The Politics of Place: Heterogeneous Networks in Three New South Wales Local Government Areas

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Certification

I, Travis A. Holland, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of The Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed:

24 April, 2017
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Acronyms

ACELG - the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government.

ALGA - Australian Local Government Association, the national industry association of local governments in Australia.

ANT – actor-network theory, a methodological approach that examines relations between human and nonhuman actants in a network of associations.

API - application programming interface, a method by which certain tools are able to integrate with and collect data from other services, such as social networking websites.

CSP - Community Strategic Plan, a legislatively mandated document produced by councils in New South Wales.

DBCDE - the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, an authority of the Australian Government.


DLG - Division/Department of Local Government, an authority of the New South Wales Government (later renamed the Office of Local Government).

DRALGAS - Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, an authority of the Australian Government.

GMAG - the Green Mile Action Group, a residents’ action group active on social media in campaigns against Wollongong City Council.
IAP2 - International Association for Public Participation.

ICAC - Independent Commission Against Corruption, a statutory investigative body of the New South Wales government.

ILGRP - Independent Local Government Review Panel, a body established by the New South Wales Government to inform the local government reform process.

IPRG - Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines, a package of tools developed by the Office of Local Government to assist local government authorities to meet their legislated responsibilities.

LAP - Land Application Maps, part of the Local Environment Plans produced by councils in New South Wales.

LEP - Local Environment(al) Plan, a series of legislatively mandated documents produced by councils in New South Wales.

LGA - local government area (sometimes local government authority), a statutory geographic area governed by a local government authority.

NSW - New South Wales, a state of Australia.

OLG - Office of Local Government, an authority of the New South Wales Government (previously known as Division/Department of Local Government).

PSPL - Public Spaces, Public Life, a large scale study undertaken by Gehl Architects in cities around the world, including Wollongong.

QLD - Queensland, a state of Australia.
RER - reciprocated edge ratio, a way of measuring the similarity between given user accounts as part of a social network analysis.

SNA - social network analysis.

SNS - social network site(s)/service(s). See social media.

SWAG - Stop Wilton Airport Group, a residents’ action group active in various forums campaigning against the establishment of an international airport at Wilton in the Wollondilly Shire.

TAFE - an institute of Technical and Further Education.
Glossary

actant/actor – from Latour (1987): “whoever and whatever is represented” (p. 84); and “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others” (1998, cited in Mitew, 2014, p. 14).

council - generally, any local government authority (especially in Australia), or the elected body governing such an authority.

e-government - electronic government, a model for delivery of government services, typically using the internet or other networked technologies such as mobile phones.

enframing – enclosing human behaviour within a technological framework, or for the purposes of technology. From Heidegger (1977): “Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological” (p. 10).

imaginaries – ideas conveyed in media or language. In particular, ideas about what a place is, at essence.

local government – the lower of three tiers of government in Australia; an authority of state governments with responsibility for local roads, garbage collection, and civic amenities such as parks and libraries. See also council.

media – prostheses that allow us to sense the world beyond what is immediately at hand.

media ecosystem/s – from Scolari (2012): “a network of technologies, producers, consumers, and social forces” (p. 219).
network – from Latour (2011): “the notion of networks points to a transformation in the way action is located and allocated. What was invisible becomes visible, what had seemed self-contained is now widely redistributed” (p. 797-798).

participation – from Vromen (2003): “acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society we want to live in” (p. 82-3).

participatory media – media that enframe certain types of participatory behaviour.

place - a social achievement arising from networks of associations and experience in which a variety of actants compete for the primacy of their imaginaries; not merely geographic location.

politics of place – the negotiation of place imaginaries among networks of heterogeneous people, objects and connections which interact constantly to produce and reproduce new configurations and imaginaries.

public/s – groups of heterogeneous individuals which considers publics which arise within a shared architectures of communication and gather around thing-objects.

social media - any digital media which allows users to establish profiles and connect with other users through either reciprocal or unidirectional relationships. These are typically profile- and timeline-based posting and connection technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the role of media in the experience of place in three local government areas. It builds upon recent scholarly work that seeks to rehabilitate the relationship between place and media following earlier claims that media usage could only inhibit a sense of place, or bring about a condition of placelessness. The research is informed by interviews conducted with staff and elected officials from the three local government authorities that serve as the primary examples and case studies. The thesis thus explores the ways in which each of these places is experienced as a complex network of heterogeneous people, objects and connections which interact constantly to produce and reproduce new configurations and imaginaries. The process of negotiation between these is identified as the ‘politics of place’, a process that can occur across various connective media including newspapers, television, books, social network sites, tourism brochures, and blogs. It is argued that each of these media may convey an experience or a construction of place that, in turn, build upon pre-existing histories and conceptions. The methodology pursued is informed by actor-network theory (ANT), which urges the tracing of associations between ontologically distinct actants in any given network. Such traces are examined in pre-existing media such as those described above, but there are also emerging forms of media emerging that are shown to also contribute to an understanding of the construction of place.
Acknowledgements

Any good TV sitcom or drama has two prominent characters operating to different methods and purposes who nonetheless complement each other. I found these two characters in my PhD supervisors Professor Susan Turnbull and Dr Teodor Mitew, whom I affectionately refer to simply as Sue and Ted. Each was patient, kind, and intellectually stimulating throughout the course of my work. Sue’s expertise in audiences and the broad strokes of media and communications theory is unsurpassed, while Ted’s work on the internet of things, actor-network theory, and everything digital is pushing forward the boundaries of thinking in those fields. Each is an excellent scholar and an excellent human, and I am very lucky to have had their support through this process.

There are a whole series of academic staff at the University of Wollongong who have also assisted my work. Of particular note here are Dr Kate Bowles and Dr Chris Moore, both of whom acted unofficially as extra supervisors whenever I needed them - which was far more often than is helpful for their workloads. Kate was valuable also for developing my critical approaches to some of the more challenging aspects of academic life, especially the pernicious process that is casualisation. Others who kindly assisted me with difficult or sticky questions on particular aspects of my work include Dr Thomas Holderness, Dr Alison Moore, and Associate Professor Bronwyn Carlson. Other staff at UOW supported me in my roles as a general staff member, as well as through some difficult personal matters. In particular, I thank Victoria Black and Tania Brown of SMART Infrastructure Facility and Dr Marcus O’Donnell and Dr Alisa Percy at Learning, Teaching and Curriculum. The School of Communication and Creative Industries at Charles Sturt University took a chance on my work before I had even finished this thesis, giving me the certainty to finally get it done.
My thanks goes to the council staff and elected councillors quoted in this research who generously gave of their time for interviews. I must also thank Max Rogers of the Berrima District Historical and Family Society who located and copied about a dozen newspaper articles from 1899 and 1900. These materials indexed what initially seemed like a relatively small piece of information, but which ultimately set me down a new path of enquiry. This work informs the early chapters of this thesis.

Our PhD student office was papered in memes - from Disney and *The Simpsons* to *Star Wars* and *Game of Thrones* - and inspirational quotes by Neil Gaiman and others. It enlivened and embiggened our time there. Thanks to Dion McLeod, Kristina Kalfic and all the other PhD students with whom I’ve shared space (and food). Hold the door!

My wife Meghan - Marge to my Homer - has been (almost) unfailing in her support to help me get the thesis completed. She has kept me grounded, looked after my health, and reminded me to take time off every now and then. She even agreed to organise a wedding and a move across the state in the middle of it all. I’m lucky to have her in my life.

My lifelong motivator for learning, my grandmother Olive, passed away in 2012 a few days before I submitted my honours thesis. At my undergraduate graduation, stricken with chemo sickness, Nan asked me why I wasn’t graduating with one of the ‘black fluffy hats’ that PhD graduands wore. So, here I am. My endless thanks to Nan, and all of my family, for the love they have given me in the last 30 years.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Gundungarra, Dharawal, and Wiradjuri people, whose lands this work is about, and upon which it was mostly written. They know this country better than I ever could.
Preface

*Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness,*

*but by the style in which they are imagined.* - Benedict Anderson

It is a trite observation to note that an individual’s experiences affect their worldviews. Yet the origins of my interest in the topic of this thesis - hometown politics of negotiation about what a place is and ought to be - likely lie in my formative understandings of this observation. The work presented in this thesis combines my interest in these kinds of everyday politics with a media-centric study that accounts for the connective social roles played by technologies used for communicating with others in these political processes. Central to this concern is my conception of place as a network of heterogeneous people, objects and connections which nonetheless relate to shared imaginaries. Below I briefly set out how my experiences with the politics of place prompted my interest to this point. I also note here that I view participation in the production and circulation of media concerning place as a manifestation of the natural orientation toward place which gives rise to care and concern.¹

Figure 1 (below, on page xviii) demonstrates the geographic layout of the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, Australia. I consider this region my ‘hometown’, and it features as a central case study in this thesis. The image is oriented with North at the top. It shows a spine of the larger central towns (Mittagong, Bowral and Moss Vale) surrounded by a series of smaller towns and villages. These are connected by a road variously known as ‘The Old Hume Highway’ and ‘The Highlands Way’, but which bears various local names in

¹ Viewing participation as a manifestation of care is a distinctly Heideggerian position, and although I mention it here briefly, I return to this topic in later chapters. Heidegger is also, more generally, useful to this work given his observations on the nature of the being-in of place and space as a relational and interactional positioning necessary for any approach to understanding the world.
each town. The town in which my parents built their family home in 1989 was one of those small villages, Hill Top, on the northern fringe of the region. The thick line running through the centre of this map, from northeast to southwest, is the Hume Freeway. The Hume links Australia’s two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney itself is about 80km to the north of this map. Branching eastward from the Hume Freeway south of Sutton Forest is a thick line representing the Illawarra Highway, which connects the Southern Highlands to the coastal communities of the Illawarra, including the post-industrial city of Wollongong. This route travels via the mountainous Macquarie Pass, which is indicated by the twisting east of Robertson.
Figure 1: The Southern Highlands

2 Image courtesy of Destination Southern Highlands
Growing up in the outlying town of Hill Top provided an experience of the Southern Highlands region that was considerably different to that of someone who grew up in one of the larger central towns. This emic experience is different for those who visit as tourists from Sydney or elsewhere. Furthermore, one’s experience shifts again for those who view the location primarily through the prism of media representations. As a teenager, I was made aware of this differential experience when our school started allocating absence privileges on the basis of home address. Students who lived nearby or had access to transport were given permission to leave early for the day but those who lived further away could not because they had no way of getting home. As the only two public high schools of the region are in Bowral and Moss Vale, students from most or all other towns would have found themselves similarly lacking these privileges.

I later observed that residents of the smaller outlying towns and villages, such as mine, tended to introduce themselves as residents of the Southern Highlands, rather than referencing our specific towns. In contrast, those from the larger towns (Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale) were more likely to identify themselves as resident in their particular town. Thus I would tend to say, when asked, that I lived in the Southern Highlands while my Bowral-born wife would refer specifically to Bowral. From observations such as these, I developed a folk theory that my experience of the Southern Highlands was a regionalised one. I knew from my point of habitation that you needed to travel to multiple towns to access services and amenities like supermarkets, railway stations and medical centres. As such my sense of place was linked to a larger physical location than just my small town. The experiences demonstrated that there are different experiences of place based on one’s personal, social and geographic location. Thus, place operates in daily life as a social standpoint or network of associations not dissimilar to other social contexts such as class, gender, or nationality. Moreover, this network of associations incorporates many
heterogeneous agents, inhabiting the form of people, objects, locations, and connective elements like media. Each of these agents have a large degree of interoperability that, as I will show, arises from the positioning of human interlocutors within each network.

These experiences - though they appear trivial - gave me an understanding of what it means to know the same place differently based on social situations. Yet, despite the differences of perception between myself and those who share the Southern Highlands with me, there appear to be certain recurring themes in representations of the place. It is: a tourist destination; a home for the rich and famous; expansive and beautiful tracts of undisturbed bushland; set well apart from Sydney; and so on. I have often found my work driven by an interest in these commonalities and I have discovered, through the course of my own research and study over the past decade or so that the media is often both a source and a reflection of such commonly shared conceptions of place. Media tools, platforms, content and industries all present (and represent) certain images of places, whether those places are globally influential and prominent in television, films, books and newspapers, or whether they are less prominent. Benedict Anderson’s (1991) suggestion that the media ‘imagines’ communities partly by imagining their places, seems as apt as any way of understanding this process.

I have for some time been captivated by Anderson’s (1991) observation that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (p. 6). Anderson applied his work to nations, arguing they were ‘imagined communities’ in which “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them” (1991, p. 6). But nations are not pre-existing entities – they must be actively made out of the raw ingredients of history, people, and geography. The process, then, by which the “deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7) of a nation

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3 Indeed, my Honours research (Holland, 2012) examined the role of ‘imagined communities’ in The Simpsons.
comes about is explicitly linked to “the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6). Anderson’s argument indicates that imaginaries are the primary method by which ontologically distinct heterogeneous agents are enrolled into shared networks (communities) such as those that make up place. Thus, the central focus of this thesis is a series of such imaginaries drawn from across three case studies that primarily arise from the triumvirate phenomena of media, publics, and place. The aim is to demonstrate how a variety of such agents interact to produce multiple processes of sense-making associated with the same locational referent.

The complexities of many heterogeneous agents interacting as a network invoke the need to respond to the development of actor-network theory (ANT) among the work of scholars at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation in Paris in the 1980s. In particular, I focus here on Latour (who explicitly discusses ANT in: 1999a; 1999b; and 2005; and explores early strands in 1987) whom Harman (2009) has dubbed The Prince of Networks. Harman (2009, p. 19) argues that, in Latour’s metaphysics, the latent potential of any ‘actant’ is only realised when it assembles allies: “The more connected an actant is, the more real; the less connected, the less real.” Latour’s (1987) definition of actant is “whoever and whatever is represented” within a given controversy, model, or debate (p. 84). Within the network, any given actant may wield more influence than others, but only thanks to its success in attracting allies and not because of any a priori positioning. Further, allies may be “enticed away from their representative in order to tip the balance” (Latour, 1987, p. 85). My work here attempts to account for Latour’s metaphysical system primarily by arguing that place is best conceived as a network in which a variety of such actants compete for the primacy of their imaginaries. In doing so, they assemble a variety of allies with which they act in concert.4

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4 I further describe actor-network theory, of which Latour is one of the major proponents, and from within which the term ‘actant’ arises, in section 2.1.
It is from the standpoint of social and public life manifesting in place that this thesis proceeds with an examination of how a politics of place - that process of negotiation by which place is made and remade - is conducted via media in three case studies of different local government areas. Place itself (but not location, as I will show) in turn arises in and is shaped by these interpersonal negotiations brought about by the being-together of a series of ontologically distinct actants operating within often shared, but sometimes competing, imaginaries which are themselves communicated in media.
Chapter 1 - Imagining place: geographies, stories, governing

The subject, but not object, of this thesis is a portion of land of some 5,930 square kilometres in the southeast of the Sydney Basin, itself a region in the east of the Australian state of New South Wales. Specifically, three local government areas (LGAs): Wingecarribee Shire, Wollondilly Shire, and Wollongong City. The object of this thesis, however, is to examine how media are deployed to imagine and manage space and place in these three local government areas. This process is what I call the politics of place. Each case study presents a space in which interactions between heterogeneous agents allow place to come about as a series of shared imaginaries. There is a particular focus on the role of local governments and various public groups that respond to them in this imagining process, including how competing visions of place are negotiated and contested. However, I acknowledge that such governments are only one of many actants in the politics of place process.

As part of establishing the process by which place is imagined, this introduction presents several accounts of these three local government areas. The first account is a brief geologic history of the Sydney Basin. I note also that the geologic process can be considered a metaphor for the way different ideas of place are layered upon each other. Secondly, I present an account of the region as Aboriginal land, noting the way it is imagined in stories of place originating with Australia’s first peoples. Thirdly, I introduce the case studies as ‘governed space’ - that is, the specific territories constituted by the establishment of the local government authorities themselves. Finally, I return specifically to an imagining of the Southern Highlands (or Wingecarribee) as the site of Australia’s capital city - an imagining which did not eventuate. Each of these accounts is in some way mediated - that is, conducted
in media. Their recounting here performs a foundational role in this thesis in outlining in broad terms both the mode and object of enquiry.

Figure 2 below is a map of the subject local government areas, with large nearby population centres also marked.

*Figure 2: Three local government areas in New South Wales*[^3]

1.1 Geologies of space and place

Provided here is an account of the geologic history of the region studied in this thesis, for the purpose of establishing the ‘deep history’ underpinning these lands. This account is not strictly one of media-making as the others contained in this introduction are, but instead refers to the literal geologic process by which space and place are made. Later parts of this work build upon this section to describe social placemaking processes and place as experienced among networks of competing actants rather than as found empty space.

