reminded of his open and inclusive nature, which is reflective of our city."<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Ali's widow, Lonnie Ali, after the 2019 renaming of Louisville Airport as the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport.*

## APPROACH

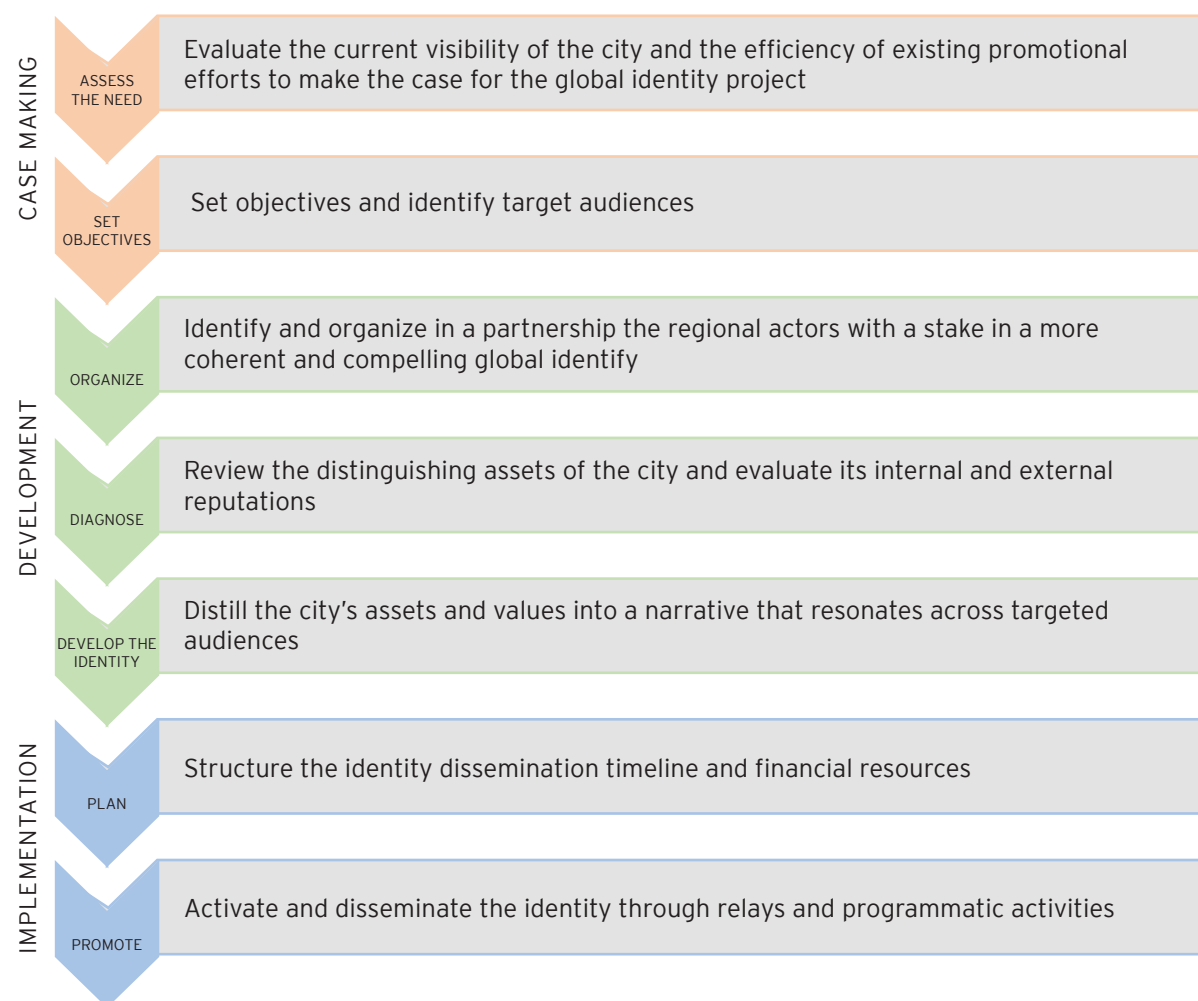
Through an 18-month pilot project with four U.S. metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Columbus, Ohio, Louisville, Ky., and Philadelphia), Brookings created a common framework for approaching global identity development by drawing on international case studies, input from global experts, and feedback from its network.

The framework contains three phases broken into seven tasks with suggested considerations and outputs (Figure 1). The first phase is about organizing and making the case for building a global identity at the metropolitan level, revealing the rationale that creates the motivation and conditions for an identity alliance to emerge and be supported. The second phase gives metropolitan leaders a path to uncover and establish the identity itself. The third phase provides a strategy to execute by engaging stakeholders in identity consensus-building and governance, as well as to deploy a menu of ideas for programmatic strategies. That final phase often results in branding and marketing exercises, but these tactics are not the focus of a global identity process.

A core finding from the GCI pilot and case study research is that uniform or rigid solutions cannot be transferred across regions. Failed efforts most often involved a small group of city officials or branding consultants simply trying to replicate something that worked somewhere else. In fact, there are no right answers, and identity is an art more than a science. Therefore, this framework presents an outline and considerations to guide efforts and does not dictate a rote process with standard outcomes.

The framework recognizes and encourages variation and creativity in approaches. In general, cohort regions identified very similar time frames for project milestones and completion, which created more opportunities

**Figure 1. Brookings's global identity development framework**



Source: Authors



for peer learning. However, each still adapted the approach and sequencing to fit their situations. While questions or considerations might be common, chosen approaches will be a blend of adapted or novel methods that reflect differences in local circumstances, inherited reputations, institutional structures and politics, scale, assets and opportunities, points in development cycles, etc. Therefore, the actual depth, staging, and format of phases and tasks will be determined by local objectives and circumstances.

## DEFINITIONS

The concept of city identity covers various meanings across urban cultures and professional activities (tourism, marketing, economic development, policy). Metropolitan leaders often use different expressions (e.g., “city marketing,” “city promotion,” “city branding,” “reputation manager,” “brand development”). A preliminary definition exercise avoids confusion among stakeholders and ensures a unified vocabulary.

Global identity can bring value to a broader attraction strategy for the metropolitan area,

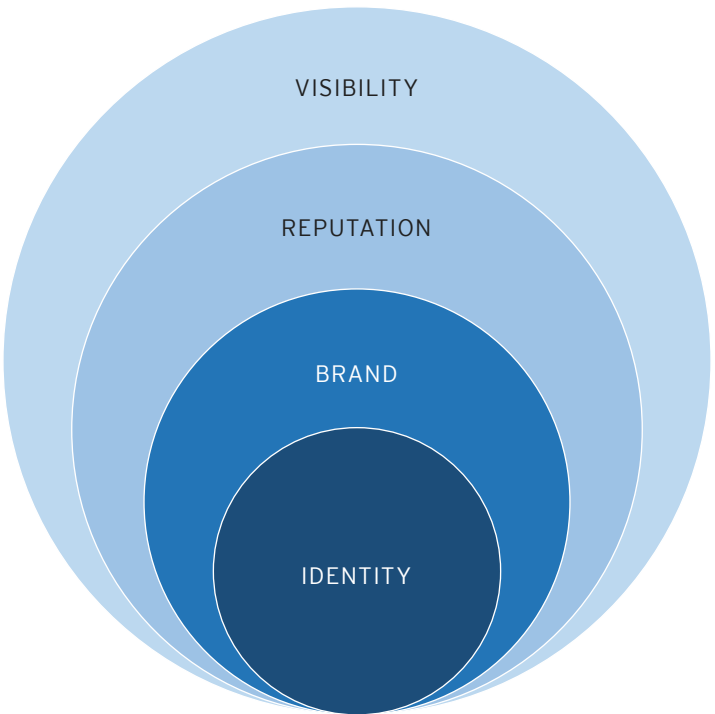
but also helps to organize a region’s internal actions around self-improvement. Identity is distinct from brand and reputation (Figure 2); it is not just about having a slogan, logo, or marketing and sales strategy. These may be useful, but not all globally successful metropolitan areas have or need them. Equally, identity is not just about the tourism and convention economy or attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) or new populations, although most successful city-regions do these things well. Identity is both for internal and external audiences. Identity is the foundation for these activities and the essence behind them.

**Visibility:** Awareness, recognition, presence, and profile of a region to target audiences.

**Reputation:** How the city is perceived through an acquired track record of references and associations, which may or may not be an accurate reflection of performance.

**Brand:** A city’s intentional and organized story/proposition that differentiates it and seeks to drive demand. It often involves a common slogan or logo and marketing to signpost the identity.

**Figure 2. What is the difference between identity, brand, reputation, and visibility?**



Source: Authors

**Identity:** A region's DNA—a unique, inherited collection of assets, history, traits, and culture that project and distinguish it internally and externally, and have the potential to unite people and place.

A city's **identity** can be likened to that of a person. Everyone has their own unique genetic makeup, character traits, and lived experience that define them as an individual; it is the essence of who they are. Based on their identity,

people choose to represent themselves and their interests through their personal brand. Their **brand** can be defined by how they dress, what they choose to tell others about themselves, and a host of other lifestyle decisions that reflect who they are as an individual. People have **reputations** based on how their brand is *perceived* by others. Their **visibility** refers to how many people know them and in what social circles.



Building a global identity at the metropolitan level requires strong intentional effort from local actors and leaders based on evidence and collective assessment of the need for change.

Therefore, case-making precedes identity-building. From the outset, metropolitan leaders must assess the challenges around the current identity and communication strategy of the region. They should consider how well their external communication is working and ask questions such as:

- Does the world know us well?
- Are we helping the world to know us better?

They must clarify what building a global identity will achieve and how it will contribute to the metropolitan area's goals. They should develop a preliminary assessment of how they are seen and determine whether existing marketing, branding, and promotional efforts project a coherent image—or if they instead promote distorted, unbalanced, or conflicting ideas about the region.

These benchmarks lead into setting the objectives of the identity exercise and how it will complement other efforts serving the broader strategy of the region. Without this motivation and understanding about why the city needs to do something different, the whole process will founder when the first challenges arise.

### TASK 1: ASSESS THE NEED

The nuance of a global identity is a difficult concept to grasp. Its execution involves a broad and diverse range of public, private, and civic actors with disparate responsibilities and performance metrics. They act at different geographic scales, and many do not think about their role in establishing an identity. Therefore, metropolitan leaders must make the case for change and set a clear purpose from the start,

considering the identity objectives that would be addressed:

1. How important is strategic communication to our development objectives? Is there anything unique in our context that means we must communicate well if we are to attract opportunities? How has our need to communicate changed with other developments?
2. Is our identity known and understood? Where and by whom? How does the world see us? Do our own communities and stakeholders reflect a clear story about our past, present, and future?
3. How strong is our identity relative to our assets? Is our brand better than our product, or vice versa? Is our messaging coherent across sectors? Is our metropolitan story clear, or are we fragmented? Is our identity clear, balanced, helpful, and accurate?
4. What are the costs or weaknesses in our current communications approach? Do we use financial or other resources optimally across the metropolitan area? What opportunities are we missing?
5. What are the gaps that we want to bridge and the opportunities we want to take? Who would be the target audience of a global identity strategy: metropolitan leaders and stakeholders, local communities, prospective residents, foreign businesses, talent, ranking agencies, other global cities, or someone else?



