Perspectives on Becoming New Port: A Discursive Account of Stakeholder Opinions in the Renaming of Port Adelaide

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INTRODUCTION

Recent trends in urban theory and policy have revealed an explicit emphasis on the redevelopment and revitalisation of redundant industrial landscapes. Such projects are typically spearheaded by entrepreneurial collaborations which purport an economically vital and socially empowering future. The template for these forms of landscape regeneration programs is now ubiquitous. Specifically, large-scale, mixed use developments promoting postindustrial identities and lifestyles are juxtaposed against the former industrial, blue collar identities of these places. Supplementing this is the aim to reorient such redundant landscapes of production to postindustrial places of consumption. Effectively, this postindustrial transformation witnesses the rebirth of places as progressive, vibrant and economically prosperous. To realise this transformation, the physical landscape of the industrial past is demolished. Concurrently, aggressive reimaging campaigns are mobilised to diffuse or submerge the stigma attached to and communicated through the industrial landscape. The act of creating new post-industrial places demands that industrial spaces be destroyed. Zukin (1991) refers to this process as 'creative destruction'. However, this process is never absolute. Traces of industrial heritage and identity often linger and emerge to problematise or contest the newly reconstructed post-industrial discourse (see Healey 2005; Rofe 2004; Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2009). This is particularly pertinent to local communities whose identities and heritage are intimately tied to the industrial landscape. This paper draws upon ongoing research that has investigated the redevelopment of the Port Adelaide waterfront in South Australia (see Rofe 2007; Rofe & Oakley 2006; Szili & Rofe 2007; Rofe & Szili 2009). Specifically, it focuses on the recent approval to create a new suburb within Port Adelaide by renaming the redevelopment site, New Port. Developing previous research (see Rofe & Szili 2009), the authors contend that place names such as Port Adelaide may be so infused with negativity that attempts to renegotiate its meaning through physical redevelopment and traditional place marketing strategies are seemingly unachievable. Considering this, developers may often employ more radical strategies to inscribe new discursive landscapes within existing places. However, the processes of redevelopment and renaming also herald material and contested outcomes. Whilst previous research has addressed the rhetorical (see Rofe & Szili 2009) and political (see Szili & Rofe 2009) consequences of renaming, this paper offers a more nuanced, discursive account of stakeholder opinions as expressed through in-depth interviews throughout the renaming process. The focus on interview data effectively contextualises the public construction and meaning of place names to reveal the diversity of perception within stakeholder groups. The paper thus contributes to more critical understandings of the power of identity, place names and renaming and their connection to urban regenerative practice.

Located 14 kilometres to the north of the Adelaide CBD (see Figure 1), Port Adelaide is on the cusp of an urban "renaissance" (Hoyle & Starick 2005, pp.10-11). Central to this renaissance is the redevelopment of 52 hectares of former waterfront industrial land to provide for mixed residential and commercial use (see Figure 2). This redevelopment straddles the harbour including sites in the suburbs of Port Adelaide, Ethelton, Glanville and Birkenhead (hereafter referred to as Port Adelaide). The redevelopment of this site is overseen by the State Government's Land Management Corporation (LMC) in collaboration with the private sector development company Urban Construct and Multiplex. Trading as Newport Quays Consortium (NPQ), this venture is typical of the entrepreneurial collaborations between government and private property developers. It is estimated that the redevelopment will generate 6000 jobs and realise approximately A\$2 billion in reinvestment capital (LMC, n.d.). Reflecting the scale of this project, the redevelopment will be undertaken in six stages beginning in 2005 with completion anticipated in 2014. Described by a senior spokesperson for the LMC as 'largely redundant... underutilised industrial land' with 'a lot of dilapidated buildings and contaminated sites', the master-planned development is envisaged to drive the 'grime out' of Port Adelaide (Craig 2002, p.3), aiding the area's transformation 'from working class to world class' (Mansell 2005, p.18). However, the fiercely contested and politicised renaming process suggests that from the developer's perspective, only New Port can achieve world class status, while Port Adelaide will continue to languish in the past.