The sedimentary bedrock of the Sydney Basin, deposited during the relatively recent Paleozoic-Mesozoic geologic era, extends several hundred kilometres across the eastern portion of New South Wales (Blewitt, 2012). The basin features landmarks such as the Hawkesbury Sandstone-dominated Blue Mountains and the three largest population centres in the state (Sydney, Newcastle, and Wollongong). The region also hosts rich coal deposits, including coal seam gas fields. It is classified by the Australian Government as one of 89 distinct bioregions on the continent (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012a). Ecologically, the Sydney Basin is dominated by temperate broadleaf and mixed forest environments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012b).

Prominent along the southern coastline of the Sydney Basin is a rock wall known as the Illawarra Escarpment that stretches some 120 kilometres from the Royal National Park to Nowra (Young, 1980). It is this escarpment which separates the narrow coastal plains occupied by Wollongong and surrounds from the upland areas where the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires sit. The Hawkesbury Sandstone mentioned above is also the prominent

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6 For an exploration of what constitutes deep time and history in the Australian context, see McGrath and Jebb (2015, p. 2), who ponder “how the discipline of history might deal with a chunk of time so voluminous that change itself seems too slow, even imperceptible.”
feature of the Illawarra Escarpment. Elsewhere along the range, including to the south near Kiama (Saddleback Mountain) and inland around Bowral (Mount Gibraltar), are mountains that present evidence of past volcanic activity and which have provided fertile soils for farming and viticulture.

The sandstone-dominated landscape has leant itself to erosion by waterways, of which there are a number of prominent examples. The Wingecarribee River cuts across the plateau from east to west and drains north after its confluence with the Wollondilly River, eventually forming Lake Burragorang, a man-made lake enclosed by Warragamba Dam, which is the source of much of Sydney’s water supply. On the coast, the shallow estuary Lake Illawarra is a popular recreational attraction and economic resource.

The geologic processes and features described here underpin the open space of the three local government areas which are the case studies in this thesis. For the humans that came long after the landscape was established, these constitute empty space from which place is created through experience and the layering of imaginaries. The prominence of these features, including natural barriers such as the escarpment and rivers, has shaped the development pattern of towns, industries and infrastructure. In the mediated accounts of place presented throughout this work, they sometimes feature prominently, and sometimes less so, but they are always influential as key markers of space and place.

The geologic process in which multiple layers of heterogeneous rock and other elements accumulate on top of one another is a suitable metaphor for the layering of alternate imaginaries of place contemplated throughout this thesis. As with geology, such processes are not uniform – some elements overlap others, while various processes act to make underlying strata visible in certain circumstances. Occasionally, deep layers will erupt or sub-duct others, causing massive interruptions to the surface as human interlocutors experience it. Similarly,
competing and alternate conceptions of place exist layered upon one another, sometimes multiply visible and sometimes less so.

1.2 Stories of place

This sub-region of the Sydney Basin and adjoining lands are also part of the Gundungurra and Dharawal country of Australia’s first peoples (Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), 2005; University of Wollongong, 2013; Organ, 1990). The first peoples of this country have their own names, histories and understandings of these regions, including specific accounts of landscape. An example of these accounts is the following story about the creation of Windang Island off the coast of Wollongong (Matthews, 1899, reproduced in Organ, 1990, p. liv-lv):

In the remote past all the animals that are now in Australia lived in another land beyond the sea. They were at that time human creatures, and resolved to leave that country in a canoe, and come to the hunting-grounds in which they are present [today]. This voyage lasted several days and nights, until at length land was sighted on ahead, and a straight line was made for it. On getting alongside the shore, all the people landed from the canoe sat down to rest themselves. But [a man] danced upon the bottom of the canoe until he made a hole in it with his feet, after which he himself got out of it, and shoved it a little way from the shore, where it settled down in the water and became the small island now known as Gan-man-gang [Windang Island], near the entrance of Lake Illawarra into the ocean.

Much of Australia’s history since Europeans arrived on the continent have been characterised by bouts of displacement of the original peoples. Thus, the introduction here of their accounts

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7 Since these are appropriated and translated descriptions that often rely on early settler historical sources, there are conflicting options for describing these peoples and regions. Such conflicts include spelling. Where such conflicts exist, I have deferred to the University of Wollongong’s (2013) ‘Guidelines and Protocols for Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of People and Country and Aboriginal Cultural Performances.’
of place provides an important remedial foundation for the work to be presented below. In addition to the role of formal governing institutions like local governments in imagining place through the media items they produce, the role of folk or popular imaginings of place are examined in this work.

Despite displacement and dispossession, pre-European oral stories of place have persisted, though undoubtedly many have disappeared from knowledge and many more are corrupted in one way or another. The very names of the regions used so frequently throughout this research illustrate co-opting of language and, by extension, culture. The word Wingecarribee comes from the (probable) Dharawal word given to the prominent local waterway which subsequently converges with the Wollondilly River and flows into Lake Burragorang to water Sydney from behind the Warragamba Dam. This word (Wingecarribee) is said to mean “waters to rest beside” or “flight of birds” (Jervis, cited in Geographical Names Board, n.d., n.p.). Both senses give off something of an idea of flows which in turn recalls Gundungarra country creation stories that specify how the rivers, valleys, caves and mountains in the west of the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly and up into the Blue Mountains came to be during a drawn out struggle between two ancestral spirits Gurangatch and Mirragan (Jenolan Caves, n.d; Smith, 1992; O’Brien, 2015).

The story of Gurangatch and Mirragan was recounted by Southern Highlands-based elder Aunty Val Mulcahy (Mulcahy & O’Brien, 2015) for ABC Open, and accompanied by a collage of vision and photographs of the natural landscapes it tells of. Mulcahy says:

This is a dreamtime story of how the Southern Highlands was formed. It is a dreamtime story of an epic battle between Gurangatch and Mirragan… Mirragan was part [tiger] cat, but he

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8 Indeed, the construction of Warragamba Dam itself was a significant act of displacement for Gundungarra, who, post-European settlement, lived for some decades along with other displaced first peoples in the now-flooded Burragorang valley.
was a hunter, and he tried to catch Gurangatch because Gurangatch was part fish and had good flesh on him. Gurangatch, he decided to get away. So, from the Blue Mountains, he dug down into the ground. And as he moved, the water came from behind him and made the Wingecarribee and the Wollondilly Rivers… When he got to Wombeyan Caves and he got down into the ground there, Mirragan tried to dig him out. He got a stick and he tried to dig him out. He got flesh off him, but he couldn’t get him. And today when you visit Wombeyan Caves, there’s holes in the roof and these are the holes where Mirragan tried to dig him out with a stick.

The assertions of place evident here seep through the histories and accounts of the Southern Highlands and surrounds considered in this thesis. They tell also of the value of the rivers in the west of the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires as a source of water - long preceding the damming of them for this same purpose - and food.

‘Wollondilly’ is also an adopted Gundungurra country word, again with divergent or contested meanings. The Wollondilly Visitor Guide gives three meanings: “‘A place where spirits dwell’, and ‘Water trickling over rocks’. The third meaning is connected to a local legend… ‘Worron’ means black coal and ‘dilly’ means carry basket’” (Wollondilly Shire Council, n.d., p. 6). Each of these three might accurately be applied to the Wollondilly region, though it is only local Aboriginal people who can vouch for the appropriateness of the first. The other two are specifically tied to observable features of the landscape like Wollondilly’s many rivers, creeks and gorges and the rich coal seams, indicating the way that place is imagined in communication.

Organ (1990) compiled numerous sources which depict Aboriginal understanding of the Illawarra region and surrounds including the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires. These describe, for example, how the people of the coastal plane came to Lake Illawarra (a large coastal lake between the cities of Wollongong and Shellharbour) from across the sea, and the
post-death journey in the same direction. This is the story abridged above. As has been noted by Organ (1990) and the DEC (2005), these and similar stories have largely been written from memory by white settlers and much meaning is sure to have been lost in translation from both the Aboriginal languages and oral forms. Compounding this is the long-held settler belief that “there was no extant, contemporary material upon which to base a comprehensive history” (Organ, 1990, p. xxviii). Such a position means that little to no regard was often paid to those records and stories which did exist within the living culture.

Regardless of veracity or paucity of the documentary evidence, I have no hesitation enrolling such stories into the description of media to which I will adhere throughout this work. This descriptor need not rely solely upon written or visual works, but should be broad enough to include other modes of communication, especially where these produce and carry important place meaning. However, it should be noted that I cannot lay claim to the authenticity of these stories nor to their cultural currency. Instead, I am examining them as media representing place in the same regard as other examples discussed in this work.

In pursuing and documenting these place narratives, I am cognisant of two identity positions which inflect the politics of my use of them. The first of those is my own position as a person who does not identify as Aboriginal. The second is the descriptor ‘Aboriginal’ itself, which is an imposed and fraught term. Both of these are likely to influence the reception of this section of the thesis and, although I cannot control such reactions, I intend as carefully as possible to mediate them.

Firstly, I accept that as a researcher who does not identify as Aboriginal, my engagement with the place narratives of Aboriginal people could be perceived as appropriation of culture.
not unlike that which has occurred in Australia since Europeans arrived. Grossman (2003) has argued that a “marginalisation of Indigenous critical analysis and interpretation [has] worked to sustain the hegemonic influence of non-Indigenous critiques in the realm of Indigenous affairs” (p. 4). Such a comment ought to sound caution to any researcher who does not identify as Aboriginal and is considering describing Aboriginal culture. However, since this work examines representations of place in a particular and defined part of Australia, to ignore the pre- and post-colonial Aboriginal history of these places would be a more pernicious and dangerous response than to carefully and critically incorporate these perspectives into the work. It is for this reason that I have pursued this perspective in my work.

The second major identity position which may influence how this chapter is perceived is the usage of the word ‘Aboriginal’. As Carlson (2011) notes: “This identifier is a European word and concept not an Aboriginal one” (p. 24). Given this, I initially attempted to avoid using the word Aboriginal at all in favour of instead referring to the people of Gundungurra and Dharawal country. However, it is impossible to discuss a narrow subset of peoples without giving reference to the broader history of all original occupants of Australia, including all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this regard, I have endeavoured to consistently make reference to the plural ‘peoples’ as a small way of acknowledging the many and varied groups to which the broad term ‘Aboriginal’ applies.

Aside from the positions specified above, I have attempted also to mediate between the identity politics surrounding these issues by enrolling the place narratives discussed in this section into a broader cohesive structure which considers many examples of place media. In this regard, I am deliberately avoiding the essentialist risks associated with much scholarship on Aboriginal concerns by sticking with a strict media studies perspective. That is, I am
treating the narratives presented in this chapter as discrete examples of place media alongside the broader assemblage of place media in this thesis and not as particularly or especially representative of Aboriginal culture.

Finally, whereas throughout this work I have consistently referred to the idea of ‘place’, it is more appropriate in this section to consider the narratives discussed as stories of Country:

Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy (Rose, 1996, p. 7)\(^\text{10}\)

This description is not intended as a marker of difference for the purposes of diminishing or lessening the relevance of these narratives to my overall argument. Instead, the many uses of the word ‘place’ in this dissertation can be seen as building upon to the idea of Country as lived and experienced space. In other words, Country might, on balance, prove a more useful way of describing the ideas of place to which I adhere, especially as deployed within the Australian context. Nonetheless, this is an argument to be left to the geographers and Aboriginal scholars. In this section, as in those to come, I am merely attempting to undertake an analysis of how place/Country is portrayed and represented across the breadth of media and, in particular, how the particular Country/ies described in detail earlier are represented in such media.

As a way of considering the nature of habitation or relationship to land, Aboriginal perspectives and practices of Country can prove instructive. The DEC (2005) says the

\(^{10}\) The idea of ‘Country’ as something you can talk to and engage with foreshadows my engagement with the metaphysics of ANT, which emphasises the range of heterogeneous actants – human and nonhuman – able to participate in any given assemblage. See especially section 2.1.
physical environment is a core component in identity formation for Aboriginal people due in part to the kinds of resources available: “The Illawarra environment provided its Aboriginal inhabitants with the identity of fisher people particularly skilled in the knowledge of marine and estuarine resources” (p. 60). Initially such practices might appear to be beyond the bounds of this work since they do not overtly rely upon media. However, as suggested above, the cultural practice of oral storytelling and singing, which is a relational practice of transmitting cultural knowledge, is enmeshed with this place-oriented identity. Many instances of storytelling and teaching through song are compiled by Organ, though unfortunately “Europeans have authored or edited the majority of [historical] material” (1990, p. xlv). Nonetheless, this perspective is clear, for example, in the focus on marine life in the Dharawal narrative presented above.

What I want to acknowledge in raising Aboriginal stories of place is the “enormous potential of narrativity as a means to expand cartography’s ability to articulate multiple geographies and spaces” (Pearce, 2008, p. 19). The narrative structure of these stories is exemplary of the process of imagining place through media described throughout this thesis and contributes significantly to the foundational work of this introduction. Additionally, these stories have a role in highlighting both the heterogeneity and competitive nature of the variety of place imaginaries. Though official and unofficial attempts have been made to erase these accounts of place, they remain part of the landscape and the way it can be understood.

1.3 The imagination of government

The three local government areas (LGAs) have been chosen as the case studies in this thesis because they offer an opportunity to examine linked, but separate, instantiations of the politics of place and mediated imaginings in practice. The LGAs of Wollondilly Shire, Wollongong City and Wingecarribee Shire have relationships in that they occupy contiguous
territory, share key geographic resources such as rivers and coal seams, plus physical infrastructure such as roads and railways lines. There are also significant populations that flow between them, including those linked to the University of Wollongong.

Although they are physically close together, linked by physical infrastructure networks, and share certain features and population groups, each LGA is distinctive. Though the three councils are neighbours, they sit across key divides. The administrative needs of the New South Wales state government have mostly divided these three LGAs into different regional groupings. Wollongong is most often grouped with its southern neighbours Shellharbour City and Kiama Municipality as part of the Illawarra (a region which sometimes also includes the Shoalhaven City further to the south). Wollondilly is generally considered to be the edge of the Sydney region, while the Wingecarribee is characterised as part of a group of southern inland councils that stretches south to the border of the Australian Capital Territory. Thus, these case studies offer a good opportunity to examine how similar phenomena manifest in neighbouring yet distinct locations.

Wingecarribee Shire

The Wingecarribee Shire covers a land area of 2,689 square kilometres, the largest of the three selected local government areas. It has a population of around 47,000, and is classified by the New South Wales state government as a ‘Regional Town/City’. It is a semi-rural shire with large tracts of protected bushland.

\[11\] Indeed, the NSW Government proposed to merge Shellharbour and Wollongong City LGAs in May 2016. A press release issued by the Minister for Local Government indicated that he “supports in principle the creation of a new council for Shellharbour and Wollongong, subject to the decision of the court” (Toole, 2016). Other NSW councils amalgamated on that date had their elected representatives replaced by administrators with elections scheduled in September 2017.
There are three main towns in the Wingecarribee Shire. They are surrounded by a network of two dozen smaller towns and villages. The main regional centre is the town of Bowral, although the seat of local government and therefore the main administrative centre is at Moss Vale. Bowral is well-known for a several reasons, including its status as the hometown of the Australian cricketer Sir Donald Bradman (‘the boy from Bowral’) and an annual flower festival called Tulip Time.

The greater region - most often referred to as the Southern Highlands rather than by its formal name of Wingecarribee - has long been a place of escape for the wealthy and powerful of the state of New South Wales. It boasts a number of estates built and occupied by colonial governors (amongst others) including Bunya Hill in the village of Sutton Forest, presently owned by the movie star Nicole Kidman and her country music singer husband Keith Urban (Bloc and Chancellor, 2008), and Throsby Park in Moss Vale. Nearby to Sutton Forest is Belanglo State Forest, a place with a notorious history as the killing field of one of Australia’s worst serial killers, Ivan Milat.

The shire is traversed by the busiest highway in Australia - the Hume Freeway, which stretches 900 kilometres from Sydney to Melbourne. All of these factors, and many more, may be part of the collective imagining of just what the Southern Highlands is.

Wingecarribee Shire had elections in September 2012, at which 9 councillors were elected, and they served for the majority of the time this thesis was in preparation. Fresh elections were conducted in September 2016. The mayor is elected by the councillors from among their number each September.
Wollondilly Shire

North and down the hill from the Wingecarribee Shire is the Wollondilly Shire, home to vast tracts of protected wild bushland, farms and blooming suburbs. Wollondilly is part of the Macarthur region, which is considered the birthplace of Australia’s cattle and sheep industries. It sits precariously at the outer edge of Sydney’s commuter belt and atop rich coal seams which have been mined for generations. The closure of the region’s largest coal mine, Tahmoor Colliery, is expected in 2019 with the loss of 350 jobs (Glencore, 2016).