## CASE STUDY

### OSLO - REGIONAL BRAND ALLIANCE TO DELIVER UNIFIED BRAND IDENTITY

Oslo, Norway's identity approach is driven by the need to narrow the perception gap between its assets and its global visibility—particularly relative to other Scandinavian capitals. In 2014, the city of Oslo, almost 80 municipalities, and five counties in the Greater Oslo region launched an initiative to strengthen the region's international brand. As a medium-sized region, it made sense to include the whole region from the outset and to leverage assets across the entire area to achieve scale to compete with larger cities. Mainly financed through the coalition of local governments, the project was implemented cooperatively among the Oslo Region Alliance (a public sector collaboration of the

region's municipalities), Oslo's business development agency (Oslo Business Region), and VisitOSLO. A bottom-up process to build a brand platform involved more than 1,000 stakeholders from business, academia, culture, and government, drawing heavily on experience from other cities via an international advisory board. The Oslo Region decided not to create logos or slogans, but instead focused on communicating a consistent story of the metro area using simply the name "Oslo" as the common brand. A brand filter—by which different organizations could test their messaging against the identity elements—was used to promote consistency in storytelling over time across target groups.



Reflecting on these questions builds understanding and motivation for such efforts, creating the conditions for an alliance to emerge. They set targets that drive the activities. Most metro areas uncover a combination of challenges that ground the need for identity development:

### **1. Low visibility in global media, studies, and reviews.**

City-regions often find that other metro areas with fewer assets than them are better known and recognized and get more opportunity as a result. They set goals to be better known by targeted audiences and at least as well-known as peer metro areas with comparable assets.

*“The truth is, we’ve got a lot to brag about in our city and we need to do a better job at bragging... We’ve got great unique assets and opportunities here, we need to do more to let people know why we live in this great city and why we love this great city...Our goal is to elevate our city on the global stage, to better communicate who we are, what we do, and what we offer.”<sup>5</sup> Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, 2019 State of the City speech*

### **2. Unbalanced perceptions and unrecognized assets.**

Outside perception of a city-region can lag behind its actual performance or be narrowly characterized and linked to legacy assets. The global identity effort aims to advance understanding of the metro area around a more current and forward-looking narrative. Often, local leaders need to change the narrative of a struggling city to one that’s made of an economic transition, or extend their reputation beyond being a great place to party, retire, vacation, or study, but also to live, work, invest, venture, or locate a business. These metro areas set goals to change the way they are understood so that global markets do not put them only in narrow niches for historical qualities.

For instance, Louisville, Ky. Faced a “Derby, bourbon, and manufacturing” legacy-image challenge, and wanted to draw attention on its other assets and values. Louisville’s new identity strategy supports its ongoing evolution to an increasingly services-oriented economy, in which manufacturing continues to be important, but does not represent the bulk of projected job

growth. Services firms, workers, and investors favor different assets and strengths than manufacturers, and Louisville’s identity must reflect a more complete picture of the region in its present and future.

Auckland, New Zealand’s reputation was dominated by the tourist economy and the perception of a place to visit and live. Recent identity efforts, however, centered on growing its reputation as a business center—a place to work and invest. Barcelona, Spain, host of the 1992 Summer Olympics and a world-renowned soccer culture, became known solely as a global tourism destination. As a response, the city focused its identity effort on its lagging business brand to promote recognition of its distinctive innovation and talent strengths.

### **3. Confusion from telling different stories across the city-region.**

Internal competition between disparate stakeholders in a city-region fragments global identity, leaving audiences uncertain about what assets are shared within a metro area economy, their location, and quality of life. Taken together across the region, these qualities add up to much more. These metro areas must set objectives to achieve more coherent narratives and stories across their region, while also allowing diversity to flourish. Global identity efforts align regional governance bodies and rally partners around a common purpose.

The global identity effort of Columbus, Ohio catalyzed the integration of a common strategy and branding across the region. A constellation of actors involved in economic development, marketing, tourism, and visibility aligned their messages around the civic culture that differentiates Columbus, or as they called it, “the Columbus Way.”

### **4. Negative images, fictions, or myths that have been perpetuated.**

A city’s values and aspirations sometimes ascribe a different or conflicting identity from an outsized perceived one, such as Amsterdam’s red light and coffee shop culture. These metro areas want to reveal the other parts of their current identity while neutralizing the effects of exaggerated reputations that they inherited through popular culture references.

Similarly, global identity efforts help to distance a city's identity from its country or state. With a weakening perception of Italy, the city of Milan reinforces its distinctly global identity. As some U.S. states take legislative action on social issues that local leaders oppose and consider "unwelcoming" to investors and global talent, and as the "USA" brand declines around the world, metro areas seek to highlight contrasting aspects of their own identity.

## **5. Naming problems.**

Metro economies struggle with whether to be known by the name of the core city, their biggest county, the geography within which they are located, or a recognizable natural asset. No political jurisdiction wants to subjugate its own name identity, yet they need scale and consistency to achieve visibility in the global marketplace. City-regions must unify and build a case for using one name that makes sense to the outside world and promote that name and personality.

## **6. Low self-confidence.**

Communicating positive attributes while facing stubborn problems projects a weak and confused identity. Oftentimes, local stakeholders who should advocate externally for the city-region—businesses, civic institutions, residents—do not truly know their metro area's own attributes and unique character. Developing an identity provides the city with a better understanding of its comparative advantage vis-a-vis other cities and position in the global marketplace.

## **7. Current challenges versus longer-term advantages.**

Many metro areas find that their current challenges rather than their longer-term advantages are the news of the day. National and international media may consistently report on inequality, crime, congestion, pollution, poor health, corruption, or unemployment rather than recognizing that these real challenges should be seen in the context of cyclical dynamics, wider improvements, or patterns of inherited activity that can be changed. Consistent reporting of "bad news" can not only blight a region's reputation, it can also reduce self-confidence and cooperation in how a region communicates

with the outside world. Recognizing this problem and owning it as a communication challenge is an important step for regions that want to get onto the front foot.

## **TASK 2: SET THE OBJECTIVES**

Inspiring the motivation to do the work also requires setting clear objectives for building a global identity. These objectives may change alongside the process. Overall, a compelling global identity aims at influencing specific audiences in the short and longer terms for internal and external benefits (see Table 1):

### **Increase the confidence and resilience of the city**

Identity empowers. Self-confident city residents and leaders are more likely to innovate, seize opportunities, and address stubborn challenges with bold reforms. Increasing civic pride has positive effects on public safety, social stability, population growth, and talent retention.

A clear sense of origin and values enables a common purpose and vision. These are driving forces behind the decisions the city makes for the future. They also attract and inspire people that might be keen on joining and participating in the vision.

A compelling identity also supports the resilience of the city's image and reputation in the aftermath of external shocks (political crisis, civilian unrest, terrorist attacks, etc.). For instance, Barcelona used its strong brand to mitigate perceptions of a dangerous city after the 2017 terror attacks. The city launched a campaign to convey the feeling of normality and resilience.<sup>6</sup>

### **Enhance the business trajectory**

Oftentimes, cities promote vague or nonspecific features that resonate poorly in the global marketplace. Identity development serves the region's economic ambition by better projecting its distinctive competitive assets.

An attractive identity signals the location as a prime destination for business and investment. The city also positions itself to compete for talent, especially innovators and entrepreneurs.





## CASE STUDY

### SINGAPORE - UNIFIED BRAND TO SOLIDIFY GLOBAL REPUTATION AS A TOURISM AND BUSINESS HUB

From the 1980s to today, Singapore's narrative has focused around the idea of being "the Global City in Asia." Until the late 2010s, promotion efforts primarily consisted of marketing programs that highlighted improvements to the city's software and hardware, such as the "YourSingapore" campaign. Storytelling, though prominent, was not yet fully embedded in the city's branding strategy, and several commentators observed that the approach lacked vision and cohesion.<sup>7</sup> In 2017, the Singapore Tourism Board began a cycle of focused identity-building targeted at delivering an authentic and unified narrative. Delivered in tandem with the Economic Development Board, the new "Passion Made Possible" brand is designed to provide a cohesive brand

that uses a narrative matrix not only to appeal to distinct demographics—such as young families and business travelers—but also to align across different segments (e.g. local audiences, government agencies, international audiences).<sup>8</sup> The new brand emphasizes the city's passion and entrepreneurial spirit, jointly promoting tourism and business and showcasing the city's innovative strengths. Engaging residents and making them brand advocates has been a key focus and has been achieved through detailed research and public consultation with citizens, as well as the broadcast of a series of films that feature Singaporeans and notable personalities via media channels and social media platforms.<sup>9</sup>

## Seduce and recruit the world

A strong global identity increases the appeal and reputation of the city. Instead of spending on marketing, the world tells the story of the city on its own. Convincing national and global media there is a story to tell is the product of having a clear message. Building that reputation generates expectations and curiosity.

With a global identity, cities improve their global standing to become places where the world gathers and meets. A global identity grows the visitor economy—which also includes conventions, global fairs, and sporting events—and associated job opportunities.

## Improve strategy, spending, governance

Building a global identity is, at its heart, a civic and governance exercise. The effort requires collaboration across often-siloed stakeholders and the collection of inputs across the city's racial and ethnic groups, cultures, and regional organizations. That cooperation allows the alignment of all resources and activities in service of a common message.

Identity development efforts require an inclusive and collaborative approach because every part of the metro area economy's success is connected. The audience is dynamic and multifaceted, with today's visitor as tomorrow's student, resident, worker, etc. With a limited number of marketing dollars in a city-region, everyone must be singing the same hymnal to make the best use of resources.

**Table 1. Metro areas try to influence specific audiences depending on their goals.**

Visitor Economy	Business & Investment	Civic	Education	Culture & Creative
Leisure tourism and hospitality, business tourism, conferences and conventions, diplomatic tourism for summits, inter-governmental meetings	HQ/corporate enterprise, trade, FDI, real estate investment, research (R&D), talent, conferences	Governmental institutions, Philanthropy, think tanks, summits	Institutions Students Faculty	Sport Entertainment Events Film, TV, Music shoots

Source: Authors





## CASE STUDY

### FUKUOKA - VISIONARY CITY LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE DUAL IDENTITY OF INNOVATION AND LIVABILITY

Despite being the fastest-growing city in Japan in demographic terms, Fukuoka's global reach and identity, much like that of other secondary Japanese cities, continues to be crowded out by Tokyo's preeminence. But Fukuoka's mayor—the youngest in the city's history—aimed to change this, and developed the visionary idea of a Fukuoka "Startup City" campaign.<sup>10</sup> In comparison to other cities looking to reposition themselves as innovation hubs, however, Fukuoka's new identity places a heavy emphasis on livability, highlighting the region's excellent quality of life for startup founders and employees. The campaign also highlights the region's designation as a National Strategic Special Zone

and the development of innovation infrastructure thanks to collaborative projects implemented by city government and businesses. The crux of the new identity is about the possibility of employees having a work-life balance and access to nature.<sup>11</sup> Current promotional material emphasizes the region's relative affordability, its growing diversity, and its excellent transport infrastructure—particularly the 15-minute connection from the city-center to the airport and the lowest average commute time in Japan.<sup>12</sup> The city's unique fusion of bustling city life and adjacent mountains and its growing status as the "Heart of East Asia" are also key features of the city's identity.



## PHASE 2 - DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDENTITY

The second phase of the framework contains three tasks: (1) organizing the region's stakeholders, (2) diagnosing the gap between real assets and perception, and (3) developing the identity itself. While questions or considerations might be common across cities, chosen approaches are a blend of adapted or novel methods that reflect differences in local circumstances, inherited reputations, institutional structures and politics, scale, assets and opportunities, points in development cycles, etc.

The pilot project initially allowed for seven months to complete this phase, but many larger metro areas likely require longer than that. Several aspects can be undertaken quietly in advance before broadly going public and raising expectations for action, allowing necessary data collection and coalition-building prior to the identity development components.