Figure 1: Location of Study Site

Figure 2: Redevelopment Site – Port Adelaide Inner Harbour
Source: Newport Quays brochure (2005, p.16).

Place Names: Power, Politics and Rhetoric

Place naming, or toponomy has recently regained critical attention in geographical research. Scholars have now progressed from the traditional focus on etymology and taxonomy to concentrate on the power and politics of place naming practice (Alderman 2008; Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009; Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2009; Rose-Redwood *et al*. 2010). The underlying premise of this attention rests on the notion that place names are an integral part of landscape and are redolent with meaning. Beyond the grouping of letters and their syntax, they are infused with real and imagined subtexts. Drawing from Willems (2000, p.86), place names are then 'complex signs with specific linguistic, pragmatic, logical, philosophical, semiotic, historical, psychological, social, and juridical properties'. Thus, as Berg & Vuolteenaho (2009) and Rose-Redwood *et al*. (2010) assert, the study of place names across a variety of disciplines is essential in gaining critical understandings of landscapes in flux.

As an integral part of landscape communication, place names function as much more than a means of facilitating spatial orientation and transportation (Azaryahu 1997; Mitchelson *et al.* 2007). They also function as symbolic texts within cities and are embedded in larger systems of meaning and ideology that are read, interpreted, and acted upon socially by people (Alderman 2008; Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002). As Rofe and Szili (2009, p.262) assert, place names can also be regarded as rhetorical devices, 'in that they communicate a sense of the landscape to which they are attached'. Considering this, place names are neither accidental nor haphazard. Rather, they are deliberately chosen and imbued with meaning. Thus, place names can be considered as instrumental in that the ability to name place is to exercise power. This notion draws on Bourdieu's (1991) assertion that place naming can act as a form of 'symbolic capital' where toponyms are chosen to associate places with 'consumable and exclusive visions of that past' (Alderman 2008, p.199). More critically, naming can also be viewed as a form of 'symbolic violence' (see Bourdieu 1991) where state monopolies produce centralised representations of a community at the expense of the disenfranchised and 'speakers of non-sanctioned languages and dialects' (Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009, p.3). Supporting this notion, Pinchevski and Torgovnik (2002, p.366) assert that the very act of naming landscape is indeed 'a political act, for a name is always given to something or someone by an external force having the legitimacy to do so'. As such, identifying with a place name and associated naming processes may serve as a social distinction for some, while disenfranchising others. Unpacking the intersections of naming, power and rhetoric is thus critical for more finely-nuanced understandings of landscape. Moreover, in the case of landscape revitalisation, language is central to implementing and contesting redevelopment (Pfeiffer 2006), and subsequently serves as a valuable site of interrogation.

Name games for New Port

The overwhelming optimism portrayed in the marketing and media materials of the Port Adelaide waterfront redevelopment have clearly promulgated the redevelopment as a catalyst to revive the ailing industrial precinct (see Szili & Rofe 2007). However, persistent contestation from the local community over the form, scale and governance of the redevelopment has rendered this 'renaissance' stagnant, while the landscape continues to 'resemble[ ] a ghost town' (Wheatley & Lloyd 2009, pp.10-11). Physically evident in disused shopfronts and the problem-plagued Stage 2B that has been halted due to environmental constraints and apartment blocks that exceed height restrictions and poor design to disinvestment and disinterest as a result of the global financial crisis (GFC); Port Adelaide's revival has prompted many to question whether the Port should be left to 'rust in peace?' (Lloyd 2009, p.54; Wheatley & Lloyd 2009). While media statements made by the development consortium refuted claims that interest in the redevelopment had waned due to these obstacles (Emmerson 2010), interview respondents, media reports and the landscape itself revealed otherwise.