The main town, Picton, used to be called Stonequarry after its earliest industry. Now, the Wollondilly Shire thrives on tourism, promoting itself to the Sydney day-trip market as “closer than you think.” (Wollondilly Shire Council, n.d., p. 1). Wollondilly shares with Wingecarribee the Hume Freeway and the main southern railway line. It also houses five dams that collect and store water for most of Sydney and much of the nearby coastal region known as the Illawarra, which is adjacent to the eastern edges of both Wollondilly and Wingecarribee.

Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Shires appear superficially similar. They both occupy tablelands above the Illawarra escarpment that are crisscrossed by a series of significant waterways, water catchments and protected land (largely National and State Parks). Both are characterised by a development pattern of medium-sized towns surrounded by smaller villages. Both have large tracts of open rural land. However, a prominent difference is that Wollondilly is a key New South Wales growth area and is classified by the State Government as a fringe metropolitan local government. Currently, Wollondilly sits between, and separates, regional and metropolitan parts of the state. The shire’s slogan ‘Rural Living’ seems to contrast sharply with the expected growth in population in coming decades.
Wollondilly covers an area slightly smaller than the Wingecarribee, at 2,556 square kilometres, and also has slightly fewer residents at around 46,300. However, Wollondilly’s population growth rate is the strongest of the three case study local government areas, at 9.2% compared to Wingecarribee’s 5.6% and Wollongong’s 5%. The shire also had elections in September 2012 and September 2016, returning 9 councillors, including a mayor who is elected by the councillors each September.12

Wollongong City

Between the uplands occupied by Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires and the Pacific Ocean sits the coastal Illawarra region, the heart of which is the steel city of Wollongong - a city whose reputation and economy have been built upon manufacturing industries which are crumbling in the face of rising costs of production in Australia. In response, information and communication technology industries are currently seen as the bedrock of Wollongong’s “transition” from an “industrial and manufacturing centre” to a “silicon beach” (Wollongong City Council, 2012, p. 1). This claim, promoted by the Lord Mayor Gordon Bradbery and others, attempts to position information and communication technology at the heart of Wollongong City’s brand and attraction as a region with both suitable lifestyle and business environments as a bulwark against the changing economic landscape.

The physical landscape of Wollongong is also quickly changing. In February 2014, Port Kembla Copper demolished a 198-metre chimney stack which had loomed over the city since the mid-1960s (Department of Environment and Planning, 2014), while the present growth rate of 5% equates to about 10,000 new residents per year. Wollongong City Council’s 205,000 residents make it the third largest local government area in the state of New South

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12 A referendum conducted alongside the 2016 election overwhelmingly supported the introduction of a popularly elected mayor for Wollondilly, which will come into effect from the next council election, currently scheduled for 2020.
Wales by population, even though it is confined to a geographic area of only 684 square kilometres, much of which is protected bushland and the mountainous Illawarra escarpment. The settled part of Wollongong City is a largely urban area with major educational facilities such as TAFE Illawarra and the University of Wollongong. The large coastal Lake Illawarra is a significant natural feature, and Wollongong also features a working harbour and port, plus renowned beaches.

Wollongong Council is perhaps most well-known for a corruption scandal that was the subject of hearings by the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 2008. In their report following the hearings, ICAC (2008a) found that “systemic corruption exists within Wollongong City Council” (p. 4). The elected councillors were subsequently sacked by the state government, and fresh elections were held in September 2011. The 13 councillors, (including the Lord Mayor) that were elected then are those serving at time of writing in September 2016.13

1.4 Imagining a capital

At the turn of the twentieth century, newly-federated Australia sought a site suitable for “the finest capital city in the world”14 (Harrison, 1995, p.6). Residents of the town of Bowral met in a town hall and formed a committee to lobby for their region to be chosen. Having realised they were within the then-vaunted boundary of “not less than one hundred miles from Sydney” (Constitution Act (Cwth), s. 125) the residents nonetheless attempted to convince the relevant governments of their case. The hall in which they met, then known as the Bowral

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13 Pending the outcome of the state government’s merger proposals. The NSW Land and Environment Court dismissed the case against the mergers brought by a coalition of councils, including Shellharbour, in September 2016. The decision cleared the way for mergers to occur, but at time of writing, Shellharbour indicated an intention to appeal the decision (Pearson, 2016) and the matter has not yet been finalised.

14 Harrison cites an oft-quoted phrase of then Minister for Home Affairs King O’Malley, who made his grandiose statement in the midst of also complaining the government should not be moved from Melbourne.
School of Arts, has been the site of many similar events in which important decisions about Bowral and its rural surrounds were made. Local residents at that time were used to conducting their politics in the public sphere afforded by town hall meetings. Following the meeting, local newspaper the *Bowral Free Press* (A.N.V, 1899) recorded:

> If the new capital is to be built on the highlands, it cannot but prove to be a most attractive place for residences. There are not likely to be many factories or industrial establishments within it, but the ideal should be miles of pretty villa residences, each on three acres and possessing a cow. (p. 2).

Here, both the perceived value of the natural landscape and farming history of ‘the highlands’ is asserted in conjunction with the idea that the proposed capital is unlikely to mimic the busier New South Wales state capital of Sydney to produce an ideal upon which to base further claims about what their place was and could be.

The idea of the capital itself as having “agricultural, horticultural and sylvan features” was later affirmed in papers presented the 1901 ‘Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors and Others Interested in the Building of the Federal Capital of Australia’ (Harrison, 1995, p. 3). Indeed, Australia’s eventual capital, Canberra, is a city whose imagining commenced long before it was built. Webb and Williams (2015) note that “It was imagined, and only after that was it made; *the map preceded the territory*” (p. 493, original emphasis). Perceptions of what the capital should be, and what the Southern Highlands should be, were closely aligned at the time of that meeting in the Bowral School of Arts Hall, a factor that appeared to weigh in favour of the local campaign.

While residents were advocating for the establishment of the capital in their midst, the *Bowral Free Press* (A.N.V, 1899) newspaper further sought to argue the proposal should not
have a negative impact on the amenities in the region, nor increase costs for existing residents:

The expansion of all the neighbouring townships is scarcely likely to take place with such an attraction near by [sic], therefore all the more reason why water works and improvements entailing ratepayers’ money should be considered with the utmost circumspection. (p. 2).

The passages show an imagined possibility (the Highlands as a capital city) emerging alongside existing ideas about the future development pattern of the Southern Highlands region. This is the politics of place in action - involving negotiations and claim-making by residents, governments and media organisations about overlapping or competing imaginings of the present or future of the places in which they operate. Various actants are apparent within these claims, including the ideas themselves, the people assembling and arguing for them, and the places to which they refer.

History shows that the Southern Highlands did not go on to become the site of Australia’s capital, which instead was located about 150 kilometres to the south east, in Canberra. However, this episode of Southern Highlands history demonstrates how a politics of place can play out. In their public debate, residents and aldermen were actively *contesting or negotiating* multiple possible futures, pasts and presents. Furthermore, the debate occurred in relation to a *locational reference*, Bowral specifically, or the Southern Highlands region more generally.

As has been highlighted by Masuda and Garvin (2008), the concept of place has emerged as “both a site of meaning as well as a tool used by powerful groups to manipulate present and future action” (p. 112). What is important about the historical account presented above is that it illustrates how the politics of place operates within local communities, involving the mobilization of ideas and ideals about what a place is and what it should be with the goal of
either maintaining or altering the place in question. All of this exists within the wider processes of contestation and negotiation between governments and multiple publics with competing networks of multiple possibilities of identities (of places and individuals), and the locational reference point to which place is tied.

Massey (2005) has argued places should be conceived of “not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events” (p. 130, original emphasis). Place as geographers see it is largely “woven together out of ongoing stories” (Massey, 2005, p. 131). The process of negotiating the interaction of these stories and the unfolding of such events is the politics of place - it is a process by which place is made and unmade, contested and protested, governed and discussed within broad networks made up of a variety of heterogeneous agents.

Anderson argues that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (1991, p. 6). In large part, Anderson’s imaginings rely on media technologies which facilitate some shared communicational spaces across the breadth of a given community (typically, nations). Yet, the audiences for a local newspaper like the Bowral Free Press introduced above paper must also surely imagine themselves as members of a community about which the paper writes.

In this thesis, place is conceived as a construct - that is, something understood socially from the perspective of human interlocutors, but which is influenced by a wide variety of actors. This is the core of what Anderson (1991) refers to as the imagining process, a component of which is the shared media items circulated within communities. In turning to the politics of place in participatory media, I will explore a number of case studies to illustrate the interactional nature of this process. Of particular interest here is the role of local government authorities in shaping ideas about place through media, and their relationship to citizen and
other makers of media about place. Thus, I approach the case studies from the standpoint of a politics of place as it is conducted in modern media networks. I have selected my home local government area, the Wingecarribee Shire (also known as the Southern Highlands), and the neighbouring Wollondilly Shire (where I have family) and Wollongong City (where I work and study) as my case studies. Thus I am deeply embedded in these case studies, and can consider them from both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives.

At the 1899 town hall meeting described above, residents met with their local government officials in person. Today, however, the residents in my three case studies are much more likely to engage with councils and councillors online firstly, and secondly through other media platforms. In the context of the current technological moment, these practices often occur in what have been called participatory media - technologies designed not just to broadcast, but to communicate and conduct dialogue. These are technologies with global reach whose rise have elicited concerns that our sense of place is disappearing or being collapsed (for example, Meyrowitz, 1985; Relph 1976). Yet, the politics of place still rely on local communities and publics. Conducting such politics in open and public networks designed for communication at a distance (rather than across town) invokes a certain sense of paradox and novelty. It is in responding to these conditions that this thesis arises.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis poses the central research question ‘How does media facilitate the politics of place?’ To facilitate and guide discussion, two further questions are proposed: ‘What role do local governments have in this process?’ and ‘What role do citizens have in this process?’ In seeking to answer these questions, I will address the emerging response among media and communication theorists to the view, which emerged in the mid-1970s onward, that electronic media induced a kind of ‘placelessness’ (Relph, 1976) or the collapse of the
context which generated a sense of place (Meyrowitz, 1985). This position has recently been challenged by Postill (2008), Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011), Farman (2012), Moores (2012), and Evans (2015), for example. Each argues that electronic media can facilitate different kinds of interactions with place, in some cases enriching what Seamon (1979) calls ‘everyday environmental experience’, by which he means “the sum total of a person’s first-hand involvements with the geographical world in which he or she typically lives” (p. 15-16).

This thesis continues this rethinking, arguing strongly that mediated experience of place is no less formative or relevant than the ‘first-hand’ experience suggested by Seamon.

A number of the scholars whose work is referenced in this thesis are members of the New York and Toronto Schools of Media Ecology. Media ecology is a field which consists of “the study of media as environments” (Postman, quoted in Strate, 2006, p. 17). McLuhan (1964), one of the more prominent and influential media ecology scholars, appears regularly throughout this work. His book *Understanding Media* (1964) is preoccupied with the environments created by media. In that book, McLuhan coins his widely known aphorism that “the medium is the message”, commenting that “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (1964/2013, loc. 164). It is important to acknowledge that although I have used both McLuhan (1964) and Meyrowitz (1985) as points of departure in this work, it is not intended to be an in-depth treatment of either their work or developments in the field of media ecology. This thesis contains shades of media ecology, to be sure, but my engagement is primarily with other scholars. The literature examined here, and from which I draw inspiration, is an eclectic mix. The most prominent influences are the sociologist Anderson (1991), actor network theorist Latour (1999; 2005), and non-media centric communication scholar Moores (2006; 2012).
This thesis is structured to take account of both the broad heterogeneous elements in the imaginaries of place already presented and the variety of agents involved in producing such imaginaries. It does so by introducing yet further mediated accounts of place drawn from across the networks of associations that exist in each of the case study local government areas (and, indeed, across them). Presented here, then, is a broad study of mediated imaginings of place from across the three case study local government areas, with particular attention to how different imaginings are contested or negotiated amongst participants.

There is a strong focus on so-called participatory media, by which citizens and others outside of the professional media industries co-create, shape and contest ideas of place. The work interrogates the promise of these participatory practices as promoted by local governments themselves and questions the extent to which their promise has been fulfilled. As the councils are just one of the many participants in this process, due attention is paid to how members of the public conduct themselves, and what their usage of participatory media means for how local governments go about community engagement today. The centrality of local government to this work – including the role of the selected places by reference to local government areas – arises from early incarnations of this thesis as a response to the media-making activities of local governments. However, as the work progressed it became clear that there are a wide variety of influential actors in the networks of place considered here.

The thesis draws a link between how a sense of place is imagined and presented in various media forms, including and especially those which invite participation by many individual contributors. There is also consideration of the fact that, as one of the key informants in this study suggested, local government is still “straddling the digital divide” (interviewee S6,
pers. comm). Media items considered here include film and television, newspapers, books, social media sites and networks, tourism brochures, blogs, and planning maps. This approach responds to my general approach of drawing together a broad and heterogeneous network for the purposes of tracing relationships between various objects and actants.

In short, the research presented here is about how place is imagined and contested in and by the media for those who govern and inhabit it. Participants in this process include citizens, media makers, and governments, and is conducted across a wide variety of media items and platforms. Place is constructed, or emerges from, the range of imaginaries promoted across networks of associations that are open enough to accommodate ontologically distinct objects such as people, governments, buildings, towns, roads, animals and media, in the spirit of Latour (1999a; 1999b; 2005).

This introduction has offered something of a chronological account of how place has unfolded in the three local government areas already introduced, while the body of the thesis recounts more recent imaginings of place. This chapter has progressed from a brief overview of the geography of the Sydney Basin and the sub-region chosen as the main case study in this work, to the stories of the first peoples who inhabited them, and then to structures of government in these areas. The purpose of offering these accounts is to establish the multiplicity inherent in any ideas of place, despite common histories, which underwrites the negotiation of ideas referred to as the politics of place and the wider unfolding of place within networks.

Chapter 2 performs a literature review function, setting out the existing work in the fields of geography, communication, media studies and philosophy to which this thesis primarily

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15 Interviewees are assigned alphanumeric indicators showing their order of interview (number) and their broad role within the research (letter). The letters are ‘S’ for ‘staff member’, ‘C’ for ‘councillor’, and ‘O’ for ‘other’. Further details of this system are described in the section Confidentiality beginning on page 102.
responds. It performs a foundational role in establishing the sense in which I use the terms ‘politics of place’, ‘media’, ‘publics’ and ‘local government’ in this thesis (see also the Glossary). Chapter 3 is a description of the methodology employed in this research, including some of the general theoretical stances adopted. It also critically addresses the researcher’s role as a situated interpreter and member of the publics tied to the places discussed in this research.

Although it is clear that local governments and citizens are not the only makers of media about place, the focus in this work is primarily those two groups and the interaction between them. Thus the first three discussion chapters can be viewed as being on a continuum from local government through to citizens. Chapter 4, therefore, explores how councils themselves create mediated imaginings of place while Chapter 5 examines the participatory interactions between councils and their publics. Finally, Chapter 6 reports almost exclusively on the actions of publics in their own right.

Chapter 7, presents a concerted focus on yet further mediated accounts of place, this time drawn from the professional media and entertainment industries. These include reports on crimes that have occurred in each of the three case study local government areas and film and television productions either set or filmed here.

Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, suggests the possible destination of converging place imaginings, including some of the implications of the present round of local government reform being conducted in New South Wales, which was still unfolding as this thesis was being finalised.