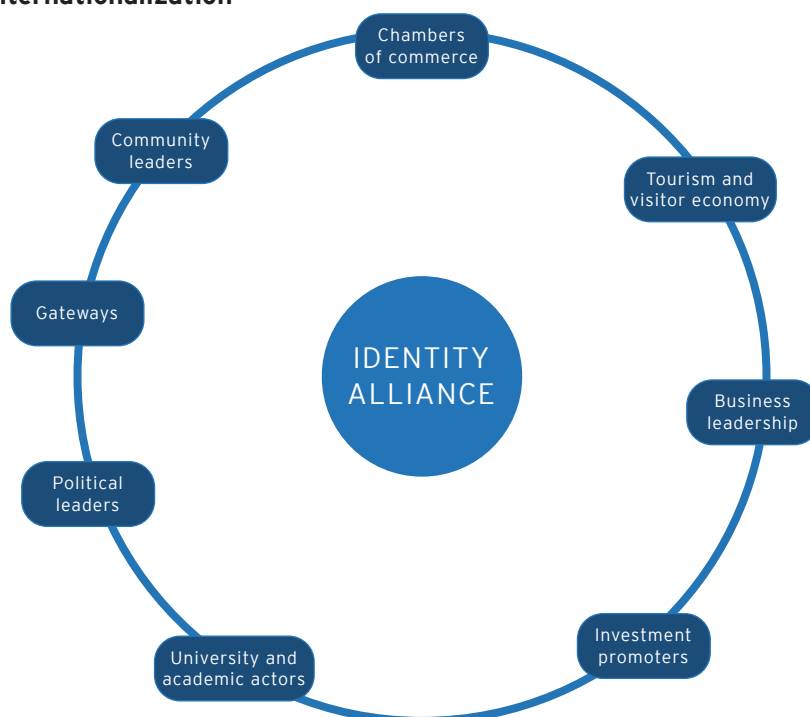
### TASK 3: ORGANIZE THE REGION'S STAKEHOLDERS

Building a global identity starts with governance. Having identified the goals for establishing a global identity, metropolitan leaders assess which key stakeholders, individuals, and organizations should join the table. This organizational effort at the outset ensures the long-term support and coherence of the identity. The identity alliance syncs the action of disparate organizations in the region that are willing to work on building a common identity and cooperate on joint promotional efforts. This initial alliance may evolve and expand as the effort recruits supporters along the way.

#### Identify the actors with a stake in global identity

Although they may not consider themselves marketers or promoters of the city-region, many different groups can contribute to a more

**Figure 3. The identity alliance must bring to the table the actors that make up the city and facilitate its internationalization**



Source: Authors

## SHOULD LOCAL TEAMS SEEK HELP FROM AN OUTSIDE CONSULTANT?

Some cities bring in consultants to support parts of their identity development efforts. Consultants provide additional manpower for understaffed city teams, as well as experience in sophisticated marketing research and interpretation. For example, the cities of Columbus, Ohio and Philadelphia hired consultants to conduct research, analyze global perception, and facilitate development of their brand.

However, the civic and leadership-building aspects of identity development cannot be outsourced. Through the process, local teams

build relationships across the governance structure of their metropolitan region, cultivating knowledge about their region. Identity development attains momentum through activities that deepen the bonds and partnership between stakeholders. Local teams must retain ownership of the execution of these activities.

Local teams must also protect the intellectual property developed through the process. In summary, the cities should, as one participant said, “Be careful that the MOU does not become an ‘I owe you.’”

cohesive and effective identity. Metro areas must inventory the diverse organizations and individuals with a stake in the region’s identity effort, their interests, objectives, and how best to engage them (Figure 3).

A global identity effort also requires thinking at a regional scale in order to pool resources and minimize duplication of branding efforts. Metropolitan areas are complex systems connecting economic assets in urban cores and the surrounding suburbs and municipalities. For instance, the Philadelphia biotech ecosystem spans both downtown and areas outside the city’s jurisdiction. Similarly, its financial center cuts across 11 counties and three states. International audiences pay little attention to these boundaries and do not recognize local names such as King of Prussia or the Delaware (River) Valley. To align these jurisdictions under one globally recognizable identity, regional collaboration is key. Smaller communities with less international visibility than their urban core also have an incentive to align their identity closer to that core city.

“You are lucky if someone knows Columbus, Ohio, let alone Dublin, about 11 miles northwest,” notes a participant in the GCI network. “The only people you’re helping by advertising internationally for Dublin live in Ireland.”

### Build the identity alliance

Global identity development requires building governance centered on collaboration and alliances. Only alignment of key stakeholders’ activities creates mutually reinforcing and resonant messages. Different motivations or objectives can drive participation. The creation of an identity alliance can raise questions from existing organizations. Teams should highlight that the aim is to elevate existing work, rather than replace it, and highlight distinctiveness and complementarity. This is not a new organization, nor an additional layer of decisionmaking. Instead, this collaborative body coordinates activities and builds cohesion between the city and the surrounding counties. (See sidebar).

Four principles define the formation of an identity alliance:

- Start with strong leadership. A baseline of leadership is required from day one. The process must start with an enthusiastic alliance willing to ensure a minimum level of involvement. No rule commands an organization to trigger the process; actors as various as metropolitan-level chambers of commerce, tourism bureaus, and city economic development bureaus have started



## CASE STUDY

### STOCKHOLM - LEVERAGING THE WIDER SCANDINAVIAN CONTEXT TO REDEFINE IDENTITY

Redefinition of Stockholm's identity helped it become one of Europe's wealthiest and most successful metropolitan areas.<sup>13</sup> Stockholm first made the decision to reposition itself in 2003, in response to the challenges of the dot-com crash.<sup>14</sup> City leaders argued they needed a more compelling brand to remain globally competitive. To distinguish Stockholm from its northern competitors and convey both greater scale and importance, the city launched the "Stockholm: Capital of Scandinavia" brand. Created in English, the brand helped build a new reputation and identity for Stockholm as a city with reach and relevance beyond its national borders. In 2006, the city

established the Stockholm Business Alliance, a voluntary partnership among 55 regional municipalities.<sup>15</sup> The alliance, whose board features representation from all political parties, helped unite the region behind a common message and cause. It now allows member municipalities to coordinate investment attraction efforts and serves as a simple gateway for international investors seeking to access the talent and resources in Stockholm and surrounding communities. It has also enabled significant investment in R&D, IT, and science clusters, helping the region to become a center for innovation and gain the global status of "unicorn factory."<sup>16</sup>



global identity processes. However, the initiation usually comes from a regionally functioning organization with the appetite for such an effort and the capacity to coordinate and get buy-in from other regional organizations and government.

- ▶ Recruit supporters along the way. As the process takes shape, the core team identifies and recruits supporters with interests in the region's global identity. A great identity attracts people and institutions. After the first results or when visibility begins to increase, a wider range of actors and ambassadors will join. Local champions will eventually embrace the brand and use the message and core-city name. The level of engagement varies: Some actors join the leadership group of the alliance, others play an advisory or execution role. Various circles can be formed around the steering/ leadership committee: advisory board, brand alliance, ambassador's team, etc.
- ▶ Share ownership. Identity development is a multifaceted effort owned by the alliance, not by the city or any group. Every sector has a role to play. To avoid fragmentation, the identity process is shared through stakeholder identification and outreach. The identity effort must be collaborative, not directive. Alliance members align their message with the shared goal of improving outcomes for the larger community.
- ▶ Reflect the region's diversity. The alliance should invite and relay the input of an array of local actors in various sectors, cultures, communities, and networks (economic, political, tourism, artistic, social, etc.). The group should not be an echo chamber, or a closed club dominated by one group. Ignoring an organization or a community leaves the identity open to criticism about exclusion and hinders its dissemination.

## TASK 4: DIAGNOSE

Metropolitan leaders do not make up a global identity from scratch. The identity of a city-region stems from its unique DNA and the many ways that it has evolved and been perceived across its existence.

First, stakeholders must know the region's distinctive features and look for growth areas. They also must fully understand current external perceptions by completing a global perception review. This identifies the gaps between what the region should be known for, how the world sees it, and how it is promoted.

### Uncover the metro area DNA

Determining a city-region's personality requires quantitative and qualitative research on the values and assets that distinguish its identity. This exercise necessitates a deep review of the region's unique selling points, key competitive opportunities, and weaknesses. The outcomes are not brand statements about "great quality of life," but ideas that help position the city globally and give it a distinctive meaning.

This review consists of an analysis of the key traits and distinctive assets of the metro area. Compared to a living organism, the character of a city can be likened to its biological DNA. The DNA is what is inherent to the city and what is passed down through economic and political cycles. It encompasses geographic characteristics such as location, climate, and geological features; built environment attributes such as urban design and infrastructure; and its population and mix of cultures and traditions.

This DNA is established early on with traits added over time, such as a changing skyline, immigration waves, cycles of influence, and international roles. Metro area DNA is neither fate nor destiny—it is subject to external and internal impulses. Environmental factors such as war, climate events, disasters, and terrorist attacks can durably change the city's DNA like epigenetic markers. Internal choices and behaviors also slowly modify the DNA through generations. Therefore, institutions, policy decisions, and leadership can manage a city-



## CASE STUDIES

### TEL AVIV - USING THE CITY'S DNA TO DEFINE ITS BRAND

Sustained branding efforts have enabled Tel Aviv, Israel to communicate the entrepreneurial and pioneering strands of its DNA and renew its founding identity as a modern, welcoming city. It first marketed itself as the “Non-Stop City” in 1989 to highlight its vibrant and cosmopolitan nature, along with a pervasive tech and innovation culture in all areas of urban life. This coincided with a sharp rise in tourism and some international investment throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. In 2010, Tel Aviv established Tel Aviv Global, a city-owned corporation, to increase tourists, investors, and innovators by catapulting the city’s reputation onto the global stage. Reflecting its own startup founding in

the desert and rebirth through an influx of immigration, a municipal strategic policy called Startup City was formed to engage investors, entrepreneurs and creative tourists around the notion that Tel Aviv was about more than its nightlife and beach culture. It has since become a complementary brand to Non-Stop City by making more explicit links between the city’s tolerance, vibrancy, and entrepreneurial spirit. Tel Aviv now also positions itself as a “smart city” to demonstrate its leadership in applying digital innovation to benefit its residents and visitors, again ensuring that there is a direct connection between its brand promise and real initiatives.<sup>17</sup>

### MANCHESTER - EMBEDDING DNA INTO THE CITY'S BRAND

One of the U.K.’s preeminent manufacturing cities, Manchester struggled with deindustrialization, unemployment, and economic decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s. After successfully hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2002, Manchester realized that it could leverage its industrial history to create a new identity. The mayor hired a creative director to form an ambitious shared vision for the city. A recurrent theme became Manchester’s status as the world’s first industrial city—a concept expressed by the new “Manchester: The Original Modern City” brand strategy (often now simply called “Original Modern”). Owned and promoted by Marketing Manchester, Greater Manchester’s

combined tourist board and destination marketing organization, the strategy focused on Manchester’s DNA as a city of firsts (e.g., the city that split the first atom, or created the world’s first programmable computer), and as a place where great minds meet (inventors, Nobel laureates). Over time, the strategy became codified in a specific identity formula: progressivism plus appetite and ability to challenge convention, think globally, and incubate new ideas. Today, this value assessment continues to inform storytelling efforts, but does not in and of itself constitute the city’s identity, which has instead become synonymous with the iconic “M” logo used city-wide as shorthand for the Original Modern city.<sup>18</sup>



## GLASGOW - CROWDSOURCING A CIVIC IDENTITY TO ENGAGE CITIZENS AND DEVELOP A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

Since the 1990s, Glasgow, Scotland has worked to overcome its reputation as a city troubled by crime and deprivation, and reveal itself as a world-class destination for business, education, and tourism. Although the first two campaigns—"Glasgow Miles Better" and "Glasgow - Scotland with Style"—attracted some business interest and helped promote retail and entertainment, they did not address deep perception challenges or capture the city's full vibrancy. As a result, the city moved away from professional branding exercises, and in 2013 launched the world's first crowdsourced city identity, branded into "People Make Glasgow." With a budget of £90,000, contributions from more than 1,500 people proved to be the least expensive way to

develop a transparent and inclusive brand while maximizing involvement. The city government capitalized on the attention of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games to make the brand visible on its buses, taxis, and city bikes. Continued success relies on its flexibility and the ability of key industries and population segments to co-opt the brand with extender words (e.g. People Make Glasgow Creative/Connected/Home). In addition to designating the universities and the airport as brand champions, the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau also successfully engaged with the city's small businesses, encouraging them to adopt the brand through an online toolkit and effectively turning them into brand ambassadors.

## IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT INCREASES RESILIENCE BY CONFRONTING INCONVENIENT TRUTHS.

Atlanta's identity diagnosis did not ignore its connections to America's history of racism and segregation, but instead leveraged this history to redefine a positive future. Distancing itself from the "Gone with the Wind" stereotype, Atlanta instead highlighted its civil rights legacy as a testimony to its innovation, creativity,

and ability to overcome. This identity as a transformer or inventor connected with Atlanta's top tech market and its entrepreneurial and innovative culture, while also showcasing the stories of residents who reflect the region's diversity.





## HOW PILOT CITIES ALIGNED THE EFFORTS OF REGIONAL ACTORS IN IDENTITY ALLIANCES

The **Louisville** Global identity core group includes four of the region's principal organizations representing economic development, business, and tourism: Louisville Forward, the Louisville Convention & Visitors' Bureau, One Southern Indiana, and Greater Louisville Inc. This group convened a larger advisory group at intervals throughout the global identity process to collect impressions, discuss initial concepts, and test and refine the emerging work product. This group consisted of marketing organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and cultural organizations, who will ultimately represent first adopters as the global identity work moves into the implementation phase. The core group also engaged the public through a series of meetings, presentations, "man on the street"-style interviews, and an online poll.

In **Philadelphia**, the city's commerce department stewarded the project, but actively sought to integrate central city and suburban actors and assets. A steering committee of core groups with the responsibilities and budget to promote or interact internationally was seeded to launch the project. A leadership council with approximately 30 professionals and practitioners from economic development, university, and tourism entities will oversee the project moving forward. Additionally, a larger advisory board of about 80 people has provided feedback throughout the process.

**Atlanta's** global identity project is coordinated by the Metro Atlanta Chamber, but centered on advancing a 29-county alliance of regional organizations focused on regional identity, building on prior collaboration around export

and foreign direct investment and motivated by a Super Bowl launch opportunity. The collaboration included complementary efforts such as the Atlanta Regional Commission's marketing alliance, CATLYST, and the Economic Development Marketing Council, plus foreign consulates. It initially focused on the 10 counties closest to the city and those most engaged in regional economic development efforts. Chamber facilitators met one-on-one with the region's arts community, colleges and universities, key Fortune 500 corporations, the Super Bowl host committee, economic development offices, and others. Research such as the Brookings global perception analysis (see below) and Net Promoter data was presented, and surveys were sent to partners to generate insight about and support for the identity statement. This structure and process helped affirm the alliance, create stronger relationships for forging an identity statement, and enable identity statement amplification.

In **Columbus**, legacy efforts had convened a wide range of regional actors to form a brand and marketing alliance. Affiliations included economic development functions (e.g. Columbus 2020, Columbus Partnership, Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, Columbus Chamber); civic interests (The Columbus Foundation, Columbus Recreation and Parks, Greater Columbus Arts Council, Short North Alliance); sectoral groups (Smart Columbus, Experience Columbus, Greater Columbus Sports Commission, Rev1 Ventures); local government (city of Columbus, Franklin County); and businesses (e.g. Nationwide, Huntington, Battelle).

region's DNA and adjust the course of its evolution, but not achieve a rapid wholesale change of a metro area into something it never was.

This review covers three aspects:

**1. Historical roots:** Research—coupled with interviewing or learning from local experts, historians, and institutional leaders—establishes a sense of the history of the region. How was the core city founded, and why? What was the ethos of the city at the time of its founding, and what legacy attributes remain? What have been its best outputs? How do these translate into modern times, and which qualities can be pulled out that resonate with a diverse group of stakeholders today?

**2. Comparative benchmarks:** Metro areas need to gauge themselves against their peers and competitors, requiring both local and external market research with performance data analysis and expert interviews. What is the region's performance relative to its peers in winning opportunities such as visitors, talent, investment, and events? What are the comparative advantages that truly differentiate the region? Which personality traits and assets make the region stand out in the international marketplace? What sectors or geographies stand out?

**3. Citizen engagement:** Understanding how residents view the region and its shared history helps find consensus on identity; the voice of citizens is both an important content input and a way to drive support for the project later. An inclusive process for input will distill what makes a place attractive, unites the community, and is unique to their city. Finding which tools work best to secure participation requires creativity and knowledge of the local market. Outreach methods include crowdsourcing, work with schools, local competitions, radio talk shows, public exhibitions, surveys, focus groups, feedback systems from visitors, etc.

To be inclusive and go beyond stereotypes, the identity analysis must consider all aspects, populations, demographics, and communities that make up the essence of the city-region. The experience of diverse residents must be validated, and all must recognize themselves in the identity the city promotes. A wide solicitation of input—requiring intentional

invitations from the identity alliance—can preempt critiques that the identity only represents entrenched economic and special interests.

Identity analysis is both authentic and aspirational. A candid, internal self-assessment of DNA assets and distinguishing characteristics should include drawbacks and weaknesses such as social divisions and inequalities. Cities should explore their inner contradictions and nuance them with positive aspects. Linking challenges to positive aspects demonstrates the city's ability to apply strengths to solve problems. Metro areas may find shortcomings that the development of a positive identity can address. An aspirational identity creates a path to resolve these tensions by inspiring cohesion and problem-solving.

Thus, a city-region may need to reframe an important piece of its traditions that distracts from the city's future identity. For example, reputations for bullfighting or legalized prostitution may contradict innovative aspirations or need explanation. Resilient identities move away from these perceptions and focus instead on aspects that are more protected from cultural shocks and trends.

### Assess the external perception of the city

Metro areas must undertake a global perception analysis that gathers evidence on the reputation of the region and what it is known for. An outside-in review challenges local groupthink by tapping the perspective of external audiences from the international marketplace. The diagnosis needs feedback and inputs from diverse audiences in various professional and cultural environments. At a minimum, this involves review of indices, rankings, and media. Optimally, it reaches international executives, business owners, investors, foreign students and expats, site selectors, and reporters, etc.

Cities then weigh the results from the perception analysis against their objectively measured strengths and weaknesses. The city must understand the potential imbalances in its visibility: whether the region is known for the right things, in the right ways, and the costs of these imbalances.

## CROWDSOURCED METHODS ACTIVATE PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT AND CREATE VIRAL MESSAGING

Glasgow's "People Make Glasgow" campaign used public conversations and a "pre-moderated conversation wall" to get input on the city's brand, receiving 7,000 visits and 1,500 submissions by people from 42 countries across the world. The city's marketing bureau organized digital outreach with 400,000 Facebook and Twitter conversations over four weeks.

Philadelphia's in-depth research methodology was two-fold. Secondary research included background on Philadelphia's identity from local histories, studies, media reviews, prior marketing campaigns, a more. Primary research encompassed interviews with over

400 people in the region via focus groups, online discussion boards, and individual meetings. About 900 people were surveyed across different categories of residents, relocated residents, expats, and out-of-market audiences. Finally, Philadelphia developed an online platform, Speak Philly, to gather short answers from the public on the question: "What makes Philly better than the rest?" (Figure 4). Reaching the public via taxi placards and other advertising, this tool received more than 2,000 proactive responses with quotes that articulated themes and offered distinctive words such as "grit," "passion," and "revolutionary."

**Figure 4. Philadelphia gathered insights through surveys, interviews, and background research**

Philadelphia  
Global Identity  
Project

# Hey Philly,

The Philadelphia Global Identity Project is building an identity for Philadelphia to help attract and retain more businesses, talent and investment—and we need your voice to make it happen. The world is listening.

What makes Philly better than the rest?

ENTER →

Source: Philadelphia Global Identity Team



# GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S REPUTATION TRACKER

The pilot project experimented with novel research tools, such as the Georgia State University (GSU) social media tracking project, to both bolster the baseline perception analysis and monitor progress over time.

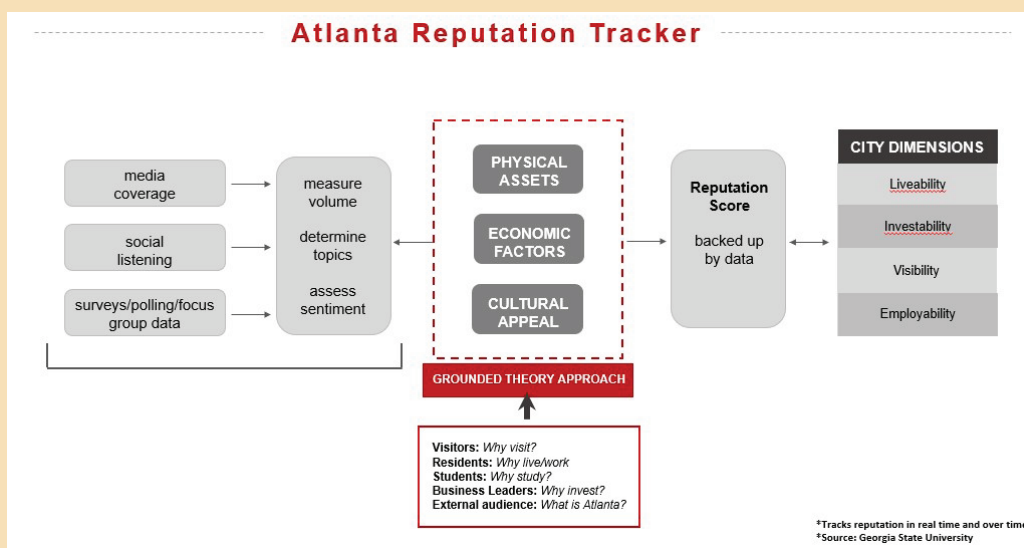
Atlanta's core project team enlisted GSU's College of Business to develop big data methods and algorithms that capture sentiments on the city's reputation on a daily basis, and possibly in near real-time.

The pilot tool taps data from multiple sources, such as traditional media coverage and social media conversations. It considers four dimensions of a city's reputation:

**Livability:** factors that increase the attractiveness of a city to live in;  
**Investability:** factors that prompt businesses or investors to expand in the city;  
**Visibility:** visibility to the external audience;  
**Employability:** factors that make a city appealing to work in.

Rather than taking a single snapshot in time, this approach can gauge the impact and duration of discrete interventions or events on the city's reputation, and help to more specifically identify and prioritize areas for reputation improvement. In its final form, the reputation tracker also could benchmark against peer city reputation trends.

**Figure 5. Reputation tracker developed by a research team at Georgia State University**



Source: Atlanta Global Identity Team and Georgia State University

The pilot cohort cities started their work using media perception analysis provided by Brookings, which included identification of peer benchmark regions, review of 300+ indices rankings using a proprietary database, and bespoke analysis of global media sources.