In response to the entrenched malaise, attempts to ignite and reignite interest in the redevelopment have included aggressive marketing and place-making campaigns by both state government actors (the LMC) and the development consortium (NPQ). Other more subversive tactics have included the obfuscation and greenwash of broader urban policies to meet the needs of the public-private partnership by the LMC to 'extraordinary stunts' by the developers that included giving away free luxury sports cars and boats with every new apartment sold (Watson 2009, p.7). Thus, it seems that the Port is so acutely infused with the subtext of negativity, that attempts to renegotiate its meaning as a vital, post-industrial centre have been partial and unviable (Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2007; 2009; 2010). Considering the partial and unsuccessful physical and discursive reorientations of Port Adelaide, the development consortium had adopted another unique and radical strategy to carve a new discursive landscape within Port Adelaide. In the case of Port Adelaide, which has borne the stigmatised alternate place name *Port Misery* for over one hundred and fifty years (Rofe & Oakley 2006; Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2007; 2009), the meanings infused within the name Port Adelaide have been deemed a hallmark of the derelict past. As such, the name itself is beyond discursive rehabilitation and was thus jettisoned by the development consortium (Rofe & Szili

2009; Szili & Rofe 2009). Specifically, the development consortium sought to short-circuit the need to aggressively reimage the existing name of Port Adelaide by imposing a new suburb name, New Port on the redevelopment precinct. However, this process was once again met with hostility from the local community. Tracing this unique and highly strategic process and the associated contestations reveals yet another facet of the problematic nature of the entrepreneurially governed waterfront redevelopment.

As previously established the revitalisation of Port Adelaide aptly demonstrates the politicisation and contested nature of landscape. Despite the physical landscape being altered to submerge the blighted images of its industrial heritage and fit within a postindustrial discourse, the development consortium mobilised another discursive strategy to consolidate this transformation. The strategy was to change the name of the land contained within the redevelopment site to 'Newport Quays'. Commenting on the name change proposal, a prominent member of the development consortium stated that the renaming was '...vital to the success of the redevelopment', adding that a new name '...would help [with the] marketing strategies' and demonstrate that a 'new era and face of the Port has arrived'. Consequently, the name change can be seen to shed the stigmatised mantle of 'Port Misery'.

In 2006, the development consortium proposed to create a new suburb to assist in the reimaging of the Port. This supports Zelinsky's (1989) assertion that place names play an important role in place promotion, with developers and government actors very aware of their 'image generating potential' (Alderman 2008, p.201). To shed the unfavourable working class, industrial image of the '...less glamorous suburb names of Ethelton, Glanville... Birkenhead [and Port Adelaide]' the development consortium proposed to have a '...more marketable name' for the waterfront land earmarked for redevelopment (Naughton 2006, p.29). A spokesman for Urban Construct, Mr Todd Brown, confirmed this through a media statement, claiming that Newport Quays was a '...separate type of structure and style [from the surrounding area] and so... should have a different suburban name' (cited in Naughton 2006, p.29). Similarly, a prominent informant from the LMC claimed to 'see nothing wrong with the name change' as it reflected the 'a new and positive chapter in the Port's history'; while a local real estate agent reiterated a new name would 'cement the fact the winds of change were finally blowing in the Port's favour'.

Nevertheless, the need to rename the waterfront landscape emphasises a certain insecurity felt by the development consortium (Szili & Rofe 2009). According to a local resident and member of the Port Adelaide Residents Environment Protection Group (PAREPG), the creation of a new suburb name 'cut[s] away from the nasty, working class connotations of the 150 year old suburbs [that] the [redevelopment] stand[s] in and shows blatant fear by the developers'. The respondent further added that the developers and government are becoming anxious and 'scared that they might not sell their development fast enough', so a name change is 'just another piece of arsenal in their marketing missile'. The more recent price reduction of the apartments is indicative of this inveterate fear. Monmonier (1995, p.61) supports this assertion, claiming that 'the need to rename places is perhaps strongest among [those who are] insecure about their territory'. As such, the practice of place naming can be seen to assert dominance whilst masking an inherent wariness of the multiple layers of the history of landscape (Szili & Rofe 2009)

Additionally, this renaming proposal directly contrasted previous sentiments espoused by the consortium that the redevelopment was inclusive and sought to integrate with the existing community. This was echoed in an interview with a local resident who perceived the redevelopment as 'more inclusive' and stated that the renaming only exacerbated the tension between the local community and developers (Netschitowski, cited in Kerrison 2007). Moving quickly from its public announcement, the consortium lodged a proposal with the Geographical Names Unit (GNU) to rename the new suburb as 'Newport Quays' in October 2006 (Westthorp 2007a; Naughton 2006). However, in keeping with the ubiquitous hostility already harboured for the development consortium, local community groups together with the Port Adelaide-Enfield Council (PAEC) strongly protested the new name.