This study itself is intended to contribute to an understanding of participatory media practices within those selected case studies, and to have resonance both inside and outside of academia.
In particular, my consideration of media networks created by, and circulating around, the local governments themselves may provide those local governments with new information of relevance to their community engagement, placemaking and place marketing activities. My intention here is to expand on Anderson’s (1991) work on the role of media in shaping communities and their places, and continues a recent tradition within media and communication studies of rethinking the relationship between place and digital media. Additionally, this thesis explores the ways in which citizens and publics seek to participate in their own placemaking and placeshaping activities, most particularly through what I term participatory media.
Chapter 2: Locating the politics of place

The Southern Highlands was not the only pre-federation rural community that sought to lay claim to the capital. On March 22, 1899, an article republished from the Singleton Argus in the Moss Vale newspaper The Scrutineer noted at least eleven such campaigns (Singleton Argus, cited in Scrutineer, 1899). The article is a fine example of the use of language and a sense of historicity to create the sub-stratum on which place sits. It establishes a range of phenomena – amongst them the media item, various publics and fleeting accounts of specific places – which interact in the networks of associations in which place is imagined. It began:

The fun of the world at the present time seems to be a Melbourne boomster\(^{16}\) lying quietly and watching the guileless New South Wales towns […] trying to snatch up the shadow of the federal capital (p. 4)

Even in these few lines, the emotive descriptions of the ‘Melbourne boomster’ and the ‘guileless towns’ establishes a political network that incorporates a range of actants from across the fledgling nation and positions them immediately at odds with one another. In this way, the writer is capturing and interpreting for the newspaper’s audience a series of actions in the politics of creating and managing what is one of the more influential places within any given nation – its capital. The contestation between these towns was being played out in newspaper reports across the country. In the process, whole towns and communities are encapsulated in just a few words each, a hint at the powerful and lasting role of shared imaginaries in continuing to construct ideas of place. Thus the newspaper comes to act as a form of sensing for its audiences, a point to which I return later in this chapter.

\(^{16}\) The term ‘boomster’ likely refers to a person who is seeking to boost, talk up, or support Melbourne’s chances of retaining the right to be the capital city.
The *Argus/Scrutineer* continued in terms reminiscent of a sports report:

Albury punches poor little Bombala in the political stomach, and scornfully orders it out of the scramble when Bombala makes a vicious grab at the scanty hair of old feeble Yass, which is struggling to oust Cootamundra. Goulburn, meanwhile, has its academic thumb set firmly down upon the shadow and frantically calls on Bowral to come and assist in nailing it. Bowral replies that it wants to secure the illusive thing for itself, and demands help from Goulburn.

From out west, Bathurst complains of the unseemly selfishness of all these places, and declares that it had acquired pre-emptive rights before any of them was federally awake. It is immediately shut up with a backhander in the mouth from Orange, which […] is laid out by a vicious kick from the nasty blucher of despised Dubbo. Then Morpeth even puts in a plea, with the explanation that it is the head of Hunter River navigation […]; while sleepy Maitland utters a gasp in defence of a claim that she is supposed to have (1899, p. 4)

There is an interesting interactional space formed in this account between the media item (the newspaper article), the places described and the presumed readers. In the act of republishing this article, the *Scrutineer* created two distinct audiences - those of the original publisher and their own, both of whom live near towns in the midst of this contest. The article’s author is also commenting upon the politics of the process of choosing the federal capital, highlighting the competitive and seemingly pointless squabbling. Additionally, the article establishes each of the towns as actants in their own right in a broader political network of other towns. This network is perceived in part as a competitive space by those interested in the debate.

This thesis attempts to examine the interactions between media, publics and places, evident in the example so richly portrayed in the articles from the *Argus/Scrutineer* and the *Bowral Free Press*. It does so by considering the various publics acting in these spaces, the media through which they communicate, and the places they discuss, through the frame of the imagining and
negotiation that goes on in media of all kinds. Additionally, the work acknowledges and discusses the influence of local government authorities on the other three phenomena, an artefact of an earlier focus on the role of local governments themselves in creating place. In the course of the work, however, it became necessary to pay greater attention to broader networks and a wider range of actants. Latour’s own definition of actants as “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others” (1998, cited in Mitew, 2014, p. 14) establishes the point that there are a wide variety of action-originating characters in any complex network of sociality.

The interaction of local places with global networks of communication and media is now described as the rise of the ‘glocality’, a neologism that combines the words global and locality. Meyrowitz (2005) argues “Each glocality is unique in many ways, and yet each is also influenced by global trends and global consciousness” (p. 23). Thus this thesis arises from a need to understand and reposition location in light of the “interconnected global matrix” (Meyrowitz, 2005, p. 23) of media networks such as the internet, satellite, terrestrial broadcasts and widespread and accessible travel networks. In turn, this need has arisen in response to decades of work that argued such networks have negative impacts on the sense of place inherent in experience situated in location, as Meyrowitz himself admits it must be. Relph (1976) argued that the experience of place is tending toward ‘placelessness’, “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place” (preface). One of the forces driving this process, in Relph’s argument, is mass communication technologies. Meanwhile, Meyrowitz (1985) more directly argues that “the evolution of media has decreased the significance of physical presence in the experience of people and events” (p. vii). In Meyrowitz’s view, people’s use of media to communicate with each other and get information at a distance
erodes the sense of place by breaking down barriers whose presence had allowed place to arise amongst actants whose primary (or only) connection was their proximal location.

The work presented in the following chapters partly responds to the positions of Relph (1976) and Meyrowitz (1985) described above, while seeking to build on the work of Postill (2008), Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011), Farman (2012), Moores (2012), and Evans (2015), amongst others, which repudiate this view and contend that media technologies can strengthen, rather than weaken, the experience of and opportunity to shape place. It is important to be clear, though, that Meyrowitz’s (1985) work does not suggest place is deformed or damaged by electronic media, only that “electronic technologies have little or no regard for place and space” (Paterno, 2016, p. 127). This chapter presents these foundational works further, describing the core concerns of this thesis, namely: the politics of place; media; publics; and the role of local government in managing each of these.

In describing and considering place, I repeatedly return to the work of geographers, who appear at first to be more concerned with natural phenomena rather than human-initiated activity like media use. Casey (2002), however, suggests geography “studies arbitrary configurations of the places and regions of the earth” (p. 265, emphasis added). Here, Casey is hinting at the nature of geography as a human-centred discipline just like studies of media such as the examples presented in this thesis. Seamon (1979) further supports this perspective, arguing “Geography is the study of the earth as the dwellingplace of man” (p. 15, emphasis added). Seamon (1979) expands this position to underline the concern of geography with the relationship between human beings and the physical world: “It seeks to understand a person’s life in relation to the places, spaces and environments which in sum comprise his or her geographical world” (p. 15). In this regard, media and geography clearly
have significant scope for interface in the instances where media extend and interact with a person’s relationship with the world.

As noted, a challenge to the arguments underlying this thesis is presented by Relph (1976), who suggests that images of place “disseminated through the mass-media” are “superficial... offering no scope for empathetic insideness and eroding existential insideness by destroying the bases for identity with places” (p. 58). This thesis seeks to counteract such positions by arguing that where media facilitate publics to gather and interpret information about the physical world - what Seamon (1979) describes as the geographical world - they can play a role in how publics understand that world. Thus, the arguments presented here proceed primarily from the standpoint of social and public life manifesting in relation to place.

In the particular cases described here, media supplement and inform the very kinds of local experience Relph (1976) suggests are overridden by mass media. I argue that it is in representations and imaginings of place that this interaction is most clearly visible and that, in fact, representation of place in media can play a role in producing and shaping place itself. Macfarlane argues similarly of language, that it “does not just register experience, it produces it. The contours and colours of words are inseparable from the feelings we create in relation to situations, to others and to places” (2015, p. 14). This concern is also taken up by Casey: “The truth is that representation is not a contingent matter, something merely secondary; it is integral to the perception of landscape itself” (2002, p. xv). What this suggests is that media can play a role in producing or supplementing experiences of place, a theme to which I return throughout this research.
2.1 Politics of place: contested imaginings in a complex network of heterogeneous agents

The politics of place is an ongoing process by which a given place is imagined and contested by those who govern and inhabit it. Participants in this process include citizens, media makers, and governments, all of whom are enrolled into wider networks within which place emerges. Such networks necessarily include histories, geologies and objects which reside in or are otherwise related to the places of interest. This section describes two components of the politics of place - contestation or negotiation over particular imaginings and the locational reference point. The following section describes the media through which the politics of place is conducted. I additionally argue for an understanding of the term place primarily as a social achievement arising from networks of associations and not merely as a geographic location.

Although I have chosen to concentrate on the term ‘politics of place’ in this thesis, similar processes are described in other terms by other scholars. For example, Postill (2008, p. 422) describes the ‘field of residential affairs’, by which he means:

the field of organized striving in which residents, politicians, municipal staff, journalists and other social agents compete and cooperate over matters of concern to local residents, often by means of the internet

Such work, although it employs slightly different terms, is helpful for positioning this current project within a broader disciplinary field. Indeed, this study of three local government areas is closely aligned with Postill’s ethnographic approach to the communities in Malaysia in which he developed the description quoted above. Postill’s definition of the ‘field of residential affairs’ is therefore useful here because it makes explicit the involvement of series of publics in the politics of place processes. ‘Residents’, for example, are never a wholly
constituted homogenous group, but typically pursue multiple objectives in any of the matters of concern which come to their attention.

The politics of place in my three case studies plays out through two interrelated elements: (1) contestation over multiple possible trajectories, histories and manifestations; and (2) a locational reference point (in simple terms, the place itself). This process is today enacted in large measure by the community engagement practices and media items produced by local governments, and also by individuals and publics using forms of mediated communication for their own purposes. These publics are largely the source of place imaginings, but not the only contributors, as this thesis will show. In the sections below, each of the claims made about politics of place will be considered in more detail in order to demonstrate the role that the phenomena of contestation and locality play in constituting the politics of place which may play out in participatory media.

Contesting place

The politics of place is a process of contestation or negotiation over what places are and could be. In the example of residents of the Southern Highlands seeking to have their region named as the nation’s capital, the divergent choices at the heart of such negotiations are clear - the region should either seek to become the capital, or it should not. The outcome of the process of choosing the capital hardly matters since once residents, politicians and media have decided to pursue the campaign as once the decision is made, the idea enters into the politics of place. The ability of any given actant or group of actants, such as townspeople of Bowral, to rally allies to their cause is likely to influence the outcome. Such negotiations result in place identities, which themselves may come in for further contestation. Further, these negotiations take place both in formal political and governance structures like local government authorities and in contexts such as the media.
Pierce et al. (2011) describe the politics of place as a process in which “as competing discourses about places are contested (and, in their contestation, shaped and adopted by others), they become constitutive of new, shared place identities” (p. 55). In the Southern Highlands example described above, these dialogic processes were conducted by people in a public meeting. The politics of place played out in front of and by those present and was reported on in the local paper. The political structures that came into place in this negotiation were largely formal in nature, given the involvement of elected aldermen, although a number of citizens participated in the public debate and contributed letters in absentia. It also seemed important, given the stakes, that elected members of parliament were involved, as reported in the *Bowral Free Press* (A.N.V., 1899).

The observations above with regard to the conduct of a politics of place in person and through formal and identifiable means (town hall meetings and the newspaper) point to two of the transformations that animate the questions addressed by this thesis. Firstly, the role of local legacy news media is now somewhat diminished in favour of other sites of negotiation such as social networking sites and applications, council-managed websites, and citizen blogs and publications (see, for example, Picard, 2015; Metzgar, et al., 2011; Freeman and Hutchins, 2016). Secondly, there are now many more channels for participation that stretch well beyond face-to-face meetings in the local town hall, conducted by recognised governing bodies. The social media tools of participation are also tools of organisation so that citizens’ groups can call and conduct their own meetings, and campaign outside of the bounds of formal communication structures established by councils and the like (see section 6.2 and 6.3 of this thesis for further discussion of these structures of organisation).

Massey (2005) argues “what is special about place is precisely […] the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” (p. 140) in conjunction with both human and
nonhuman others. Thus, the negotiation - or politics - of place is central to the process by which place itself is conceived. Massey (2005) describes this as a ‘throwntogetherness’ and it is clear that it is the necessary negotiations instigated by this throwntogetherness that the politics of place arises, whether in formal political structures or more informally.

Massey (2005) suggests the here-and-now always necessarily draws “on a history and a geography of thens and theres” (p. 140) Any politics of place therefore involves ongoing processes by which place is made for participants and others and in which multiple overlapping places can be conceived, each with different possible trajectories and imaginings even when people share the same physical environment. The past histories of place - whether real or imagined, claimed or unclaimed - leave their traces on future imaginings. The present day Southern Highlands (a here and now) draws on historical developments (then and there), such as debates about the siting of the future capital, which in turn made earlier claims for the apparent natural qualities of the region. The ways in which these politics are now conducted in the shaping and making of place via participatory and other media are at the core of this thesis.

Thus the contestation over place (i.e., the politics of place) relies upon many possible imaginings of the place of concern, and groups or individuals willing and able to deploy these imaginings in contest with each other. These are the heterogeneous networks of place – many agents (including people, objects, and imaginaries) deployed in concert or opposition to each other, but always in relation to a shared context. It is clear that the representational nature of media artefacts like the newspaper described in this section help to facilitate the emergence of multiple possible trajectories in relation to the similar locational reference points. The following section considers the place which is the source and site of this politics.
Location and place

Place itself remains a contested term, but clearly extends beyond the physical location associated with places to a socially constructed and experienced phenomena. For geographers, ‘place’ connotes a specialised concept which is “sensed in a chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places” (Relph, 1976, p. 79). Relph further argues place is partly a process of exerting experience of space by naming it. Like Relph, Bodenhamer et al. (2010) argue place is “the dense coil of memory, artifact [sic], and experience that exists in a particular space” (p. vii). Both of these conceptions suggest place is a concept which emerges only in concert with other aspects of habitation, such as experience. Presumably, though few geographers address it, this conception of experience discounts mediated forms of knowing like those considered in this thesis.

Seamon (1979), however, suggests the media can facilitate “encounter”, meaning “any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand” (p. 99). The phrase ‘attentive contact’ alludes to perception, at the centre of which Merleau-Ponty (2012) positions the body, meaning “our means for having a world” (p. 147). Seamon (2006) later appears to dismiss the possibility of media enhancing encounter and yet simultaneously argues for studies broaching “a phenomenology of encounter and media” (n.p.). His view seems to be that media can only diminish encounter with the (physical) world, a claim I contest. I argue that media items about place come to act as a space within which encounters occur, enriching and producing the places of everyday habitation. In this way, encounters with the world are not limited to those that are obtained through bodily mediation, but may be obtained through other media forms.
In her definitions of place, Massey (2005) foregrounds the social aspects of the ways in which place is constructed and perceived. Massey also argues that place is not fixed, but rather should be conceived as an ‘event’, or “a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, and as in process, as unfinished business” (2005, p. 130). Place is always in process, with particular configurations (of people, activities, and objects) co-occurring at particular times. The politics of place comes about in negotiating these configurations.

Others, such as Kemmis (1990), highlight instead a sense of place-as-location, but generally acknowledge that location is an active influence and not a blank space. Kemmis (1990) notes that “the political culture of a place is not something apart from the place itself” (p. 7). For Massey, place arises from within the social-political nexus while for Kemmis the political arises in place. The politics of place for Kemmis suggests the way in which politics manages place, while for Massey it implies the necessary politics induced by being together that creates place.

The role of place in underpinning the emergence of a polis (or public) appears especially prominent in sub-national contexts. Kemmis (1990) notes the American state of Montana’s constitution includes an “expression of gratitude for Montana’s landscape”, whereas the United States constitution does not (p. 7). This, he argues, underpins how a people constitute themselves as a public in relation to place. The word public, for Kemmis, must be considered “within the context of the way we inhabit very particular stretches of land” (1990, p. 41). The politics of place, then, is in part a social process that emerges within a locational framework.

The artist Wood (2010) further describes the locational emergence of place when he suggests we could think about "those people in that place, their relationships, and their ways in the world; and thus, less a place than a process” (p. 16, original emphasis). This proposition
reinforces the suggestion that the construction of place and the politics inherent in this construction is always broadly relational and social. Each of the accounts of place cited above suggest place is both spatially situated and constituted from experience, context, and relationships with human and nonhuman others. Thus there are two interrelated elements to the politics of place - the common spatial reference point with its multiple competing ‘thens and theres’, ‘heres and now’ and the necessary negotiation of the polis which exists within and shapes the place.

The term ‘politics of place’ in this thesis is therefore intended to encompass the process of influencing, managing, and creating a sense of place while simultaneously negotiating the inherent politics of human communication and being together. There is also an acknowledgement that any politics of place has multiple potential trajectories, and may be viewed differently by each participant. Furthermore, all participants respond to other objects within the broad networks of association that exist within place, including human and non-human actants, ideas, media items, and histories.