*Guidance on how to replicate this baseline analysis of a metro area's global profile and perception is provided in Appendix 1, with a step-by-step, low-cost approach to measuring perception.*

Some metro areas augmented these with additional data sources such as Net Promoter, prior branding studies, and direct surveys. These tools include:

- ▶ Crowdsourced diagnosis (live public survey throughout the process) such as in Glasgow or Philadelphia's "Speak Philly" platform. (See sidebar).
- ▶ Surveys of expats, students, entering/exiting visitors, or business leaders to understand the underlying appeal of the region from their point of view (livability for talent, business climate for small business, dynamism for investors, capacity for reinvestment, etc.).
- ▶ Open workshops and student competitions about defining the city's identity, as organized by Oslo.
- ▶ Leveraging sister city relations to survey foreign locations and get international feedback.
- ▶ Establishing an international advisory group or "friends of the city" club in the model of the Friends of Barcelona club, to tap pools of motivated people.
- ▶ Creating a benchmark club with peer cities to compare commonalities.
- ▶ Real-time social media tracking through key terms. (See Georgia State University reputation tracker)

## TASK 5: DEVELOP THE IDENTITY

After the diagnosis, regional stakeholders need to apply the findings, assets, and values to specific audiences with a narrative matrix. They must also distill the city's narratives into a common description of the essence and distinctive character of the city—the identity statement. At this step, including creative leaders and mixed groups leads to stronger responses.

### Develop narratives resonating across audiences

From the DNA and perception analyses, metro areas must first translate the values and assets of the city into a narrative that resonates with target audiences, including residents, businesses, innovators, investors, tourists, event organizers, and students. This step develops the identity into a multisector narrative.

A narrative matrix, or some other more locally useful format, can help apply the identity to different target audiences by linking it to practical applications for individual stakeholders. The narrative matrix also is a tool for teaching the identity message to people who join the community. The identity message and emphasis vary for each audience (Figure 6). The matrix uses case studies, examples, and practical situations to adapt the core identity to the lens of specific audiences. This makes the identity tangible, relatable, meaningful, and attractive for each group (see Table 2 and Table 3 for examples).

Local teams should approach the narrative matrix from the bottom-up, taking time to execute on the diagnostic process prior to filling out the narrative matrix. Regional stakeholders develop the narrative matrix through a deliberate process, often in phases tackling one or several sectors at a time. Designing the narrative matrix will also likely be an iterative process, where teams develop certain ideas and then test and retest them with audiences to see if they resonate. As trust grows within the identity alliance, conversations also become more honest. Feedback loops with focus groups, additional research, and conversations with advisory groups gradually hone the narratives.



## CASE STUDY

### MIAMI - CIVIC-LED INITIATIVES AS MEANS TO BUILD CONSENSUS AROUND PRIORITY ISSUES

Miami has been nurturing its global identity as a contemporary hub of arts, culture, and architecture for over 25 years. In the 1980s, the city risked losing its competitiveness due to its peripheral location, comparatively undiversified economy, and negative brand image. So it was motivated to reposition itself as a high-value gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean. Since then, Miami has witnessed cycles of private and civic-led initiatives to reverse economic decline by fostering greater diversification. In the 1990s, Mayor Alex Penelas appointed business leader Jay Malina to spearhead a coordinated business leadership response within the International Trade Consortium. The result was “One Community One

Goal,” which brought together 42 public and private partners to jointly pursue a citizen-owned agenda around diversification, trade, cosmopolitanism, and entrepreneurship. The city’s new identity focused on higher-value sectors, investment in culture, substantially improved intercontinental connectivity, and the repurposing of former industrial districts into contemporary arts neighborhoods. The result is that Miami has shifted from its “sun and fun” reputation toward one of design, culture, trade, and innovation, with the sum effect of retaining a larger number of long-term residents rather than those who come just for retirement or seasonal enjoyment.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 6. The narrative matrix applies values and identity facets to each target audiences**

CORE VALUES AND ASSETS	TARGET AUDIENCES		
	VALUE 1	VALUE 2	VALUE 3
AUDIENCE 1	Application to the audience & example	Application to the audience & example	Application to the audience & example
AUDIENCE 2	Application to the audience & example	Application to the audience & example	Application to the audience & example

Source: Authors

**Distill the city's identity in a statement**

Condensing the multisector narrative into a few paragraphs provides a useful statement of the city's essence and distinctive character. Cities can test a unique value proposition about the identity. The identity statement or manifesto often includes:

- ▶ The multichapter story that defines the metropolitan area's DNA based on inherited views. It describes the current chapter, and what the next can look like.
- ▶ Core findings or messages gathered from the diagnostic process.
- ▶ Areas for improvement of the identity that aligns perception with performance or aspirations.

The identity statement must be specific enough to represent the city alone. If the team were to hide the city name from the statement or messaging boards, the audience still could guess its relation to the city. The identity statement also must be meaningful to a foreign audience unfamiliar with American jargon, colloquial expressions, or regional references.

**Table 2. Summary of the narrative matrix from Louisville**

	<b>Welcoming</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Blended</b>	<b>Rising</b>
<b>Visit:</b> Conferences; trade shows; individual leisure travel; entertainment events	<b>Room for Everyone</b> A distinctive brand of southern-ness and hospitality.	<b>Local, Original, Quirky</b> Combines heritage with innovation, authenticity with originality.	<b>Delightful Convergence</b> A city of free-thinking individuals.	<b>Feel the Energy</b> From the downtown renaissance to the bourbon industry boom, Louisville is on the rise.
<b>Live:</b> Talent, population retention & growth	<b>Room for Everyone</b> Compassionate, Louisville embraces all.	<b>Rich History, Bright Future</b> Louisville values both history and future, creating an eclectic, independent spirit.	<b>Delightful Convergence</b> A combination of rural and urban, river and forest, historic and innovative, rugged and genteel.	<b>Creating Our Future</b> New and exciting opportunities for residents to enjoy a different adventure every day.
<b>Invest:</b> Investment in priority sectors; entrepreneurs	<b>Collaborative and Competitive</b> Spanning Kentucky and Indiana, Louisville's economy is globally competitive and locally collaborative.	<b>Trailblazing Since 1778</b> Louisville is a proven launchpad for long-standing global brands and fast-growing upstarts.	<b>Eclectic Opportunities, Unrivalled Location</b> A bi-state region of distinctive character. Embodies history and ambition, tradition and technology, possibility and accessibility.	<b>Creating Our Future</b> An enviable mix of industries, ideal geography, and world-class infrastructure make for a bright future.
<b>Work:</b> Middle- and high-skilled service workers in priority sectors	<b>Collaborative and Competitive</b> A professional culture that celebrates all sizes of businesses.	<b>Trailblazing Since 1778</b> Opportunities for professionals looking to make an impact in their fields.	<b>Eclectic Opportunities Found and Created</b> Louisville is two states, one city, with opportunities for professionals in a variety of settings.	<b>Creating Our Future</b> Louisville's economy is evolving in key industries. and offers increasing opportunities to grow careers.

Source: Louisville Global Identity Team

**Table 3. Example of a narrative matrix developed for London in 2004**

	<b>Always opportunities to do more</b>	<b>Connecting past, present, and future</b>	<b>A place for individuals</b>	<b>The city where the world meets</b>	<b>Exciting contrasts</b>
<b>Tourism</b>	Whatever experience you want, London offers it.	Where ideas are shown and grown.	Interest for every interest.	Enjoy the richness of diversity.	Heritage and here and now.
<b>Business</b>	At the leading edge of business creativity.	Industrial revolution. Knowledge economy.	Achieve potential—test against the best.	Global center for networks.	Experience and innovation.
<b>Culture</b>	The generation of new thinking for a changing world.	Experience enlightenment and inspiration.	Realize your creative potential.	Magnet for arts and artists.	Treasure house and greenhouse.
<b>Sports</b>	Inventors, developers, and supporters of every kind of sport.	History resonates and spurs on higher levels.	Follow your passion.	See the world's greatest perform.	Metropolitan settings, open spaces.
<b>Education</b>	Where the world's finest minds have developed ideas.	Knowledge and London never stand still.	Fulfill your true learning potential.	Access the world's knowledge here.	Academic tradition and new learning.

*Source: London Brand Project, 2004*



## EACH CITY FROM THE GCI COHORT DEVELOPED AN IDENTITY STATEMENT OR MANIFESTO.

### Atlanta

*"Metro Atlanta is here, now, and next. A region of visionaries who do what others never imagined. Inventing. Connecting. Inspiring. Thriving. We nurture and welcome the brightest talent—global leaders who disrupt the status quo and crusade to change the world. We are dreamers who galvanized the Civil Rights Movement, creatives who are redefining digital entertainment, and innovators who are paving an inclusive way to urban development. We are lively main streets, lakes nestled in lush green spaces, and bustling nightlife in the city—the options are endless. In metro Atlanta, we share one ambition: to never stop rising."*

### Columbus

Columbus identified the values that drive "the Columbus Way"—a widely adopted moniker used to describe Columbus' culture and civic-minded business approach. A statement and brand manifesto centered on the values of the Columbus Way was developed. An excerpt follows:

*"Through the Columbus Way, we are fueled by soaring ambition to reach new heights. To imagine a future like no other and know that we can build it. We are dedicated to collaboration, harnessing the power of hearts and minds united in a common purpose. We believe in fellowship, a genuine caring for each other's success—a unique brand of togetherness that can power unbridled progress. We are devoted to inclusivity, the wisdom to know that leaders spring from public, private, civic, and grassroots sectors. We strive to work for the common good,*

*knowing that it will elevate us all. The Columbus Way is why we set bold goals. Why we impact the world with never-done-before achievements. Why we create our future with aspiration and purpose."*

### Louisville

*"Located at the convergence of the American South and Midwest, Louisville is a dynamic and globally oriented city. It is defined by its welcoming spirit, independent thinkers, delightful blend of influences, and continual quest for its best self. Powered by the infrastructure, assets, and amenities of a 21st century city, Louisville is creating a future built on opportunity, ingenuity, and people-driven growth."*

### Philadelphia

Philadelphia developed three alternative brand narratives, each sending a strategic message to a segmented audience. Ultimately, the working group in Philadelphia opted for a converged narrative that hit on key points from each of the three options. The converged narrative centered around Philadelphia being "A City Where Passion Drives Possibility."

*"Philadelphia is a city fueled by passion. Passion to change the status quo, think differently, and push forward together. Passion to invent—from American Democracy to breakthrough cancer-curing treatments. Passion and ingenuity to do more with less. Passion to make a difference in a city that's small enough that you can make an impact, but big enough that your impact matters. Passion to connect with those around you and to give back to the community that you call home. Passion is, and always has been, the fuel that sparks revolutionary possibility in Philadelphia."*

## PHASE 3 - IDENTITY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Having developed a shared identity and common narrative, local teams should disseminate the identity internally and externally around core audiences. The collective decisions on identity and fundamental messaging guide the new marketing campaigns, materials, and branding in the normal course of organizational change.

A complex and expensive implementation over time tests the strength and resilience of the original goodwill alliance. Cities need to raise additional funds and get durable commitments from stakeholders. The implementation process is not linear: As outside organizations align, periods of calm and high energy alternate. Core teams among the GCI pilot cohort noted

difficulties sustaining the momentum after the original wave of enthusiasm.

### TASK 6: PLAN

This planning step helps anticipate funding needs and structure the identity dissemination strategy. Cities must decide when the recruitment of one or more dedicated full-time employees becomes required. Regional teams should also determine how to collaborate for shared identity tasks between what needs to be done collectively, and who is individually responsible. They should anticipate the legal requirements to protect the intellectual property and branding materials developed in the process.