For several months, a bitter battle ensued between the developers and Council and local community groups. For Council, the renaming of the redevelopment site would facilitate the creation of an exclusive enclave and contravene the developer's promise of integrating the old and the new areas (Westthorp, 2007a, p.9). In support, a prominent local government representative acerbically remarked that the 'name change was amusing... what a novel name... it's just part of the marketing... and has no regard for local history'. These sentiments were reiterated by several local residents who insisted the renaming would pander to the 'Club Med types' who were construed as a threat to local identity (Hammond 2006; Hastings 2006; Shields 2007). A local business owner similarly stated that 'the current working-class types of people' residing in the area were not the 'right type of investor' to stimulate reinvestment to the area. Hammond (2006) continues, stating that renaming the area to improve the value and image of property would denigrate the existing suburbs of the Port and alienate the existing community. However, not all factions of the community were in opposition.

An interview with another prominent local business owner and local community activist revealed support for New Port;

> I really don't think that it [renaming] is a big deal. I mean sure, we probably all have romantic notions about the Port… there is some history in the dilapidated shacks around the Port river and the crumbling buildings... but it's time to reclaim the Port and its river and reverse its image as a grimy dump. If renaming helps us reverse this [the negative images], then I think it's a good thing.

Similar discussions with informants from the LMC and a local real estate agent indicated support for the new name. For one LMC informant, renaming the redevelopment to 'whatever you [or the developers] like' is not problematic as 'we live in a state of flux'. Supporting the notion that landscapes are in a constant state of change, the respondent added that 'Mawson Lakes [a residential development in Northern Adelaide] was once known as The Levels' (see Figure 1). Moreover, the respondent admonished the perception that the name change would facilitate the creation of an exclusive enclave, stating that:

> it's not just the name that would contribute to those perceptions... the contestation just reflects the hard-nosed NIMBYism of some members of the local community.

Correspondingly, a local real estate agent admitted that the renaming 'should have been settled' prior to the commencement of the redevelopment. However, from a realtor's perspective, the name 'is a fair choice'. For the respondent, the new name 'will definitely attract investors' and 'enhance the overall image of the Port'. Commenting on the historicity of the name, the resident concluded by stating that the new name

> is not offending the Port's history – it is [about] moving forward... [the new name] still keeps with the area's maritime heritage, so...it's a reasonable choice.

For the vast majority of local stakeholders however, the erosion of traditional (European) names for the benefit of the consortium's marketing campaign disregards the historical significance and heritage value of these suburbs (Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2009; Westthorp 2007b). Portonians argued that the new suburb name would 'kill off 150 years of history' of the area (Westthorp 2007b, p.1). Thus, the construction of a new post-industrial suburb within existing industrial suburbs challenges the meanings of place and draws attention to issues of social equity within such entrepreneurial redevelopments.