Heterogeneous participants in the networks of place

Thus far, I have so far hinted at but not explicitly addressed the frameworks within which I have suggested the politics of place (and, place itself) operates. The network positioning emphasised here draws much influence from the actor-network theory (ANT) perspective developed in part by Latour (1999a; 1999b; 2005), which I explore in this section. A further scholar of note is Law (1992; Law and Singleton, 2013). Frameworks such as that offered by ANT make palatable the bewildering variety of heterogenous agents that contend with one another in any complex social network, by noting the ways in which they interact and urging the tracing of associations between distinct actants..
In an early critique, Latour (1999a) argues “there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen” (p. 15). This critique demonstrates the need to contend with ANT not as a unifying theory but as a methodological approach that reveals, rather than explains, social phenomena. Latour goes on to argue that it is “a method and not a theory, a way to travel from one spot to the next, from one field site to the next” (1999, p. 20). Law (1992), succinctly explains that ANT “treats social relations, including power and organization, as network effects” (p. 379). Thus ANT would appear to be appropriate in this study, which takes into account the details and structures evident within three such ‘network’ sites – each of the case studies – and their situation amongst a broader network of other places. Each of the case studies are made as places within the networks of actants primarily through relations between actants.

ANT is useful also because it encompasses a definition of actants that moves beyond the human to incorporate non-human entities, such as the technologies, landscapes, and buildings which contribute to place. As Law (1992) notes, “Agents, texts, devices, architectures are all generated in, form part of, and are essential to, the networks of the social” (p. 379). ANT therefore insists upon “an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together” (Latour, 2005, p. 65). These ‘brief moments’ are present in the capturing of place in this thesis, in which certain assemblages of actants are able to be observed as having been aligned in a configuration of place.

The term ‘network’, in ANT is intended to mean “a series of transformations – translations, transductions” and not “transport without deformation” (Latour, 1999, p. 16, original emphasis). In this way, network captures the relational nature of ANT which means that any network cannot exist without the wide range of actants that are incorporated within it and,
conversely, the actants are constituted within the network by their relations. Associated with any given place (which could itself be considered one of the network-constituting actants), are a series of individuals, publics, locations, natural features, buildings, roads, animals, plants, governments and innumerable other objects. Thus it is across a series of such relations – which Latour describes as transformation – that the imaginaries of place arise.

This thesis deploys ANT with a view to empirically tracing the various distinct and heterogeneous actants that constitute the networks of place. Law and Singleton (2013) succinctly argue that “for ANT words are never enough: you need to practice it” (p. 485). This view urges active engagement with a variety of actants, and the careful tracing of relations between them in order to trace their networks. It is, however, not a prescriptive toolset but rather “a sensibility, a set of empirical interferences in the world, a worldly practice, or a lively craft” (Singleton and Law, 2013, p. 485).

The relationship between ANT and the politics of place as presented in this thesis is that both make particular claims about the world. Law and Singleton (2013) suggest that ANT and similar “descriptions in social science” are “performative, that they license particular ways of seeing or frameworks” (p. 502). There are clear links between this description of ANT and my descriptions of imaginaries – or ways of seeing and making claims – throughout this work. For these reasons, the method of ANT is entirely suitable to the content of this study.

2.2 Media: sensory apparatus and participatory tool

The multiplicity inherent in competing ideas of place arises not just within the context of in-person contestation such as the town hall meeting referred to already, but also in the overlapping representational spaces of communicational media. McLuhan (1964) famously
characterised media as the “extensions of man” (sic), brashly\textsuperscript{17} claiming that “we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace” (p. 5). Shirky calls media “the connective tissue of society… Media is how you know about anything more than ten yards away” (2010, p. 54). Following these leads, I suggest that media are \textit{sensory apparatus}. They are prostheses that allow us to sense the world beyond what is immediately at hand. This term, like those of both McLuhan and Shirky, is intended to call upon a biological metaphor since modern media extend our ability not only to receive information but to send it, and they do so at previously unimaginable scales while collapsing temporal and geographic barriers to communication. They extend our ability to reach out into the world and influence what we find there, often in concert with other actants.

The sense of place gained through the use of sensory prostheses is likewise expanded to encompass many places at once, which Moores (in Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; 2012) and Scannell (1996) have described as a ‘doubling’ of place. Moores (in Couldry and McCarthy, 2004) argues that “place, and experiences of being-in-place, can be pluralized in and by electronically mediated communication” (p. 32). In making this argument, Moores draws upon Scannell’s suggestion that place can be ‘doubled’, allowing media users to be in multiple places simultaneously. Although his examples are drawn from media used for communication at a distance (television broadcasts, internet forums, mobile telephones), it is my contention that media can account also for places where a user \textit{is} physically present. For example, Evans (2015) argues that individuals can understand place as an orientation of the self to place as mapped by fellow users of location-based social network sites. The effect of this orientation is to bring together digital and physical manifestations of the same place,

\textsuperscript{17} Although this phrasing seems commonplace today, I describe the claim as brash in the spirit of McLuhan himself, who wrote at the time: “Just how little consideration has been given to such matters in the past can be gathered from the consternation of one of the editors of this book. He noted in dismay that ‘seventy-five per cent of your material is new. A successful book cannot venture to be more than ten per cent new’” (1964, p. 5).
allowing a doubling of place upon itself rather than conjoining distant places. Similarly, Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) observe that a city “contains annotations and connections, information and orientations from a network of people and devices that extend well beyond what is [visible]” (p.1). This is the doubling process in the modern era.

The multiplicity inherent in place is difficult to describe only in terms of doubling given the many possible networks in which various ideas of place can arise and the many actants within any given network. This is the point of my description in Chapter 1 that place is layered similarly to cumulative geologic processes. Associated with any given locational referent is a series of histories and accounts which each enrol a network of actants. Sometimes, such networks intersect and collide, becoming more or less visible from any given vantage point. Thus I find it useful generally to describe place as layered and propose that the sensory apparatus of media contribute to this layering process.

The idea of people forming themselves into publics via formal documents like constitutions, as suggested by Kemmis (1990) starts to seem anachronistic when publics can form swiftly around issues and things on a minute-to-minute basis, while contributing their own voices, photographs, video, and text to the networks of which they are part. The rhetoric around participatory media argues that this facilitates greater levels of democratic engagement and social cohesiveness. However, in order to properly address the promise of participatory media in local communities such as those considered in this thesis, there needs to be a broader understanding of the history of local communication practices. Such an examination must include the local governments which are central to local media production, both in terms of

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18 Discussed in the previous section.
the way they have traditionally been reported by local professional media, and the media items they have produced.

The debate around the siting of Canberra described earlier in this chapter involved considerable activity of local aldermen from the area now known as Wingecarribee Shire. At that time, the activities of the aldermen (now referred to as councillors) were reported on only by local newspapers (A.N.V., 1899). There seem to be few means by which non-professionals could at that time produce media items which might have challenged or otherwise responded to the reporting of the actions of the aldermen. In more recent decades, councils have contended with those same newspapers alongside local television and radio stations, all of which essentially operated on a ‘broadcast’ model, with media organisation staff controlling what was published or broadcast. This model, however, has come under increasing stress as more open technologies have developed. In this regard, Couldry suggests that the “open architecture” of the internet has provoked a media environment that is “supersaturated from massively many directions” (2011, p. 488). In this formulation, there are many content originators and each organisation, individual, group and device is just one node amongst many on the network. Castells (2000) refers to the space created in and by such networks as “the space of flows”, which involves “all of a technological infrastructure of information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines” (p. 19) The space of flows is then open to contributions originating in any or many of the nodes, of which councils are one among many.

Australian local government authorities are adapting to the emergence of participatory media technologies in a variety of ways. This adaptation is driven by federal government initiatives such as the Digital Local Government Program (DBCDE, 2012) and the potential of digital media technologies as important communication tools, amongst other factors. A role for
social networking websites in particular, in event promotion and “general community engagement” has been identified (Howard, 2012, p. 11). However, councils also noted difficulties around controlling information and negative feedback as high-level barriers to the use of social networking websites (Purser, 2012).

Councils have especially taken up the task of producing their own media items for distribution on the internet. Amongst these are electronic newsletters and sites hosting press releases and the like. These elements are largely still in a broadcast mode, and can be considered a step between broadcast technologies and participatory media. They are participatory in that council staff are bypassing media organisations to create the media, but still operate within a broadcast mindset of one-to-many communication, rather than dialogically-informed practice.

The affordances of open contribution tools are one of the major differences between internet-era dialogic or exchange-based media and older broadcast media. Jenkins’ (2006a) theory of media convergence suggests that the internet is a subsuming medium that draws in and repackages other media formats, including television, radio and print newspapers. But even as the internet incorporates older media forms, it also transforms them by opening up spaces for contributions from those previously excluded from media creation practices. These developments enable a media environment in which many people are empowered to contribute to a politics of place by creating, sharing and using media within the information networks overlaying the locations to which place is tied. As Jenkins notes, “It matters what tools are available to a culture, but it matters more what that culture chooses to do with those tools” (2006b, p. 8). That is, the promise of technologies mean little on their own; it is in their use that they become meaningful.
Shirky (2010) argues that usage of the term ‘participatory culture’ has only arisen because of an abundance of flexible digital networking technologies:

Before the twentieth century, we didn’t really have a phrase for participatory culture; in fact, it would have been something of a tautology… The simple act of creating something with others in mind and then sharing it with them represents, at the very least, an echo of that older model of culture, now in technological raiment. (Shirky, 2010, p. 19)

The phrase ‘technological raiment’ indicates an important point about participatory technologies: their visibility is only the outward and overt indication of the possibility of participation and this belies a deeper and more complex series of behaviours. Though there is promise around participatory media, the practice might be a whole other matter.

There is a distinction to be made between media formats which might allow back and forth private dialogue (like email or the postal service) and those which are more open and, in a real sense, public. Conversations conducted on forums, in website comment streams, and on many social networks are public in the sense that anyone can see and access them, either fully openly on the public web or by having an account on the given website. Though there are non-public social network sites (for example, Snapchat) and many messaging applications (private messages on social networks or email), these are outside the direct scope of this work and outside the scope of what is intended by the term participatory media. Later chapters will further discuss the constitution of the public.19

Both Heidegger and McLuhan hint at an understanding that the media facilitate individual human beings to reach out beyond themselves in order to find some understanding of the

19 Especially Chapter 6 and the next section of this chapter.
world.\(^{20}\) For Heidegger (1977), “technology is a mode of revealing” (p. 6). This revealing comes from its challenge to nature: “It [technology] sets upon it [nature] in the sense of challenging it” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 7). Thus technology operates to reveal nature - both in humanity and elsewhere - through this challenge. McLuhan, on the other hand, suggests that “our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind” (1964, p. 6). Both thereby establish media/technology as a mode of understanding the world beyond ourselves. In concert with Heidegger, McLuhan (1964/2013) also notes that technological embrace serves, in part, to subjugate humanity. He suggests that:

By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve the objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions. (McLuhan, 1964/2013, loc. 719).

McLuhan takes his point further to argue that, precisely because of these ‘extensions of man’, “we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action” (1964, p. 6). This establishes the necessity of understanding participation as a social or relational concept, something that again is taken up by Heidegger (1996): “looking at is always a way of assuming a definite direction toward something” (p. 57, original emphasis).\(^{21}\) The orientation toward necessitates participation for Heidegger as it does for McLuhan.

It is important to note that for Heidegger, “the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing-reserve” (1977, p. 10). That is, the orientation of humanity toward nature provoked by the challenge posed by technology establishes nature as “standing-reserve”, or as a resource ready at hand (1977). In doing so, technology *enframes* humans into its own mode

\(^{20}\) That is not to say that they are placing the source knowledge wholly external to human beings, but instead that knowledge can only be experienced and interpreted from the essential starting point *within* a being, itself placed in a relational network of other objects and people.

\(^{21}\) I take up the concept of relational networks as a function of orientation-toward in the next section.
of being. It is in this enframing that humanity also becomes a form of standing-reserve in
relation to other objects and beings, and each other. Thus, technology provokes or conditions
a certain response from those that use it. For Heidegger, these responses take the form of
enframing. In response, I argue that such enframing conditions a participatory response - that
is, that participatory media technology invites user interaction by the nature of its design and
architectures. Media (as technology), then, invites or enframes certain kinds of participatory
action: the empty frame of a textbox common at the top of social networking websites such as
Facebook and Twitter invites the user to fill it with textual or visual material. This is a certain
kind of participatory action, concurrently shaped by both the architecture of the site and the
social norms of users, both of which are modes of enframing.

McLuhan (1964) also observes that media technologies have particular modes of enframing
or provoking participation or response, in his description of ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ media. For
McLuhan, “Any hot medium allows of less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes
for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than a dialogue” (1964, p. 25). ‘Hot’
media, in McLuhan’s parlance, do not provide room for a participant to develop a response
because they fill the available space – as in the high level of visual detail in a movie theatre.
Thus, McLuhan’s (1964) understanding of participation differs somewhat from that which I
set out here. McLuhan considers television to be a ‘cool’, participatory medium because it
was at the time low-definition and required active engagement and imagination from the
audience to form a complete picture.

The structures of the “extensions of ourselves” (from McLuhan, 1964) that are media
technologies (especially what I here refer to as participatory media) provoke participation in
the world that in turn allows the world to come forth in a revealing, as suggested by
Heidegger. It is in the enframing process that this orientation-toward the world manifests as
participation. However, participation itself has elsewhere been defined. Vromen (2003), for example, defines it as “acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society we want to live in” (p. 82-3) This definition turns toward more intentional acts of shaping that indicate political positions, taking for example, claims over what kind of development should or should not be allowed in a particular neighbourhood or town. It is these everyday forms of politics that shape place as they are conducted through the participatory media technologies that this thesis considers.

Taking the definitions and theoretical perspectives above into account, within the broad term ‘participatory media’ I therefore mean to capture a variety of newer digital communications technologies and platforms that are used by non-professional media makers to create and distribute media items and ideas. In the context of this thesis, such technologies carry and propagate a sense of place, or facilitate the contestation of ideas about place that characterises the process of negotiating a politics of place. They are a method of both collecting and sharing information (McLuhan’s, 1964, ‘extensions of ourselves’), and of understanding (Heidegger’s, 1977, ‘mode of revealing’). They are also tools for communicating with others and therefore modes of socially constructing place.

In addition to use by citizens, participatory media are deployed by governments for the purposes of inviting or allowing citizens and others to have input into decision-making. Most often in this context, they are internet-based tools including social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, blogging platforms, citizen forums (Howard, 2012), or participatory budgeting tools (Pillora and McKinlay, 2011).

It should be noted that the term participatory media as used in this thesis is also responsive to Jenkins’ (2006b) description of a participatory culture, which includes five key characteristics:
1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. Strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others
3. Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Members believe that their contributions matter
5. Members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (p. 7)

The possibilities of participatory media can be realised only when there are wider cultural contexts of participation, which is why there is a need to tie the affordances of the media technologies described above to Jenkins’ cultural descriptors.

Though there continues to be debate around the role and impact of participatory media on governments, there also appears to be a recognition of, in the words of one informant to this study, “the rapidly changing face of the whole communications and media industry” (S6, pers. comm.). These changes are characterised by the reconfiguration of many of the processes of media production, circulation and consumption: reconfigurations that are having a range of impacts across formal and informal political structures.

Whereas the politics of place might previously have been negotiated in person (for example, at town hall events), I will demonstrate that this now occurs in far more dispersed and disparate media channels. The emergence of distributed, networked-based media technologies like mobile phones, social network sites and the internet itself has fundamentally altered and extended the practice of communication. The effects of this are felt even in local communication networks such as those of Australian local government areas.

The use of the term participatory media also borrows, though is distinct from, Bruns’ (2007) conception of ‘produsage,’ the “collaborative and iterative content creation practices within
many user-led environments as a hybrid and often inextricable combination of production and use” (p. 2). The distinction arises in the emphasis Bruns places on “collaborative and iterative content creation” (2007, p. 2). Within the context of this thesis participatory media is intended to encompass mainly the technologies used to enable the kinds of participation described by Bruns and Jenkins. There is also recognition that, unlike for both Bruns and Jenkins, participatory media is deployed by organisations as an opportunity for participation, and does not therefore always describe “user-led environments” (Bruns, 2007, p. 2). Nonetheless, this thesis will also explore examples where citizens themselves have initiated communication, which more properly fulfils the spirit of describing a technology as participatory.

Communication can take place within a much wider variety of media than so far addressed here. In that spirit, Paterno (2016) proposes revisiting decades-old theories of communication such as Postman’s “distinction of technology and medium, [which] suggests that the physical built-in features inherent in technology are open for translation into a medium” (Paterno, 2016, p. 133). The implication of this revisiting is to draw a distinction between “medium as a found object… or, conversely, as a social product created and socially configured in communication” (Paterno, 2016, p. 133). I have tended toward the latter in this work, endorsing the notion that usage and social positioning shapes the particular media technology deployed. Nonetheless, I will describe in detail some of the in-built functions and features of these participatory media in order to identify the architectures that can shape and enframe social responses. The point here, however, is to examine the politics of place (a social process between a range of heterogenous agents) as it is conducted in media (the technology), and so is a more mixed approach than Paterno would advocate.
Further terms have been suggested for what I describe in this thesis as participatory media. O’Reilly (2005), for example, coined the phrase ‘Web 2.0’. By positioning “the web as platform”, he suggests web 2.0 technologies have:

an implicit ‘architecture of participation’, a built-in ethic of cooperation, in which the service acts primarily as an intelligent broker, connecting the edges to each other and harnessing the power of the users themselves. (p. 2).