**Table 4. Financial models take different forms in organization and funding sources**

Financial Models	Example
<b>Government model</b> A single government entity supports the budget.	Barcelona
<b>Sponsorship model</b> A consortium of private and civic partners collectively funds the project.	Berlin
<b>Co-investor model</b> A consortium of public bodies and promotional agencies pay a nonspecific annual tariff to share the costs and encourage collaboration from diverse regional actors.	Philadelphia secured support from individual businesses
<b>Customer or license model</b> Pay-per-use of the identity collateral.	Brisbane
<b>Special assessment model</b> The activities that accrue from the promotion are “taxed” to pay for the effort.	The budget for identity development by the Metro Atlanta Chamber is funded by strategic plan funds under the promotion budget
<b>Mixed model</b> A combination of (some of) the above.	Philadelphia secured support from individual businesses

Source: Authors

## PHILADELPHIA IDENTITY IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Philadelphia's team framed their progress in the near term around outputs instead of outcomes, highlighting efficiency on storytelling efforts.

### Phase 1 – Q4 2019 - Q1 2020

- ▶ Get buy-in from tourism agencies
- ▶ Community engagement/tracking civic pride annually
- ▶ Human resources use strategy webinars, partnerships, and media activation
- ▶ Identify and onboard social media influencers and international ambassadors
- ▶ Create local support groups with quality of life initiatives

### Phase 2 – Q1 - Q2 2020

- ▶ Business leads
- ▶ Increase resources dedicated to Global ID work
- ▶ Integrated messaging with local attractor agencies
- ▶ Community activations in conjunction with high-profile local events

### Phase 3 – Q3 - Q4 2020

- ▶ Out-of-home advertising regionally and in key markets, media relations regionally, nationally, and internationally

### 1 - 3 years

- ▶ Perception from business community
- ▶ Trying to get more Philadelphians on global stages for awards, etc.

## Anticipate the timeline

Building momentum requires critical path planning. Metropolitan leaders must plan the activation and promotion of the city's identity. They should lead an organized effort and anticipate resource constraints and capacities. Creating phases of steady delivery and a timeline sequencing the activities can sustain regular delivery of the identity. (See sidebar).

## Explore financing models

The global identity efforts align existing place marketing activities and budgets in the public and private sectors, creating a common—and more coherent and impactful—narrative. Often, local teams have resources to imagine but not to implement. Securing financing plays a litmus

test role for collaboration. In the activation phase, cities have to find a way to generate resources from those who benefit from the enhanced visibility of the city-region. There is often a big free-rider problem that must be resolved before different entities contribute to a collective effort.

To start with, places should consider the resources already allocated on regional promotion. Organizations that use marketing resources to sell the region as a place to study, work, invest, locate, visit, or host conferences have the most to gain from adopting a shared understanding of identity and common narratives, and making use of jointly owned marketing tools. Developing and using common resources can even produce savings over multiple and different narrative versions. They



should make an argument for optimizing these resources through the newly defined identity. The original identity alliance oftentimes transitions into a self-help and fundraising committee, where participation and membership require a contribution. (Table 4).

## TASK 7: PROMOTE

Promoting the identity involves a careful look at chronology and segmentation. Cities can develop a global identity strategy and implementation workplan in some locally useful format. The strategy prioritizes programmatic activities to apply the identity in the short and longer terms. The workplan also codifies the overall tactics, operational commitments, and performance metrics.

### Develop a menu of programmatic activities

This menu aggregates key approaches cities use to promote their identity narrative.

#### *Shared visual identity*

A shared visual identity manifests the regional alliance. Use of a shared and consistent visual identity elevated the impact of each organization's individual efforts to promote the city-region for business, tourism, relocation, and events. Regional organizations align their messaging to create a unified visual identity that enhances brand recognition. They use their corporate brand refresh to signal their alignment or add a badge next to their logo. The brand users constantly provide a stream of data inputs and feedback so that the core team can monitor changing perceptions.

The development of a brand repository or box helps disseminate and share the narratives and visual identity (see sidebar). The brand box builds an online bank of resources used to share the identity's foundational themes. It includes slides, handouts, talking points, photos, and videos. It is an effective tool, but requires some

maintenance as well as training for users to best leverage its content:

- ▶ Develop branding guidelines
- ▶ Add photos and videos: Establish criteria for quality of images, establish deadline for submitting for review, vet for adherence to identity themes, categorize, and post
- ▶ Develop talking points, adapted in part from the narrative matrix
- ▶ Develop slides with core content and corresponding notes
- ▶ Review completeness, usability, and protocol for shared back office operations and content
- ▶ Provide user training for associations, event organizers, and domestic and foreign firms about how to communicate the identity to their respective audience

#### *Early adopters and champions*

Cities consistently have to make the case for a unified identity. Recruiting early adopters who demonstrate how the identity works for them helps make that ongoing case. Cities license, train, and support a group of international brand champions, city ambassadors, and friends that will help disseminate or adopt the identity. Partners will adopt the identity in different ways—some wholly, some partially, but the more actors who adopt and show the identity, the better. The buy-in from certain actors is strategic in the early days, like travel gateways, media, and other actors with high exposure to targeted audiences.

A stakeholder analysis helps identify different categories of actors and the most appropriate value proposition for them. Affiliate organizations and supporters may align under different labels:

- Organizations that do marketing and communicating. Their media or cultural influence make them important champions. Cities identify catalysts for multichannel exposures (events, traditional media, social media, film, TV, and literature) and make their own celebrities.
- Entities that benefit from a more visible identity through an increase in the scale in demand and an increase of the size of regional economy. These can be businesses such as real estate, transportation, telecommunication, hospitality, and banks. Most places invite the airport and public transport authorities to get involved early as they have an incentive for a stronger visibility. They also change their visual branding more often than other actors.
- Actors committed to the region's values and the flourishing of the region. These actors can have a philanthropic or historic stake in the region's heritage. They care about the well-being of its residents. Cities also recruit key champions with a political stake in the region's success, such as local and regional politicians and leaders.

#### *Correct visibility on specific indices and awards*

Cities pursue credible awards, prizes, and other external validation consistent with the identity. They often also create awards or events associated with the identity that generate attention and link the metropolitan area to the theme. In particular, cities focus metropolitan political and business leadership on activities that match the identity. Cities target enhanced or corrected visibility on selected indices, addressing distortions or data gaps. They also prioritize and target recruitment of conferences, conventions, and events that deliberately support the identity.

#### *Create an identity coordination team*

Creating a small coordination team may help sustain the momentum in time and implement the identity. A small back office bureau with a team can coordinate the implementation, provide services to the members of the identity alliance, and gradually encourage new members to adopt the identity.

The team can be hosted by the most trusted organization of the alliance or consist of a rotating bureau across the alliance. A neutral third party, like a local corporation, also can host it and provide the right service culture to the members. The engineering company Arup hosted that team in Sydney, while HSBC Bank took on that role in Hong Kong.

#### *Organize the region's diaspora and alumni.*

Cities can activate particular networks at lower costs. The city's diaspora and former residents provide a reliable pool of potential ambassadors. For instance, as a national hub for news outlets and CNN's global headquarters, Atlanta makes use of its diaspora of journalists, targeting priority journalists with Atlanta connections.

#### *Identify nontraditional catalysts for exposure*

Cities explore alternative brand amplifiers such as sport, literature, television, and films. Cities need a strategic and collaborative approach to major events and destination branding, with a robust evaluation and impact measurement framework. A "major events charter" can guarantee support to maximize economic, profile, and brand opportunities for events. For instance, Glasgow honed in on the synergy between events and the city brand, starting with the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. Atlanta hosted Super Bowl LIII in February 2019. That major U.S. sporting event provided an opportunity to test and disseminate Atlanta's recent work on identity, as well as measure the message penetration of its analysis. In particular, Atlanta analyzed to what extent the



## CASE STUDY

### MELBOURNE - INTERNATIONAL EVENTS TO ENHANCE GLOBAL APPEAL

Melbourne, Australia, a proud city with cultural and sporting depth, has undergone a transformation of its physical, social, economic, and cultural profile through the use of planning policy, investment in arts infrastructure, and large-scale sporting events. In 1992, the city of Melbourne and the Victoria Government launched Project 3000, an initiative to grow the population of the city center and the CBD by accelerating residential development.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the city developed a vision of itself as a 24/7 destination and a magnet for local and international students and tourists. The physical impacts of these policies and strategies were expressed in Melbourne's city center and inner suburbs, which saw

the development and redevelopment of extensive sport, arts, and cultural institutions, the regeneration of the Docklands, and the curation of a vibrant retail and commercial destination in the city center's historic laneways.<sup>21</sup> In recent years, city and state government, civic, and business leaders have also used mass attendance sporting events to diversify Melbourne's formerly manufacturing- and commercial-focused economy.<sup>22</sup> Today, a pivot toward large-scale arts and cultural events is expressing the importance that city leaders continue to attach to internationally renowned events as a way to promote Melbourne's destination appeal and improve its global competitiveness.



new coverage was on-message with its narrative on being a top tech hub with a welcoming community and culture.

The city must consider how the event supports identity promotion and represent its core identity. Events have varying levels of sophistication and can also have adverse effects. Sporting events provide powerful exposure but do not necessarily tell a sophisticated story.

#### *Getting started: launch or reveal?*

Cities kickstart their identity implementation strategy either with a “soft launch” or a “hard launch.”

A hard launch involves a series of promotional events and advertising campaigns to tell the identity to the world. Usually, a big one-off, single-ticket event or conference unveils and announces the new identity to the world. Instead of telling it, a soft launch reveals the identity over several months, gradually integrates sectors, and slowly invites catalysts and supporters to adopt it.

Oftentimes, cities must resist the urge for a hard launch. A launch too early or under the wrong circumstances opens the flank for poor media and press coverage. Soft launches usually work better by ensuring early adoption of the identity and brand. Cities first roll out the identity in the sectors and areas where they have most traction. They test ideas in different environments. For instance, Glasgow released its identity first in the technology and tourism sectors that were already invested in the city's promotion.

## **Measure progress in identity adoption**

Promotional or economic development strategies usually contain short-term transactional expectations. An increase in visits, job creation, or investment activity is expected within the calendar year. However, the development of a global identity reflects a slow change in the city's way of life. Most “chapters” in the life of a city span over 10 to 20 years. Visible benefits and outcomes also take time to appear. Tracking day-to-day effects of global identity activities is challenging. Many effects are nonmaterial and delayed.

Therefore, local teams must manage the expectations of regional stakeholders and define different metrics of success for certain stages of identity implementation early on. Metrics not only measure efficiency, they also constitute a key justification of the value of global identity activities. Over time, metrics help legitimize the case for global identity and the deployment of resources.

To keep stakeholders engaged, local teams ought to celebrate the “little successes” and demonstrate any progress made. The collective partnership or individual actors may measure change on a series of metrics. (Table 5).

**Table 5. Cities track a diversity of performance metrics to capture the effects of identity efforts**

SHORT TERM	<b>Participation</b>	Metrics on engagement, including the number of partners in the collective identity efforts, the type of actors using the activities, and why.
	<b>Activity</b>	Metrics on process and activity, including usage of the brand box and/or shared back office (e.g., number of people contacted, number of surveys).
	<b>Momentum</b>	Indicators on co-investment and additional support from stakeholders providing staff and resources.
MEDIUM TERM	<b>Visibility</b>	Tracking of media exposure (airtime, stories about the city, reviews on travel websites such as TripAdvisor) and social media mentions (Facebook check-in, Google Trends, Instagram, and Twitter hashtags). These metrics are coupled with an assessment of the positive or negative tone of the mentions.
	<b>Alignment</b>	Number of identity adopters, users of the core narrative in their own activities, regional organizations projecting on-message visibility and branding. This leads to collective self-confidence and mutual reliance.
	<b>Transaction</b>	Metrics on quantitative output: new investments, visitors, students, grants, events, etc.
LONG TERM	<b>Opportunity</b>	Indicators on the city-region's strategic priorities: increase of visits from priority geographies, increase in convention and international events, increased talent attraction, increased business inquiries and site visits from companies in priority industries, etc.
	<b>Leverage</b>	Measure of the city's soft power and influence, linked to increase in its voice in international circles and recognition in global city leadership.
	<b>Impact</b>	Metrics on the city's economic vitality and position in rankings: economic growth, crime rate, quality of life index, livability, etc.