In a bid to end the conflict, Deputy Premier and Port Adelaide Member of Parliament Kevin Foley, proposed in April 2007 that the site be called *New Port*. A spokesperson from the GNU supported the Minister stating the '…name reflects the area's maritime history and recognises the significant change the development will bring to Port Adelaide and the surrounding suburbs' (Westthorp 2007c, p.5). This acknowledgement of history was reflected in an interview with a senior LMC spokesperson. This respondent blithely quashed claims that the new name ignores the area's history, stating that it is a 'celebration of its history' as 'part of the redevelopment falls in an area that was labelled 'New Port' in the 1890s... so it does have its roots in the area'. Figure 3 reveals that these claims are accurate. Whilst not officially being declared as such, the 'new port' was constructed a 'mile or two downstream' of the original Port Creek settlement (Parsons 1997, p.37) and represented on various maps during the 1800s. This marked an optimistic stage in the Port's history, where the 'new Port afforded...great facilities... and was loudly acclaimed' (Parsons 1997, p.41). For the LMC representative, the new name evoked a similar optimism of the landscape's past.
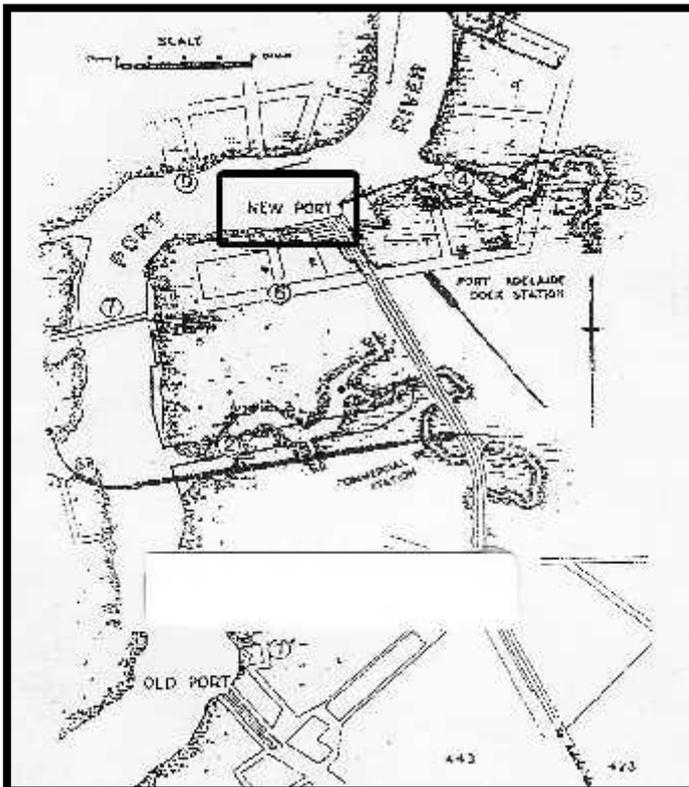
Figure 3: 'New Port' Map
Source: Parsons (1997).

Nevertheless, for many residents, the recent renaming was perceived as a tokenistic gesture (Rofe & Szili 2009; Szili & Rofe 2009). Chairman of the Port of Adelaide National Trust, Tony Kearney scorned the new name arguing that '…just taking the Quays off the name doesn't really change anything…it still sets it [the redevelopment] as a bit of an enclave' (Westthorp 2007d, p.5). These concerns were echoed in an interview with a resident and local business owner who maintained that 'the name change will [ ] create an enclave of exclusivity'. The respondent continued by stating that the name change 'would do nothing to encourage investors' as the wider disinvestment was 'still evident in the vacant shop fronts... [essentially] discouraging investment'. Commenting further, the respondent claimed the new name is a 'cheap marketing trick' that detracts from 'the real issues of wider government investment in the Port'. Thus, despite the alternate discursive constructions that the new name imbues, the physical reality of the landscape and lack of government commitment would detract from realising its potential rebirth.

Throughout the contestation, the local historical society were similarly vociferous in their opposition by lobbying government with placards emblazoned with slogans such as 'New Port is an insult' and 'Leave our historic names alone' (Westthorp 2007c, p.8). Several members of local environmental groups held similar views. For example, one prominent member of the PAREPG claimed the connection to the 'New Port' of the 1890s was tenuous as the name was only used for a short period of the Port's history, and 'not well known to people in the more established suburbs'. This notion of temporality and lack of recognition of longstanding communities was further extrapolated by the respondent who believed the new name disrespected the Indigenous heritage of the landscape. The informant claimed 'New Port' 'failed to take into account... the original Indigenous inhabitants' and believed the renaming and development in general 'should have been more sensitive to the traditional owners of the land'. Indeed, these sentiments were echoed by a local business owner and member of the Port Adelaide Environment Forum (PAEF). Recognising the imposition of colonial land uses and names on the traditional land of the Kaurna people, the respondent argued that 'while we can't reverse the physical damages we [European colonists] have done, agreeing upon a more culturally inclusive name would offer some sort of compensation... at least to restore some sense of belonging or attachment to the place'. The informant concluded their statement by reiterating the perceptions of other community members, arguing that the new name was 'insensitive to the generations of people who've lived in these suburbs and the Indigenous community... it's just another example of marketing trickery'. The opinions above are thus indicative of the power of place names in forming and reifying identity, and as sites of contestation. That is, the construction of place names is not innocuous, but laden with competing discursive values.