It is this ‘built-in ethic’ which underpins the services described here as participatory media and which local governments deploy for seemingly participatory purposes. Platform services like the social network sites Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are widely used by local government (Howard, 2012), but often in ways not especially conducive to participatory response, as shown in this current study. This is at the heart of the conflict between the promise of participatory media and its actual usage across the case studies considered in this thesis.

Participatory media technologies are often seen as having revolutionary potential. Bonsón et al argue that they can “enhance the interactivity, transparency, and openness of public sector entities and to promote new forms of accountability” (2012, p. 123). Similarly, David posits that these technologies are “actively reconstructing concepts of accountability, transparency, and public deliberation” (in Karaganis, 2007, p. 180). Both of these positions point to upheavals and changes in the practices of government, including managing the politics of place and community engagement practices.

Magro (2012, p. 149) argues more broadly that social media “have become instruments of communication, leisure, and change, and should be expected to affect our world for the foreseeable future”. Jenkins says that with the emergence of participatory media, “Like-minded individuals gather online to embrace common enterprises, which often involve access
and processing information” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 39). These are revolutionary understandings of the potential of participatory media. Wright (2011), however, would say these are “hyped” claims (p. 252). Nonetheless, all point the way to a form of governance where participatory media takes a role in defining and enabling the participation of citizens in the practice of government. It might mean, as Wright says (2008, p. 82), that a normalisation process is occurring, where the “new technologies are used to support existing democratic practices” rather than being revolutionary. But this is still acknowledging a role for these technologies in shaping government practice, whereas I position them more broadly as part of a media ecology22 that contributes to public collaborative place-constituting activity.

Along similar lines, Burgess and Green say a key component of participatory culture is a reconfiguration of “power relations between media industries and their consumers” (2009, p. 10). There are also suggestions that access to a greater variety of information sources might actually change the way people participate in formal politics. Consider Prior (2007), who argues, “Greater media choice triggers compositional change of the voting public that accentuates the role of partisanship in voting behaviour” (p. 245). This is all part of the supposed promise of participatory media.

Finally, and in concert with Jenkins (2006a), Shirky argues participatory media technologies can rewrite concepts like citizen, consumer and audience:

> Just as social tools are creating members of the former audience, they are creating legions of former consumers, if by “consumer” we mean an atomized and voiceless purchaser of goods

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22 See Strate (2006) for a discussion on the nature of media ecology as a formalised field. It is used here more generally to indicate a kind of interdependency between different media and their particular cultural locations and relationships within the selected local government authorities, but with due recognition to media ecologists such as McLuhan, Meyrowitz, and Postman, amongst others.
and services. Consumers now talk back to businesses and speak out to the general public, and they can do so en masse and in coordinated ways. (2008, p. 179)

This section has considered the role of media, and especially what I have termed participatory media, in allowing access to the world and enframing or provoking certain types of participatory behaviour - namely creating, sharing and promoting representations of place. Such behaviours are inherently afforded by participatory media technologies although, as Jenkins reminds us, they do not arise from the technology itself but from the social uses to which it is put. The remainder of this thesis examines such media practices in more detail, specifically as they occur in the local government areas selected as the case studies in this thesis.

2.3 Whence the public?

The nature and constitution of publics does require some consideration for the rest of the discussion to proceed as the role of the public in shaping the politics of place through participatory media use can hardly be considered unless the public itself is first identified. This section canvasses two conceptions of the public before describing a version of the active participatory public necessary to underpin the arguments of this thesis. This participatory public is argued to be a result of an orientation toward caring for place in a Heidegger-influenced position. I note also that publics are themselves not homogenous groups and may take a number of forms, thus explaining why a wide variety of conceptions of the public have been put forward.

Public as space of communication

A series of scholars have proposed that publics operate within shared architectures of communication. That is, they suggest that publics come about due to their use of
communication technologies, especially those which facilitate communication in public, as opposed to interpersonal or private communication technologies such as the telephone or postal system.

Benedict Anderson (1991) describes the public as arising from within a shared communicational space created by visual and textual representational media. It is within these architectures of communication that Anderson’s national publics – his titular ‘imagined communities’ - exist. For Anderson, publics are both the collections of people and the mediated spaces within which they meet and construct a shared “image of their communion” (1991, p. 6). Such imaginings are underpinned by common communicational items.

Similarly, boyd23 (2010; 2014) notes that publics can be both collections of people and the dialogic spaces within which they meet, coining the term “networked publics” (2010) for this purpose:

> Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. (boyd, 2014, p. 8).

This conceptualisation is an updated version of Anderson’s publics. Whereas Anderson suggested that pre-digital textual resources like newspapers and visual motifs facilitated national publics, boyd suggests they can arise equally within digital architectures of communication.

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23boyd’s practice of not capitalising her name is respected throughout this thesis (see boyd, n.d.).
The concept of a Habermassian public sphere also describes a shared communicational space. The bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas is “the public of private individuals who join in debate of issues bearing on state authority” (in Calhoun, 1992, p. 7). There is a clear separation between the private and public in Habermas’ reading, with the former underpinning the latter. The emergence of the public in ancient Greece relied upon identity creation in public spaces, although, “Status in the polis was... based upon status as an unlimited master of an oikos [household]” (Habermas, 1962 [1989], p. 3). The modern bourgeois public (such as those suggested by boyd) instead recognises individual identities formed in private before being publicly projected. Nonetheless, they share an interest in establishing a space in which communicational practices flourish.

Thing-publics

In addition to the communicational publics described above, a model of the public as civically active citizens gathered by shared concerns has also been proposed. For example, Anderson et al. (2012, p. 15) suggest the public is “that group of consumers or citizens who care about the forces that shape their lives”. This definition suggests the public gathers around a central object of societal concern, which Latour and Weibel (2005) would recognise as *things* that cultivate or electrify the public.

Latour argues that the processes of democracy (voting, for example) are only half of the democratic equation: “The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the matters that matter, in the *res* that creates a *public* around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly” (in Latour & Weibel, 2005, p. 16, original emphasis). Such issues (things, objects) are constitutive of publics just by being. Community participation is mandated for councils, but if the issues around which a community is gathered are not considered ‘inside the assembly’, it cannot be effective or authentic.
There is an assumption within this research that citizen engagement with public life via participatory media is a positive force. This view arises from, amongst others, John Stuart Mill’s vision for a “whole public” participating in and shaping representative government (1861 [2005], n.p.). The view that the public is capable of engaging in and influencing politics is not without contention. Walter Lippman, for example, considered the citizen to be “a back-row spectator” while the public as a whole was illusory or “phantom” (cited in Couldry et al., 2010, p. 9). Lippman’s vision of the public was a homogenous or monolithic whole, even if it was illusory, whereas I note and argue for the heterogeneity of any public. Schudson (1998, p. 311), in contrast to Lippman, argues the modern citizen is “monitorial”, or “watchful, even while he or she is doing something else”. From the vantage point of this research, the necessary conditions of public participation are met by some or any kind of engagement by way of particular media technologies in the public sphere, and especially with a view to shaping or making place. Thing-publics, or publics called into being by their shared interests, are the object of concern in this section.

Sack says that “technologies of representation” call publics “into being” (in Karaganis, 2007, p. 168). This is an extension of what Latour & Weibel (2005) argue – the need to examine the objects around which publics might gather, even temporarily. Such objects become socialised within the wider networks of place that consist of a variety of heterogeneous agents. This sociability of publics couple with a kind of fluidity and mobility (Sheller, 2004), to demonstrate that publics can coalesce around specific areas of concern quickly and disperse once these have been dealt with. Thus the public is not a pre-existing or monolithic entity, but one which can be assembled from within broad heterogeneous networks.

Thrift (2003, p. 2021) describes the way that objects of concern within networks summon publics:
Human subjects are the momentary creations of these networks, conjured into existence according to the summonings of particular contexts, and working to positional and dispositional ethics that they are often only vaguely conscious of.

The thing-public is almost always *performative*, gathered for a specific purpose and to perform a specific function. The shared concerns around which publics gather as considered in this thesis are largely related to the politics of place, typically as proposed or represented in particular media objects.

The participatory public

I seek to mediate between the communicational and the thing-public described above by noting only that each of the instances of publics participating in the politics of place considered in the remainder of this chapter tends toward one or the other, but both are motivated by an orientation toward participation. The section immediately following, for example, considers publics which both arise within a shared architecture of communication (social media) and gather around thing-objects. The common feature of participatory publics arises from their concern about place. This results in the deployment of various media in the process of conducting a politics of place.

Heidegger (1964) suggests a way in which we engage in relational networks of heterogeneous agents as an orientation of care and a process of becoming in relation to the world. His archetypal Being (Dasein) literally translates as Being-in or Being-there. In its fundamental presence (in or there) Dasein assumes a relational position vis a vis the world at large in which it is located. Thus, for Dasein “looking at is always a way of assuming a definite direction toward something, a glimpse of what is objectively present” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 57, original emphasis). This ‘direction toward’ is what I have termed an orientation
toward participation as a result of care. It is a way of turning oneself toward other beings in the world as a way of conceptualising, addressing and responding to the world.

In Heideggerian terms, orientation is necessarily toward external phenomena which are both made and known in the act of orientation itself. Thus, orientation becomes a mode of “independent dwelling together with beings in the world” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 59). With an understanding of relational orientation toward as the mode of dwelling in, we can begin to move toward the position that participatory media facilitate a sense of dwelling and care. This is so because of the necessary orientation toward both other participants and the locational reference point (the place) tied into the usage of participatory media within the politics of place.

Before proceeding, I must further emphasise that both participants and place are to be considered objects or things with their own orientation-toward other objects and beings. Evans (2015) contends that “by drawing objects into care (that is, by treating them with concern and as entities rather than mere extension) the thing orients people towards the world” (p. 9, original emphasis). That is, it is only from within the space created by the relational network between all things (beings) that we can be oriented toward those beings in any case.

By considering participatory media as relational networks of care in which users are oriented toward each other and place, the politics of place conducted within those networks is positioned as an act of care. Further, participatory publics are shown to have oriented themselves toward place by seeking to join these political practices. The turning-toward enabled by technology allows us to recognise it as a “clearing” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13), which for Heidegger means a space in which understanding and light can be found, as in a forest clearing. Thus, technology “is revealed as just as good as any other clearing” (Dreyfus,
Evans’ suggestion that technology is a way of “orient[ing] people towards the world” thus makes sense of the way in which participatory media open up a space for communities to orient themselves to the places they inhabit within the wider relational network of objects which also inhabit those places. Such orientation toward the world underscores the role of a person as standing reserve ready to be enframed into technological purposes.

2.4 Local government, placemaker

Among the networks in which place arises, certain agents are able to cobble together more influence at certain points in time. Amongst those most readily influential in local places at the present moment – especially regional places outside of metropolitan centres – are local government authorities. These institutions are able to ally themselves with a number of other entities that give them a greater amount of clout when it comes to deciding and implementing the ways in which place is made. This process of negotiating and shaping place has often been termed ‘placemaking’, and local governments in particular are heavily implicated in this process, which is sometimes also called ‘place shaping’ (Lyons, 2007; McKinlay et al., 2011; Pillora and McKinlay, 2011; Simmons, 2014). Lyons (2007, p.3) defines the latter phrase, which he sees as the broad domain of local government, as “the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens”. Ayton (2013, p. 10) distinguishes the two terms thus, “Place shaping tends to be about the built/physical environment and related policy contexts where place making is where the sense of place and belonging comes in.”

The perceived role for local government in managing how places are made or shaped suggests their ability to influence and participate in the politics of place, a process subject to community engagement and communication practices conducted by local governments and
mediated by development control policies of both local and higher levels of government. This is especially evident when taking into account the formal democratic political structures by which local government councillors are elected and the legislative requirements for community engagement imposed by superseding state governments, and is further complicated by the influences of global technological networks.

Asked to identify the greatest challenge to council communications practices, one informant to this research, a staff member at a local government, nominate:

the rapidly changing face of the whole communications and media industry… Exacerbating the problem is skewed demographics of our [local government area]. As clichéd as it sounds, we really are straddling the digital divide (S6, pers. comm).

Such rapid changes are having widespread impacts on local government processes, including their role in placemaking and their practices of community engagement. These processes are driven by social and technological developments occurring on a global scale, and yet are also having very local impacts as this thesis shows.

Local councils struggle to deal with global influences in part because they are constituted in a particular territory and with particular public groups as constituents - the first elements in constituting place suggested by the geographers cited above. These boundaries are not immutable nor unchallenged. On the territorial front, the New South Wales Coalition government has pursued an agenda of local government reform which, in late 2015, resulted in proposed boundary adjustments and amalgamations that are intended to reduce the total number of councils in the state by 40 (NSW Government, 2015).24 Similarly, there have been recent changes to enfranchisement, with representatives of businesses in the City of Sydney

24 I further consider the impact of local government reform in the politics of place process in the concluding chapter of this thesis.
local government area (non-residential voters) now being automatically enrolled to vote in local government elections, amongst other reforms (Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, 2013; NSW Government, 2014).

Local governments have a dual role in which they must act both as community leaders and managers in the overall process of negotiating a politics of place. This was spelled out by the New South Wales Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP) in its report *Future Directions for NSW Local Government*: “the role of a councillor is divided into two parts: as a ‘member of the governing body’ and as an ‘elected person’” (2013, p. 27). This duality permeates the operations of local governments throughout Australia. It obscures everyday activities and practices of managing place (such as community engagement) undertaken by local governments by implicating them in political motives and vice versa. There is also some evidence of tension between elected councillors and professional staff over the way that each engages with members of the public (Artist et al., 2012).

Underlining the positioning of local governments as managers of place and political operators is the requirement imposed by state governments for public consultation on developments and other matters. In New South Wales, local governments must prepare an integrated Community Strategic Plan accompanied by a Community Engagement Strategy, both “based on social justice principles” (Division of Local Government (DLG), 2013, p. 8), one of which is “participation and consultation about decisions” (DLG, 2010, p. 1). Further, Ch. 4 of the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) lists numerous ways for the community to “influence what a council does”, one of which is making submissions and commenting on, or objecting to, proposals and plans. The Act specifies that these are to be written submissions (s.706), but does not restrict the medium of delivery. Therefore, the Act appears to be open to a variety of
forms of mediated participation, including those newer technologies identified and discussed in this thesis.

Although the *Local Government Act 1993* does not limit modes of participation, it does include provision for “the community” to “influence” councils through polls and referenda and access to council meetings (Ch. 4). The NSW Division of Local Government (DLG) states that participation within social justice principles means “all people… are consulted in appropriate and meaningful ways and otherwise have the opportunity to participate in decision-making that affects their lives” (DLG, 2010, p. i).

From these sources, we can take it that participation in the context of local government in New South Wales means all people to whom a given local government provides services (such as residents, business owners, employees, visitors and non-resident voters) have a right to have input into that local government’s decision-making processes, and that this constitutes participation. Such rights may be enacted through accessing and commenting on proposals and plans, standing for and voting in elections, attending council meetings, joining council committees, and giving feedback on services (DLG, 2010). The process of participation is most-often initiated through action on behalf of the council as there is no specific legislative provision for the public to raise issues outside of those already being considered by the council in some way.

Thus, there are many formal provisions for local governments to involve members of the public in the politics of place. Most of these take place in some form of public communication practice, in which material is produced for public consumption and response. These are sometimes examples of ‘thing-publics’, who respond to particular items of concern such as development proposals. Similarly, however, they are created by the architecture of communication established by the council for the purposes of hearing from them. There are
also emergent technologies by which publics can also seek to involve themselves in the politics of place by establishing their own communications channels around their concerns, a number of which are the subject of sections of chapter 6 of this thesis. Although there have always been some elements of this form of politics beyond the direct influence of local governments, such as newspapers, the diversity and depth of these channels is challenging traditional communications structures. This is the point of the above informant’s concern that council communications staff are struggling with “the rapidly changing face of the whole communications and media industry”.