Source: Authors





## CASE STUDY

### BARCELONA - MEDIA OUTREACH AND RESEARCH TO CO-CREATE A NEW BRAND FOR THE CITY

After Barcelona, Spain hosted the Olympic Games in 1992, it became a global destination for tourism, arts and design, and food and drink.<sup>23</sup> But by 2010, it had become evident that the Olympic legacy and related infrastructure improvements had not carried through into creating a broader global identity for the city, particularly a business brand synonymous with innovation and global talent. In 2018, the city council launched the Barcelona City Branding Project, which culminated in a new crosscutting brand. “Always Barcelona” was designed to simultaneously boost local economic

activity, improve quality of life for residents, and engage stakeholders across all economic sectors. An exercise in co-creation, it drew heavily on global seminars, interviews with public institutions, citizens, and businesses, and a series of workshops to fine tune Barcelona’s pillar values: connectivity, entrepreneurial spirit, charm, diversity, talent base, and commitment to moral issues. Twenty-nine members are currently signed up to the project, including private companies and 22 local governments within the metropolitan area.<sup>24</sup>



## CONCLUSION

In an increasingly urban and economically integrated world, people and ideas move rapidly from location to location. More than ever, global talent, investment, and entertainment are contested and selective about where they locate. Their choices are based not only on price, incentives, or business climate, but also on cities' appeal and global visibility.

In this context, a regional identity that is magnetic, sticky, and globally resonant is essential for a metro area to remain competitive. The opportunity is substantial, especially in the current cycle, as many of the largest U.S. and global cities experience saturation and inflation, increasing the appeal of competitive midsize cities with good assets and a story to tell. These cities may be well-poised to take advantage of changes underway to the geography of talent, business, and capital.

To increase their gains and tell their story in an increasingly crowded marketplace, city-regions can work to understand and communicate the core identity that lies behind their appeal. Cities that adopt distinctive and differentiating

propositions based on a coherent, genuine, and aspirational identity can gain new opportunities. Along the way, they can recruit their residents and other stakeholders to be active champions, and better leverage their marketing resources.

This guide provides metro areas with an approach to developing a global identity. It recaps a process that involves building the case for a global identity, developing that identity through analysis and deep engagement with stakeholders, and planning/promoting the identity and measuring its adoption.

The current moment provides unprecedented opportunity for midsize and otherwise "not well-known" cities to become globally recognized and influential, exercising the soft power of appeal, confidence, and curiosity, as well as accurately communicating key facts and information about what they offer. Those that succeed in building a recognized identity—as cities such as Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, and Melbourne have done—will find that not only does opportunity come to them, but that the world starts to tell their story for them.

To provide cities with a baseline understanding of their international visibility, this guide was prepared for the GCI Global Identity Cohort by Brookings Institution nonresident senior fellow Greg Clark and former nonresident senior fellow Tim Moonen. More expensive ways to conduct this analysis exist, but the following is an optimal method in the context of scarce resources.

Analysis of a metro area's global profile and perception offers insight on different questions about global identity, such as:

- ▶ What is the region's current global identity? What regional values and traits most resonate globally?
- ▶ Why does the metro area need to promote a global identity? What gaps, risks, missed opportunities, and distortions need to be addressed?
- ▶ What audiences does the metro area need to target? (e.g., young people unfamiliar with the region, investors in key sectors, students, former residents, etc.).

This manual guides metropolitan areas through five sections as they build their own customized analysis. There is no single correct approach. Each metropolitan area may choose to focus on their preferred set of themes. Much of the perception-data gathering process is manual, gathered on a metro-by-metro, publication-by-publication basis. As such, it is time intensive. Monitoring perception on an ongoing basis with an automated service, similar to the GSU Perception Tracker introduced in the report, helps gather data and insight more efficiently.

## 1. Identify global peers

Understanding the international peer group of the region (those metro areas that have similar assets and aspirations) helps contextualize the current strength of the region's global identity and inform the strategies to pursue.

This analysis can begin by comparing the region against others in terms of total region population, GDP per capita, and industry structure. Sources such as Oxford Economics, JLL, and UN-Habitat are useful starting points.

Local leaders then consider whether other metropolitan areas share the city's position in their national or continental system of cities. Some cities may have a similar population size, but one city may be the 20th largest in its nation while another city benefits from the visibility of being a national capital. Whether metropolitan leaders and governments also broadly share goals in terms of the future of their metro area and how they position themselves externally is also relevant to whether they should be counted as a peer.

There are no fixed rules, but experience shows that when selecting a peer metro area, it is important to:

- ▶ Identify at least one core similarity in terms of metropolitan population, average income, or industry structure;
- ▶ Observe if the peer metro area is going on, or has gone on, a similar historic trend (e.g. Deindustrialization, rapid population growth, political reorganization, effort to create urban quality, etc.);
- ▶ Understand the peer's current strategy and positioning in the global marketplace to ensure there is some alignment.

## 2. Evaluate the region's performance and visibility in global benchmarks

Global benchmarks of city and metropolitan performance are an important source of insight about what advantages and disadvantages regions are perceived to have, and what gaps there are between internal perceptions and external measurements.

There are different ways to review the performance of the metropolitan area. Some systematic monitoring approaches examine the region's changing performance over time across a full range of metrics (examples include Oslo, Sydney, and Amsterdam/Holland Metropole). Metro areas can also undertake more simple reviews themselves using an online scan of the most visible rankings and indices.

This evaluation aims at gathering a clearer evidence base about:

- ▶ Whether the metro area is performing better or worse in recent years and by what measures. This can inform which areas (e.g., quality of place, business and investment appeal, talent ingredients, tourism, etc.) Can be emerging advantages around which to build external engagement or decide challenges to address;
- ▶ Whether the metropolitan area is widely included or recognized in regional or global studies. This helps identify if there are some potential awareness gaps about how the world perceives the metro area;
- ▶ Where the gaps are between performance and perception. The differences between studies that measure subjective opinion and hard evidence can be revealing for whether the metropolitan area is perceived fairly. Results can also be compared to a metro area's own perception of its strengths in order to assess the accuracy of existing brand approaches.

After this initial analysis, local leaders should continue to regularly track the region's visibility and performance relative to a set of identified domestic or global peers. This can be done via either an in-house team or by procuring external expertise.

### 3. Analyze the region's mentions and perception in international media

Tracking mentions and descriptions of the metropolitan area across different industry and

geographic markets around the world provides useful insight into its global reputation. Cities either outsource this analysis to consulting firms or undertake it manually using a simplified process akin to the following:

- ▶ Start the scan with a limited scope. To start with, each media outlet must be searched one by one for mentions of the metro area. An initial group of 10 to 12 of the most influential non-U.S. headquartered media outlets globally can be selected based on a combination of readership, impact, and strategic regions. Specialized media and magazines can orient the scope of analysis on business, lifestyle, technology, or other industries. Media aggregator services such as lexisnexis allow one to narrow the scope of the research.
- ▶ Optimize online media searches. To manually calculate the number of mentions in leading global media, researches can start with a Google search allowing timeframe and website selection, as well as keyword combination. Cities can observe change in total mentions over time across all media. If peer metropolitan areas have been selected, then peer comparisons are instructive.
- ▶ Capture a qualitative picture of the metro area's mentions. The adjectives and attributes most frequently associated with the metro area mentions provide insights on its external perception. They can be visualized using cloud charts.

Note: If gathered manually, the task is to collate all articles in the targeted list of global media publications that refer to assets or attributes of the metropolitan area (rather than just mentioning the metropolitan area in passing). Usually these references feature in Google's sample extract of the article. Experience indicates that it is useful and insightful to focus on adjectives related to the city and test key phrases usually associated with the description of a city: "[place] is a [adjective] city," or "the best thing about [place] is," or "[place] is known for its [x]." Finally, word clouds can show the



**Table 6. Summary steps for perception analyses**

<b>Quick Start to Perception Analysis</b>	<b>Full Spectrum Approach to Perception Analysis</b>
Pick one similar metropolitan area for basic calibration of findings.	Identify five to 10 global peer cities using clearly defined criteria.
Use Google search to conduct a preliminary review of how the city is performing in online performance measures, rankings, and indexes.	Track the 50+ most important global indices and benchmarks that measure the city. Observe changes in scores and visibility over time, and opportunities to achieve top scores. Use external providers where appropriate.
Identify the key categories or themes in the global identity, and consider the different ingredients and associations that make up the business brand, visitor brand, citizen brand, innovator brand, talent brand, investor brand, etc.	
Use Google search and Google Trends to scan for the most common adjectives and associations used for the metro area.	Use Google search and Google Trends to scan for the most common adjectives, nouns, and associations used for the metro area. Track change over time.
Pick the top 10 media publications worldwide to search and track for mentions of the metropolitan area over the last two years. Grade how positive or negative the mentions are and what themes are most visible.	Develop an automated machine-learning-based system to monitor and classify all media mentions online. Also consider blogs, magazines, forums, and other popular and influential sites.
Scan Twitter for keywords used about the metro area, paying extra attention to tweets from nonresidents.	Harness the Twitter API to develop a system for monitoring keywords and phrases and filtering out misleading findings. Track changes over time.
Build up a summary picture of key strengths, observable identity gaps, and where internal perceptions diverge from what others measure and perceive.	Develop a dashboard that captures the comprehensive picture and observes spikes in visibility. Measure year-over-year change.

Source: Authors

relative use of different adjectives, including across different time periods.

#### **4. Draw on insights from social media platforms**

The sentiments articulated on social media platforms about the city provide an additional source of insight into everyday perspectives of citizens, visitors, commentators, and others. Analyzing key aspects and trends in social media mentions on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram provide key insights on the city's global visibility.

Cities can use Twitter to analyze the attributes used by individuals to describe the metro area. There are several ways to use Twitter data. One structured approach is to search for a range of adjectives using the following format: [place] +

“adjective + city” (e.g. Chicago “innovative city”).

<sup>25</sup> This should be drawn from Twitter's “latest” tab rather than the default “top” tab. This can all be done manually or via an external capability to develop a machine learning system that can continually pick up this information.

Instagram mentions disseminate key visual aspects and trends reflecting the city's perception. Instagram hashtags capture what locals and visitors focus on when talking about your metro area. They can be used to compare the visibility of key themes (e.g., sport, food, urban attractions, events), and if done over time can be used to track changing sentiments and perceptions. In general, the data is most useful when comparing to the total number of hashtags for your metro area, and then comparing this percentage to other peer metropolitan areas.

## **5. Develop a framework to capture this analysis and use it to monitor progress.**

These different data points can all be brought together to develop a comparative picture of which aspects of the region's identity are most recognized, and which are underdeveloped. This can be visualized in a dashboard or spider diagram—or a similar locally useful framework—to help different users and decisionmakers see key patterns. There are many ways to undertake this:

- ▶ Identify and stick to a fixed set of peers against which to benchmark the metropolitan area.
- ▶ Categorize different attributes and elements into clear themes (e.g., business brand, innovator brand, visitor brand, lifestyle brand, etc.). Weight all the different quantitative inputs evenly to eliminate distortions.