New Name: Postscript

Nevertheless, despite consistent community concerns and local resistance, on July 11 2007, Infrastructure Minister Pat Conlon announced the creation of the suburb New Port (Conlon 2007; Zed 2007, p.9), stating the new name reflects the history of the Port as well as the significant changes that the development heralds for the area and surrounding suburbs. While this holds some truth (see Fig. 3), discussions with local stakeholders clearly indicated vehement opposition. For a local business owner and resident, *New Port* does not unify, but 'further divides us [the community] between the haves and the have-nots'. Similarly, another local resident, business owner and environmental activist, proclaimed the 'defeat' was

> the final nail in the coffin... with the boat sheds and traditional industries gone, and now the name, it's [the Port waterfront] well and truly in the hands of the yuppies. They [NPQ] could have kept the names and changed the area... it's not going to do anything but insult our heritage.

Interestingly, it seems the trepidations of the existing community have been realised. Four years since the name change, the development is still struggling to gain momentum. Notwithstanding the environmental constraints that have hindered further development (Williams 2010), the predicted rebirth of the Port has remained nothing but a prediction (McGregor 2011). Described as a 'ghost town' and an 'urban wilderness' in news reports (McGregor 2011; Williams 2010), not even the developer's subversive tactics of offering luxury cars and renaming have been able to ignite interest of potential investment. Responding to these failures, the most recent strategy to encourage investment has extended to 'massively reduced prices' of existing apartments (Emmerson 2011, p.9). For example, in a bid to 'push stock' and encourage the market to 'find its way', some more exclusive residences have been reduced from $900 000 to $400 000 (Emmerson 2011, p.9). While the contestation over the renaming has subdued as a result of the final decision being made and implemented, community angst still remains, albeit less visible in wider public discourse. Reflective of this, one prominent local council member stated the 'ignominy of the whole [process and contestation over renaming] four years on is still felt by locals'. However, the council representative claimed people 'now feel powerless to keep fighting for something that is already lost'. Thus, it is evident that Bourdieu's (1991) concept of 'symbolic violence' has operated in the renaming of the Port waterfront. That is, while the renaming was touted as a symbolically unifying function and had the intention to serve as a performative catalyst (Laclau 2005) for the postindustrial visions of the development consortium, the process occurred at the expense of the local community, the disenfranchised and minority groups that lacked political and economic clout. Moreover, despite being less visible in public discourse, the new name for many existing residents remains a site of contention.

To summarise, despite mitigation by State Government actors; that is, Foley's compromise and Conlon's attempt to bridge the existing landscape with that of the new, local community groups continue to remain unmoved, albeit less publically vociferous. For them, the renaming is a blatant marketing device that insults the meaning of those generations of residents and workers whose combined agency created the physical and discursive landscapes that the renaming ushers away. For these community members the existing suburb names are not simply words, they are the echoes of the past that are falling silent in the face of an uncertain future. For the consortium and potentially new residents, place naming is a form of symbolic capital and 'a marker of prestige' (Rose-Redwood 2008, p.438; Bourdieu 1991). However, for marginalised groups and local community members, the role of place naming can also be viewed as a site of 'symbolic resistance' (Rose-Redwood 2008). That is, whether successful or not, these groups have the ability to 'resist the imposition of elite naming practices' (Rose-Redwood 2008, p.438), highlighting the politicised and contested nature that place names imbue. To conclude, the paper demonstrates that even after an unfavourable public decision is made, the ramifications for local communities are enduring. Tracing the discursive contestation over the renaming of Port Adelaide thus adds another dimension to the problematic nature of broader revitalisation objectives and decision making processes in meeting local needs.

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