2.5 Conclusion

The politics of place introduced in this chapter has been described as a process by which place ideals are negotiated and contested between publics, councils, media organisations and others. Exploring the broad concepts of a politics of place and participatory media, I have attempted to address the complex interactions between media, publics and place that shape how place unfolds. I suggest that place unfolds amongst a network of heterogeneous agents, each of whom is involved in particular and peculiar aspects of the process. In local government areas like those that are considered in this thesis, such processes are no longer exclusively conducted at town hall meetings common to earlier decades. The contestation over multiple possibilities of the past, present and future of place occurs via participatory media technologies including social network sites and applications, council and citizen-owned websites and more. These technologies operate at a global scale, and yet have very local impacts.

Placemaking and place shaping processes are largely conducted through formal community engagement processes conducted or facilitated by local councils. Increasingly, these
conversations also occur via participatory media technologies which shape how the processes unfold. This thesis is an examination of all of these processes.

In the negotiation of a politics of place occurring in participatory media in the selected local government areas, publics are included or excluded in a variety of ways. All of this is examined with a view to arriving at a sense of how place is managed in media in these three regions.

This chapter has established the parameters for an enquiry into the key research question about the relationship between media and the politics of place involving a broad range of agents. The role of local governments and citizens in this process, two groups which figure largely in this thesis, have been addressed here and will re-appear elsewhere. Further, in introducing the concept of the glocal, the ways in which local processes and politics may be intersected by global developments in technologies and geopolitical arrangements has been indicated. The informant who suggested that the “changing face of the whole communications and media industry” is one of the biggest problems confronting local council staff seeking to engage with citizens and conduct placemaking activities points to the local unfolding of such global phenomena.

The following chapter will address the particular methodology employed in this thesis, which draws upon some of the same technologies described in this chapter. It also demonstrates my own geosocial positioning as a participant in the practices described in this thesis, which poses both challenges and opportunities for the investigation.
Chapter 3: A methodology for addressing the complexity of place

The imagining of place is the fulcrum around which this thesis turns. Given that this is located within a set of relational structures between a wide variety of actants, the methodology has evolved in the process of attempting to identify what these structures might be. Although each of the research methods described was carefully chosen and deployed, in a significant sense it is only in their coming together that the shape and structure of the thesis is revealed. As it is, a broad mix of methods has been employed, beginning with an exploration of the researcher’s standpoint as a situated interpreter. In large measure, the methods deployed involve emerging qualitative social research tools and techniques known as digital methods, but they are also responsive to the possibilities afforded by actor-network theory (ANT).

As noted earlier, the work and methodology is structured to answer a central research question ‘How does media facilitate the politics of place?’ Two further questions are also addressed: ‘What role do local governments have in this process?’ and ‘What role do citizens have in this process?’ The methodology employed, as described in this chapter, seeks to address the urgings of ANT to trace associations amongst the heterogeneous participants in networks of place.

This chapter opens with a description of my own geosocial positioning as a stakeholder in the three local government area case studies. In particular, this section describes the interview methods involved in this research, including the decision to grant confidentiality to informants, and some background on the digital tools employed.
This study began as an investigation of how Australian local governments communicate online, with five local governments in the greater Illawarra area selected as the example cases. These were Kiama Municipality, Shellharbour City, Wollongong City, Wollondilly Shire and Wingecarribee Shire. However, the project progressed and other related questions became more prominent. Subsequently, two of the proposed case studies were removed after proposed interviewees declined to participate. As the study proceeded, the politics of place emerged as a concept through which I could access the communication practices involved in community engagement. In turn, these questions provoked consideration of the nature of places as a shared imaginative experience which may be facilitated to some extent by many types of media. Put another way, it is the interaction of place and publics within in a broadly conceived network of associations with which this thesis is now concerned.

At this point, the complexity of networks in which place arises and is experienced became apparent. In response, a series of methodological issues arose. How would I account for the huge variety of representations, imaginaries, objects, people, institutions, landscapes, animals, and plants that are co-present in any one location? The answer developed here lies in a widespread sampling of imaginaries from heterogeneous sources. Thus, I have layered geological histories upon the stories of Australia’s first peoples, coupled those with accounts of place drawn from local government and unsuccessful moves to have one place re-made as the nation’s capital.

The terminology used in the previous chapter - the politics of place, media, publics and local governments - became the hook upon which to hang a study which had already begun to take shape. As it is, the methodology described in this chapter has arisen from the need and desire to address these case studies as the primary subject of this thesis, even as the objects of the
study itself has shifted. The methodology employed here is informed by Latour’s (2005) reference to ANT as a “sociology of associations”, which he defines as acknowledging:

there is no society, no social realm, and no social ties, but there exist translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations (p. 108, original emphasis)

This clashes somewhat with media ecology, as it suggests that there is no pre-existing environment to investigate. The environment, the social, is only what exists in relations between actants. Thus, the methodology is little more than a careful tracing of these associations across a variety of media, people, places, and other actants.

The intention of the approach employed in the case studies was to strike a position of “empathic neutrality”, one that “recognises that research cannot be value free but which advocates that researchers should make their assumptions transparent” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 13). Such an approach acknowledges that the assumptions of this research, and my history as both a citizen and media maker, has inevitably shaped both the methodology employed and the data collected. However, this value-mediated approach need not invalidate the findings - indeed it should be acknowledged that all research is essentially subjective to some extent in that it is shaped by the questions asked and the method of data gathering.

It has been argued that the use of multiple methods – a “triangulation” approach – can “provide a fuller picture of phenomena” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 44). Alvesson & Skolberg have also suggested there is value in a phased approach to research incorporating “various mixes of empirical work, meaningful interpretations, critical reflection and linguistic-textual self-reflection” (2000, p. 285). As such, this research has adopted a mixed method approach featuring interviews, social network analysis and visualisation, as well as textual analysis, all with a view to tracing various forms of association.
Another key consideration is the role of the researcher in seeking to interpret phenomena which are primarily experiential and therefore “part of the 'knowledge' of the individual but... unavailable to anyone else” (Ransome, 2013, p. 57). This is a concern expressed also by Moores (2012): “if the inhabiting of everyday physical and media environments involves a practical, bodily know-how (a knowing how to get around), research participants may have difficulty in bringing aspects of that pre-reflective knowledge to... ‘discursive consciousness’” (p. 95). Ransome (2013) suggests in this circumstance a pragmatic approach, acknowledging that “this knowledge is always mediated by a process of supposition and interpretation” (p. 58). For this reason, the triangulation approach and the incorporation of sometimes disparate data sources, can prove a useful method by which the process of interpretation and supposition can take place, even within the situated interpretation paradigm outlined above.

Throughout the project, a reflexive position was adopted by the researcher. This approach acknowledges that “research cannot be value free but... ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process” (Bryman, 2004, p. 22). This is similar to the Ritchie & Lewis (2003) description of “emphatic neutrality” (p. 44).

Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) suggest that in research of this nature, there is a need to consider the hermeneutic circle. That is, a practice of alternating between wholes and parts to increase understanding of both. This approach encourages understanding of the whole through study of parts and vice versa. In addition to being a useful approach in its own right, the hermeneutic circle is also part of the reflexive framework, providing distance and clarity between different aspects of data gathering. Importantly for this research, “hermeneutics has been successively widened to include the understanding of acts” in addition to written texts (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 54), and a series of such texts are considered in this work.
The texts were selected primarily for their substantive content where it contained identifiable representations of place or potential for participatory interaction with place. Chapter 4, for example, includes council-produced policies and media items which contain place imaginaries including maps and tourist guides. Similarly, Chapter 6 draws from a dataset of citizen-generated imaginings of place, while Chapter 7 samples mass media imaginings. In each instance, the item selected relates to at least one of the three case studies.

In the next section, the choice of local government as the main focus of this research is considered. This was a decision based on the description in the previous chapter of local government authorities as placemakers. The decision was also based on a prior history of locality research that is especially prominent in ethnographic approaches to place, but much less so in media studies. Section 3.2 reconsiders in detail what I have already described as my position as a situated interpreter, a position that has influenced the study design, the selection of the particular case studies, and the interaction with those case studies. Finally, section 3.3 outlines in more detail the specific methods employed in this thesis, including some of the digital research tools.

3.1 Why Local Government?

The New South Wales Constitution Act 1902 provides for a “system of local government... with responsibilities for acting for the better government of those parts of the State that are from time to time subject to that system” (s. 51). This section of the state’s Constitution, along with the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW), underpins the existence and operations of the three case studies in this thesis. Thus the work proceeds from the existence and description of these places as defined by the governments established with authority over them.
Regions such as the subject local government areas are key sites in which the politics of place is keenly contested given their status as interface regions sitting between sprawling urban areas (especially Sydney, but also Wollongong itself) and more rural locales. Masuda and Garvin (2008, p. 112) argue such regions “struggle with [the] simultaneous structural forces of rural production and employment as well as an expanding set of urban influences including consumer, residential, and industrial consumption.” As such, they are ideal case studies for an exploration of the politics of place in action via the community engagement practices of local governments and participatory media practices of citizens. Further, as noted previously, local governments tend to exert more influence within the networks of place than other entities.

The case studies considered here have a combined land area of some 5,930 square kilometres. This is an area larger than, for example, both the Australian Capital Territory, and the two smallest American States (Rhode Island and Delaware). They also have a combined population of almost 300,000. The factors of geographic and population size combined demonstrate that although the terms ‘local’ and ‘local government’ appear frequently throughout this thesis, the focus area is considerably larger than a typical ‘neighbourhood’ study. Nonetheless, the particular case studies are suitable sites for this research within the broader methodology described in the remainder of the chapter. Latour’s (1999, p. 20) suggestion that ANT is a way to travel “from one field site to the next” indicates that the scale at which research operates is unimportant provided there is a clear way of addressing the given scale, which I have achieved by describing defined local government areas.

Appadurai (1995) views locality “as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial… as a complex phenomenological quality” (p. 204). This perspective aligns with the descriptions of place, introduced in the previous chapters, as a social accomplishment or as an event in process, and leaves room for the role of heterogeneous agents acting in relation
to one another. Appadurai sketches a situation where neighbourhoods are taken to be places that, within a network of neighbourhoods, constitute localities. This reasoning gives rise to the view that “Local knowledge is substantially about producing reliably local subjects as well as producing reliably local neighbourhoods within which such subjects can be recognized and organized” (Appadurai, 1995, p. 206). The production of such local knowledge, as in the ways residents and local governments create and negotiate competing representations of their places and promote or contest them across networks of association is the major focus in this research.

The diverse nature of local governments in Australia and the different legislative frameworks under which they operate complicates any attempt to comprehensively study the field. There are 565 local governments in Australia (Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport [DRALGAS], 2013).25 These bodies consist of incorporated local governments and “declared bodies”, which are not local governments but are treated as such for the purposes of federal government financing programs (DRALGAS, 2012, p. 3). Young (2007) acknowledges the significance of local government, but claims that local governments in Australia “are so varied they are difficult to analyse in a holistic manner” (p. xxxi). Given the diversity of local government, and the concern raised by Young, this thesis focusses only on three local government areas and their councils although, as noted previously, the original sample was intended to consist of five local governments.

In common parlance, local government is argued to be “closest to the people” of all governments in Australia’s federal system (for example, Heaselgrove and Simmons, 2016, p. 4; Wills and Nash, 2012, p. 37; Artist et al., p. 20; Cuthill and Fien, 2005, p. 63). They have responsibility for the prosaic daily services of everyday life such as roads and waste

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25 Prior to the NSW Government’s amalgamations of a number of councils in 2016.
collection, plus planning and development approval, animal welfare, environmental protection and much more. As such, the relative absence of local government from academic discourse on media and governance is disconcerting. It is also one of the motivators underpinning this thesis which endeavours to provide some insight into this neglected area of research.

Local governments in Australia exercise powers only “by delegation from the State and under the State’s supervision and authority” (Twomey, 2012, p. 144). In the words of the Commonwealth Minister for Major Projects, Territories and Local Government “councils are creatures of state government” (Fletcher, 2005, n.p.). By implication and practice, local governments must respond to policy whims, legislative requirements and reform implemented by state governments. In New South Wales, this has recently meant a four-year reform program which will likely reduce the number of local councils, amongst other measures (Independent Local Government Review Panel [ILGRP], 2013; NSW Government, 2015).

Another reason for choosing the three local government case studies in this thesis is their precarious and contingent status. Amalgamations have happened in the past - the current Wingecarribee Council was formed only in 1989 out of three extant bodies, which themselves had been created by an earlier round of amalgamations some years earlier (Goodfellow, 2006). Wollongong has recently been enrolled into the Illawarra Joint Organisation (of local governments) alongside two southern neighbours, separating it from the old Southern Councils Group, which then included Wingecarribee and councils further south like Bega, Eurobodalla and Shoalhaven. In May 2016, Wollongong was slated for merger with neighbouring Shellharbour, a matter still to be decided by the courts at time of writing in
September 2016. Wollondilly is increasingly being constructed as outer Sydney, suggesting its status as a rural council is rather precarious indeed.

There is also something of a sense of regionalism (perhaps even parochialism) in my selection of these particular local government areas. In addition to being close at hand, these local government areas are quite different from the dense capital city-type urban settlements that are often the object of studies such as this. An example of the city-centric approach is HyperCities (Presner et al., 2014), which is predicated upon stories of massive cities ancient and modern: Berlin, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Rome and Tehran. Other examples include Massey’s (2007) World City, which similarly focuses on an influential ‘global city’ (London), while Moores’ (2012) Media, Place & Mobility opens with a discussion of the author’s experience of Melbourne. Rejecting this approach, Gibson (2012) argues “Australia’s geography demands creative industries research to look beyond inner-city agglomeration and bohemia” (p. 3). Anecdotally, there is also something of a move toward recognising the importance of place-based policy in the Australian political landscape (Archer, 2015).

I will argue that it is time for studies such as these to consider areas beyond big city limits and that is one of the key reasons for addressing the concerns of the smallish, regional, non-capital city of Wollongong alongside two of its more rural neighbours in this thesis. This work is motivated also - though indirectly - by an interest in the Australian landscape and the role it plays in shaping the people who live and visit here, by the contrasts and conflicts of the land, by its uses and misuses, and by the tortuous nature of our colonial presence. It is motivated by the notion that “attention to the Australian landscape itself dictates the best way of describing Australian experience” (Rothwell, 2014). This work draws on mediations of landscape and place in many forms and permutations, including those mentioned above, with
the intent of locating something that might add - even in a small way - to understanding this experience.

As it is, it was hoped that the ways in which media are created, deployed and used within these local government areas for politics of place purposes would offer constructive material for such regional research. In particular, the similarities of these areas would allow key common patterns to be identified while their differences would be illuminating.

3.2 Situated interpretation

I came to this study not as an expert outsider but from a position as both a resident and media-maker in the case study locations. Thus much of the commentary in this thesis derives primarily from an *emic* understanding of the places in question. However, this has been supplemented and thickened by the *etic* knowledge-making work of the research undertaken.

If individual and collective understandings of given places arise from within the social, as suggested by Massey, then I am an actant in the networks of the places under consideration and I have long participated in the kinds of media making activities which feature here. Thus this study has an intensely personal dimension - an outcome that, retrospectively, was predestined given the choice of topic and the case studies.

While the three councils must limit their activities to defined geographic boundaries, their citizens may move freely beyond such boundaries, often on a daily basis. My position as a member of these fluid publics - both in the sense of being mobile and in Sheller’s (2004) sense of moving between different groups - has significantly influenced the research methodology and approach. To borrow from the terminology of the local governments themselves, I am a ‘stakeholder’ in all of the selected areas. I have lived for most of my life, and have close social and familial connections, in the Wingecarribee Shire; I have studied
and worked Wollongong for close to a decade; and I have close family and have myself lived in Wollondilly. It would be obfuscation by omission to not acknowledge my stakeholder investment in these places, and the media that is produced within and about them, as one of the determining factors motivating this research.

A further motivation for acknowledging my implication in these case studies comes from the kind of thinking suggested by Heidegger in *Being and Time* about the importance of first knowing the everyday nearby world in order to explore further afield. Heidegger expressed this as a need to “pursue everyday being-in-the-world. With it as a phenomenal support, something like world must come into view” (1996 [1953], p. 62). This suggests a need to consider and dwell upon our own positioning “in-the-world” ahead of any attempt to further exploration, and the importance of an emic way of knowing. Thus this thesis arises, in part, from my own positioning in the world and my desire to engage with and investigate the kinds of everyday local politics that I experienced and observed as a teenager with a burgeoning interest in the role of the media.