The organization formerly known as Amsterdam Marketing, amsterdam&partners, manages the reputation and visibility for the 2.4-million inhabitant Amsterdam metropolitan area. One of the most recognizable capital cities in Europe, Amsterdam enhanced its global identity with proactive branding efforts highlighting its values and diverse attributes. The city's identity initiative integrated the wider Amsterdam region into the popular "I Amsterdam" logo. The process followed a holistic approach promoting the region's attractiveness for tourism, as well as a place to live, do business, study, and work.

Amsterdam is a city with a long tradition and powerful reputation of culture and innovation. However, the rise of new attractive destinations in Europe increased regional competition for tourists, students, and investments. Cities such as the Hague, Netherlands, Barcelona, Berlin, and Munich became top competitors in the 2000s. In response, the city of Amsterdam undertook a global identity development exercise to rebrand the city and its larger regional area.

### The case for an identity rebranding effort in Amsterdam

Two major themes establish the historic perception of Amsterdam.<sup>26</sup> First, Amsterdam conveys the image of a thriving commercial city leading the Netherlands' influence and power in the 17th century Dutch Golden Age painted by Rembrandt. Second, liberal and tolerant values since the Golden Age influenced Amsterdam as a city welcoming migrants and free thinkers. From the end of the 1960s, that culture of openness anchored the city's reputation as a radical hippie mecca, symbolized by its red-light district and tolerant policy on soft drug use.

Even as recently as the early 2000s, Amsterdam was known by visitors first and foremost for its canals, the availability of drugs, and an atypical entertainment offer.<sup>27</sup> Amsterdam leveraged this image of openness to increase its global visibility and appeal to visitors as the hospitality industry declined during the global economic crisis.

However, this reputation also became associated with illegality, social disorder, and commercial sex, which overshadowed other, more desirable aspects of Amsterdam.<sup>28</sup> To downplay the image of a "sin city," Amsterdam aimed to emphasize its rich and diverse cultural attributes both in its neighborhoods and the broader region.

### Amsterdam&partners coordinates the brand activities of a large alliance of regional stakeholders

This new approach required a change in policy and organization. Amsterdam leaders developed a benchmarking study to compare the urban identity, organizational structure, strategy, and activities in four peer cities considered top competitors (Barcelona, Berlin, Dublin, and Rotterdam, Netherlands). Created in 2004 as a public-private partnership for the branding and marketing of the greater Amsterdam area, Amsterdam Marketing (renamed amsterdam&partners in 2019) was tasked with developing and managing the new regional brand around the motto "I Amsterdam."

Amsterdam&partners coordinates the actions of businesses and public entities active in the global visibility of Amsterdam. An advisory board, a management board, and a supervisory board run the organization. The enduring success of Amsterdam's identity brand is partly attributable to the alliance that anchors it.<sup>29</sup> Many partners were involved financially or operationally, including:

- ▶ Representatives from large companies (Heineken, KLM, ING)
- ▶ Major gateways (Schiphol Airport, the port of Amsterdam)
- ▶ Representatives from the 32 surrounding municipalities
- ▶ Cultural institutions
- ▶ Regional universities



- ▶ Departments of the Amsterdam municipality: economic affairs, tourism, communication, cultural affairs, metropolitan board, enforcement department
- ▶ The Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions
- ▶ Startupamsterdam
- ▶ Public transportation companies
- ▶ The Amsterdam Economic Board

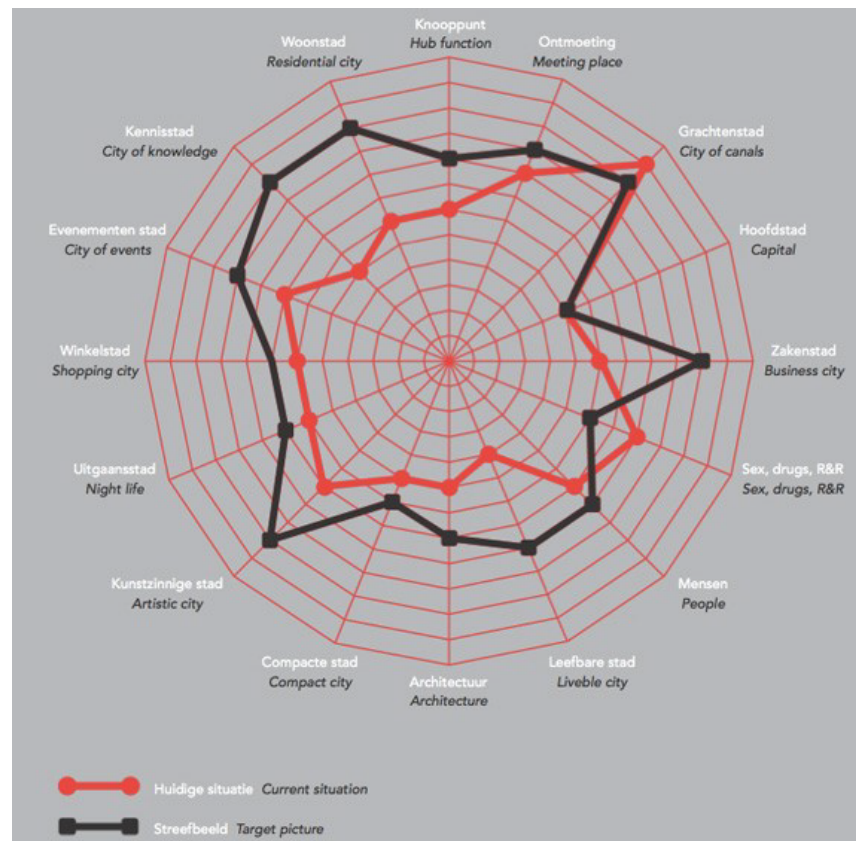
### A multiyear research process distilled the region's DNA

The rebranding efforts undertaken by

amsterdam&partners went beyond city marketing and public relations efforts. They involved significant conceptual development, benchmarking, and perception analyses from 2004 onward. A preliminary diagnostic exercise revealed the need to better promote the strengths, essence, and distinctiveness of the Amsterdam region. It also highlighted the need to promote the diverse experiences and opportunities available in the Amsterdam area.

Amsterdam&partners developed a multifaceted profile of Amsterdam with 16 different dimensions on the basis of interviews with different regional actors, image research among various target groups, statements about the region, and questionnaires to residents (Figure 7). The following diagram visualizes the perception of the city (in red) and the priorities in perception change targeted by the city (in black).

**Figure 7. The identity effort targeted specific gaps within various aspects of the city's perception**



Source: amsterdam&partners

Firm amsterdam&partners boiled down the dimensions of its identity to the nexus of three key values differentiating the region: the spirit of commerce, innovation, and creativity. Geerte Udo, the head of amsterdam&partners, said, "It is in the DNA of Amsterdam that we can be creative in business solutions and that we know how to make business out of creativity."

### **The identity objectives prioritized residents, businesses, and quality visitors.**

The identity strategy focused on three target groups providing the greatest returns to the city. Beyond short-term visitors, the identity efforts catered to residents, foreign talent, and businesses by promoting Amsterdam as a place to live, innovate, and work. Each objective was assigned goals and quantifiable indicators.

- ▶ The first targeted audience consists in residents or active city dwellers (such as empty nesters, two income couples, same-sex couples, young professionals, and students). Ambitions and goals focus on Amsterdam's livability, highlighting the special atmosphere of Amsterdam for various audiences, increasing city pride, promoting cultural participation, and expanding discovery of the city, especially lesser-known areas including Haarlem and Zaanstad.
- ▶ The second is domestic and international visitors. Instead of quantity, higher-quality tourists and congress participants are targeted. The brand promotes a more respectful and more cultural experience of the city while highlighting the diversity of landscapes and cultures across the region.
- ▶ The third audience focuses on companies and business decisionmakers, especially startups and international enterprises from

the creative and knowledge sectors with their head offices in the Amsterdam area.

The objectives of Amsterdam's identity strategy mutually support each other:

- ▶ To increase the qualitative, mental position of Amsterdam, increase how much people know about Amsterdam, and promotion of the more desirable aspects of the city. "We started the campaign to show that Amsterdam is a little bit more than sex and drugs," said Geerte Udo of amsterdam&partners.
- ▶ To increase quantitative returns, with more visitors, investments, purchasing behavior.
- ▶ To raise the city's market position in targeted rankings in livability and workability compared to key competitors.

### **Amsterdam's visibility activities focused on a regional brand**

In the 2000s and 2010s, global tourism grew at a fast pace. Overnight stays in Amsterdam increased from 10.5 million in 2012 to 16.6 million in 2018.<sup>30</sup> Over that period, Amsterdam altered its promotion strategy, moving from general tourist attraction to more targeted activities focused on reputation and the reduction of nuisance (Figure 8).

Amsterdam&partners also worked to encourage visitors to expand their mental map of Amsterdam and consider the wider Amsterdam region through the "Visit Amsterdam: See Holland" campaign.<sup>31</sup> Instead of multiple promotion campaigns, the new approach integrated disparate efforts to build an identity at the metropolitan level (Figure 9). This involved the collaboration of Amsterdam and its 32 surrounding municipalities. Various destinations and cultural activities became part of the unified offer of the Amsterdam region.

**Figure 8. New forms of advertising widened the audience and promoted civil behavior**

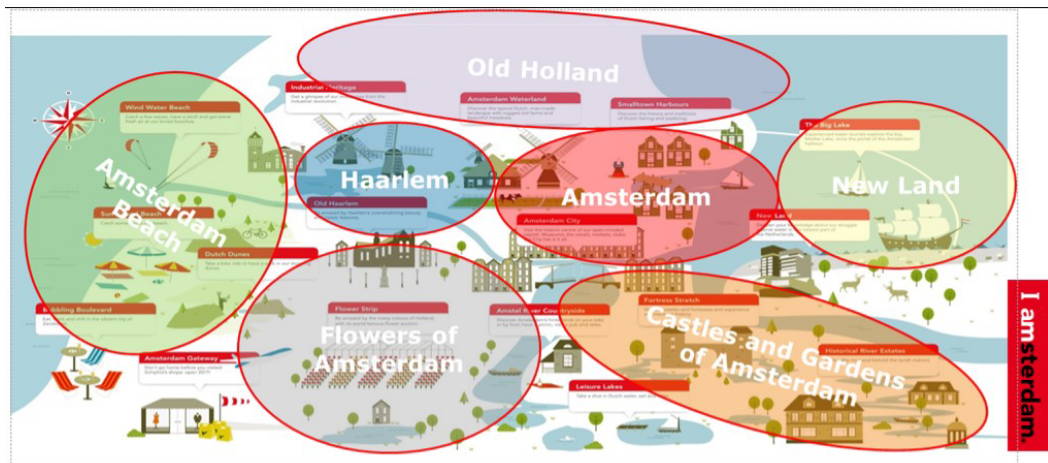


Source: amsterdam&partners

**Figure 9. The identity campaign integrates the different parts of the Amsterdam region.**

amsterdam marketing

### Campaign for visitors: Amsterdam Area



Source: amsterdam&partners







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For Openness and Hospitality: Open-minded, creative, friendly, inclusive and cosmopolitan.  
For Visitor Credentials: Cool, lots to do, exciting, vibrant and fun.  
For Livable Attributes: Clean, green, walkable, safe and livable.  
For Leadership and Potential: Special, up and coming, important, smart and dynamic.  
For Innovation and Buzz: Innovative, innovation hub, tech city, startup city and tech hub.
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