I decided that the best way to ‘map’ my relationship to the selected local government areas would be to do just that - provide a map demonstrating my activities over a week in and around the three council areas. Presner et al. (2014, p. 15) provide an argument for mapping oneself against place in this manner: “[maps] are fundamentally propositions, suffused with world-views, structuring epistemologies, and ways of seeing.” The map below (Figure 3) presents the three selected case study councils, their major population centres and one week’s worth of data (the blue lines, darker in more frequently accessed areas) from my account in

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26 Though I make no claim to drawing near to anything resembling Heidegger’s understanding of being (Da-sein) generally, his focus on being-in is a useful position from which I can shape this work as an act of scholarship against my own daily experience of the places under question.

27 See, for example, the preface.
Google’s location tracking tools. It is a visual ‘proposition’ of my way of being-in and seeing the towns and cities I inhabit.

Figure 3: The researcher as stakeholder in the selected local government areas

By revealing myself as a member of the fluid publics and also as a media-maker, it becomes possible to identify some of the ways that people may physically flow around the region. Infrastructure such as roads become visible, as do my own major affective links. Although they are not marked on the map itself, major arterial roads such as the M5-Hume Freeway (shown clearly as a north-south pathway that dissect the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires), and the Picton Road (east-west from Picton to Wollongong), are clearly visible in the data, indicating significant trajectories not just for the researcher but for the local populations more generally. The pull of the nearby state capital Sydney is also evident, highlighting the

Princes Highway (north-south from Wollongong to Sydney, and the origins of the M5 in the Sydney metropolitan area. The limitations of the road network and population centres, constrained as they are by major protected lands and geographical features in the west of the inland shires and around the border between Wollongong and the other two, are also quite clear.

My deep affective ties to the selected local government areas, as well as certain geographical characteristics of the areas themselves, is demonstrated on the map above from only a week’s worth of data demonstrating my movements in and around the case study locations. The resultant image strongly underpins what I mean by the term ‘situated interpreter’ since I am active in each of the three communities described in this research. I have a work history that includes the production of professional and amateur media items in both Wingecarribee and Wollongong. These include stints at four broadcast media organisations (a commercial newspaper, a government-owned radio station and two community radio stations), a role managing an arts organisation that produces theatrical and community-focused events, and I am the founder of citizen journalism news blog project that directly interrogates activities and decisions of the Wingecarribee Shire Council among other local politicians. These tend toward the mediated placemaking practices I have argued are central to this research.

In approaching council staff and councillors for interview, and in conversations aimed at identifying blogs that contained imaginaries of place, for consideration in Chapter 6, many of my media-making activities were known and referred to by those I contacted, instances that highlight precisely what I mean by the term situated interpreter. On Twitter, for example, a blogger whose work I was considering for inclusion in this thesis suggested: “you want to check out [journalist], she is Wollondilly based ABC journo” (pers. comm). The person named is both a former work colleague and distant relative. Such incidences highlight a
“(sometimes) precarious ethical stance and embodied relation vis-a-vis the material under consideration” (Presner et al., 2014, p. 9). These ethical considerations, such as they are, have informed the decisions that were made about confidentiality for the research participants (discussed further below) and the selection of particular items of media for inclusion in the wider study itself.

I have also chosen to orient the map in Figure 3 in a particular fashion that makes the south-eastern portion of land (in particular the Wingecarribee) appear slightly engorged and more prominent than either Wollondilly or Wollongong, and much more so than Sydney on the horizon. In part, this move is a rejection of some of the positivist assumptions of mapping technologies like Google Earth (Bodenhamer et al., 2010). But it is also a further reflection on my own position as more deeply embedded in the Wingecarribee than either of the other two areas, and the somewhat distant, obscured nature of Sydney - so prominent in much of the Australian scholarship of this type - as compared to the lived, embodied places that motivate my personal interest in this research topic.

Here, then, is a realisation of what I have suggested above is the role of media as a sensory prosthesis. In light of McLuhan’s (1964) suggestion that “media [are] extensions of man” (sic), I suggest that creating mediations of oneself in place, as in Figure 3, allows the expansion of typical ways of sensing and knowing space and place to develop knowledge. This suggestion responds also to Thrift’s (2004) argument that a new human sense (which he calls ‘qualculation’) has emerged that in part draws upon “a highly provisional sense of spatial co-ordination which is based in the continual spatial and temporal revisions made possible by track and trace systems” (p. 593). The term qualculation is based upon the increasing availability of systems which constantly calculate and recalculate given information such that we take “the subject as an instrument for seeing, rather than as an
observer” (Thrift, 2004, p. 593). Farman (2012), too, notes we “conceive of our devices as absolutely integral to the very foundations of embodied space in the digital age” (p. 46). This process is made visible in the map image above.

Acknowledging the role of a researcher as a situated interpreter allows for the consideration of “experiential data” (Strauss, 1987, p. 10) such as that outlined above. Strauss argues such data “not only give added theoretical sensitivity but provide a wealth of provisional suggestions for making comparisons, finding variations, and sampling widely on theoretical grounds” (1987, p. 11). Indeed, the formulation of an early foundational hypotheses of this thesis - that the media geography of local governments is much more complex than recognised by local governments themselves - was based upon the kinds of experiential data hinted at above, including my own role as a member of the fluid public and a media producer.

3.3 Methods of heterogeneity: from case studies to digital imaginaries

Whereas the previous sections of this chapter have established the broad methodological contexts of this research, including the focus on local government and the role of situated interpretation, this section outlines several of the key methods chosen. In particular, it outlines the case study technique in detail, including information on the use of interviews in these case studies and the decision to grant confidentiality to interview participants while maintaining the case study approach. The philosophy and general approach behind these decisions is described. Additionally, this section provides context and detail on the decision to implement digital methods and tools in the preparation of this research, although the details of those decisions are set out in the relevant sections throughout the thesis.

The overarching framework which is deployed to a greater or lesser extent throughout all of the approaches described below is one which has already been described in this work – actor-
network theory (ANT). Here, I return to ANT briefly with a view to contextualising the decisions below.

Above all, the work in this thesis is characterised by its encounter with a multiplicity of agents, methods, and tools – what I have consistently referred to as heterogeneity. The ability to enrol any number of heterogeneous actants into the analysis is a key strength of ANT. Venturini (2010, p. 269) notes that in any ANT-informed methodology:

> the quality of observation depends on the capacity to multiply the number and increase the sensitivity of monitoring devices. Only by accumulating notes, documents, interviews, surveys, archives, experiments, statistics, can researchers strive to preserve the amazing richness of collective life

Mitew (2014) comments that “ANT is a methodological framework for tracing entities as they perform themselves into existence” (p. 14). Taking both of these concerns into account indicates the need to account for the traces of such a variety of entities. In the context of this work, those are entities involved in the processes of the politics of place by way of their entanglement (which might be as producers, audiences, or representations, for example) with media objects. I have produced and examined a wide selection of such objects in this thesis. Each of these media objects relates to one a series of three case studies – the selected local government authorities – the choice of which I discuss below.

Case studies: interviews and textual analysis

Ritchie & Lewis make the point that case studies allow for consideration of a “multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context” (2003, p. 52). Similarly, Bryman notes that case studies are “concerned with the complexity and particular nature” of a specific example (2004, p. 48). Both observations relate to the nature of a case study as contextual
study. There were, in fact, multiple relevant contextual factors to be considered when presenting these particular local government areas as case studies, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first important contextual consideration is the state and national context, including attendant legislative and policy implications, and the associated political histories of Westminster-derived democratic government. Since the research questions relate to the communicative practice of both governments and citizens, this is a highly relevant consideration which also brings the citizenry into play. Australian local governments are largely autonomous, but operate within a legislative framework, and have attendant responsibilities, set down by six Australian states and the Northern Territory.\(^\text{29}\) The exact mix of powers and responsibilities varies from state to state, in part because they are not mentioned in the national constitution. This means local governments are difficult to study in a coherent way across the whole nation, making the case study a manageable approach.

The organisational contexts of the local governments themselves are also relevant. They are situated within their communities as both leaders (in the policy/political sense) and service providers. As such, their different geographic locations and demographic variations make them particularly interesting cases to cross-analyse and compare, especially when it comes to media use. While there is a burgeoning field of studies on the role of emerging information and communication technologies in government, this has largely been ignored by local government. Despite this omission, there has been rapid uptake of these technologies within all of these local governments. This knowledge-gap is yet another factor that makes the case

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\(^{29}\) The Australian Capital Territory government has both local and territorial responsibilities with no specific separate local government authorities.
study technique appropriate in this case as it offers an insight into the similarities and the differences that might come into play.

Originally, the research was designed only to consider communication activities conducted by, or involving, the core organisational unit of the local governments in question. This approach would have excluded subsidiary bodies such as pools/leisure centres, libraries and tourism organisations. However, where these bodies are explicitly mentioned in relevant local government policy documents, in media items or in interviews, they were included. The initial reasoning behind leaving these units out of explicit consideration was that they are primarily administrative or service-delivery bodies, much like the payroll or payment processing offices of the local governments in question. However, upon reflection, it became clear that such bodies play a valuable role in facilitating the politics of place within the wider local media environment, including through their own practices of community engagement. Further, much of the media they produce directly refers to or represents various accounts of place, meaning that they hold some association with those contesting and imagining place across the breadth of the case studies.

There were three phases to each of the case studies with regard to the selected local government areas. Briefly, they were:

1. a scoping study, which included an evaluation of the online presence of the selected local governments and textual and content analysis of their relevant community plans, engagement policies, and other selected documents;
2. observation of the surface web activities of each of the local governments, including social network analysis and visualisation; and
3. a series of semi-structured interviews with council officials, including elected councillors and staff.
Each scoping study included the collection of a background brief or database of information on each of the selected local governments that specified some of the key patterns and relevant information about them. The construction of such a database was therefore an important early stage in this research. This database covers publicly available demographic and location information about each of the local governments to enable later identification of relevant patterns. The existing taxonomy of the Australian Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) framework, as outlined in the 2009-10 Local Government National Report (DRALGAS, 2012), was initially used to help describe these local governments. The classification under this system is made through use of a three-letter identifier beginning with either ‘R’ for rural or ‘U’ for urban and supplemented with information designating demographic or physical characteristics and size. This categorisation is useful because it immediately identifies some commonalities and differences between the councils, providing a useful launching pad for further investigation. The information gathered on each local government included details of their online presence (such as website address/es and social media profiles), contact information, elected councillors and the dates and details of their relevant plans. This assisted in identifying the general level of online activity for each local government, and helped to unearth relevant patterns. Much of the data gathered in these phases has been presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In particular, it is visualised in Section 4.1.

The textual analysis step of phase one involved locating council plans online, such as the mandated community plan, other relevant community engagement strategies and the cultural plan. Each of these underpin the production of media by the local governments. These documents are either publicly available online or by request to the council. Each plan was coded for relevant media or placemaking practices and analysed as such. The plans were summarised and compared across the three local governments. This approach is quite close to Ritchie and Lewis’ description of content analysis in which “themes are identified, with the
researcher focusing on the way the theme is treated or presented and the frequency of its occurrence” (2003, p. 200). The initial sweep of the websites of the selected local governments identified 47 documents that were considered potentially relevant, ranging from complaints handling policies to community engagement strategies, operational and resourcing plans, media liaison plans, and youth engagement policies. However, upon further reflection, only documents relevant to the media production and explicit placemaking activities of local government were included.30

Phase two of the research involved observation of the surface web activities of each council, building upon the details collected in the scoping study and textual analysis, and social network analysis and visualisation. This included ‘scraping’ public posts from social media accounts and websites, and monitoring the engagement that takes place between these accounts and members of the public or other groups. This process only collected information already in the public domain and any identifying details were removed prior to use. Scraping information from public social media accounts involved both manual and automated copy and paste processes targeting all relevant social media accounts of the given local government authorities at the time of the observation phase. Information collected includes the time, date and content of each post, a relevant URL (uniform resource identifier), any attached images or videos, replies or comments and the social network to which it was posted. The networks selected were Twitter and Facebook. Accounts targeted were only those identified in the scoping study as official council accounts. The material collected in this phase of the research is primarily analysed in Sections 4.1, 5.1, and 5.2 of this thesis.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 35), such observations offer an “opportunity to record and analyse behaviour and interactions as they occur” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.

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30 See Appendix 6: List of Council Policies/Plans.
This allows the data to be collected without any interference by the researcher influencing the method or style of the posting or interaction that takes place. Such an approach is useful in that it allows ‘natural’ interactions to occur between multiple participants (local government representatives and members of the public or publics) (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

The third phase of the research described in this chapter involved a series of semi-structured interviews with elected councillors and staff of the selected councils. It has been suggested that interviews allow detailed consideration of “perspectives heard within the context of personal history or experience” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 58). This approach meant that detailed personal experiences of the use of media within councils could be obtained from a variety of relevant stakeholders. Both councillors and staff were included in the target group of interview subjects. Interviewees were asked to speak as representatives of their organisation, though from their personal experience of the practices and policies of their organisation. The interviews included questions designed to elicit details on the particular media technologies employed at given councils and the reasons for their use. A component of the interviews also focused on whether councils actively monitor emerging issues within public media spaces. A ‘purposive sampling’ (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) approach was used to select council staff and councillors for interview. This involves selecting participants because they meet identified criteria (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This approach meant that only council staff and councillors that actually use media technologies to communicate with a public audience would be considered as potential interview subjects.

A schedule of interview topics/questions and potential interview subjects was devised following the collection of the initial data and textual analysis of current policies of each

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31 Appendices 1-5 include further detail on what information was sought during interviews.
local government. Early on, it was anticipated that there would be two to three interviews with individual staff and/or councillors at Wingecarribee, Wollondilly, Kiama and Shellharbour councils, and three to four at Wollongong, given its relative size and influence. However, two of the councils were later removed from the study, for reasons described below.

Following advice from the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), general approval for interviews with staff was sought via formal letter to the general managers of each of the selected local government areas. The intention was to identify and approach staff individually once general approval had been granted in order to secure some level of confidentiality for interview subjects within their own organisation. Written approval for the interviews was received from the general managers or their representatives from four of the councils, while no response was received from the fifth and was therefore considered to be a refusal. A telephone call and emails followed up on this council four weeks after the letter was sent, but a response was still not received. The other four councils responded to the request by providing the contact information for the relevant staff. In one case, although approval was granted and a list of possible staff interviewees was provided, a relevant staff member ceased to return emails and telephone calls, which stopped the interview schedule from progressing at that council. Since the general managers or their delegates are aware which staff were interviewed, this complicated the application of anonymising techniques. I describe this in more detail in the following section.

Confidentiality

In order to keep track of interviewees, I have assigned alphanumeric indicators to each participant. The six staff members interviewed (two each from the three councils) have been assigned the identifiers S1 through S6. The two councillors interviewed have similarly been
assigned the identifiers C1 and C2. Staff mentioned during interviews have been assigned S numbers following this order while various other people mentioned by name during the interviews have been given the designation O(ther)1, etc. Quotes and references used within this thesis are attributed accordingly, which allows identification of their role (staff or councillor) but does not give away information about their particular affiliation.

All councillors and staff interviewed for this research have been granted confidentiality, a decision partly specified by the HREC but also spurred by ethical considerations around the responsibilities of researchers to protect research participants. Though it might seem a simple and logical choice between releasing or not releasing identifiable data, there are several complicating factors given both the methodology of this research and the general managers in effect nominating staff to participate. Such considerations give rise to a series of decisions, outlined below, about how this research attempts to protect the anonymity of confidentiality. In addition to the stipulation that interview subjects ought to be de-identified, any reference to postings on social media sites and websites by those participants are similarly de-identified. In a significant way, it is the HREC directive to protect the privacy and confidentiality of staff that has driven many of the decisions discussed below. Consideration is given first to anonymity for staff and then to the more difficult decision of anonymity for elected councillors (who are public figures).

The HREC requested that a method of selecting and interviewing staff members be used so as to grant a level of confidentiality from their employers, and that general approval for the research be sought in writing from the relevant general managers before any interviews occurred.32 The four responses received from general managers nominated particular staff for interviews rather than granting general approval for the researcher to identify and contact

32 See Appendix 5.
relevant staff directly. This meant that the confidentiality of staff within the selected councils was somewhat compromised and forced alternative methods of protecting the identity and privacy of the interviewed staff. Furthermore, in the end, staff from only three councils were interviewed, so it is difficult to maintain anonymity if information identifying those councils is released alongside quotes. Ransome (2013, p. 41) argues “While respondents might recognize themselves, others should not be able to recognize them.” As such, any information from the interviews that could identify the staff themselves or the council they work for has been suppressed from use and publication. This extends to mentions of particular people, community organisations and groups, and other councils referred to by the interview subjects since, for example, naming an adjoining council that was not part of the study could immediately identify the council to which the interviewee belongs.

The decision to grant confidentiality to interview subjects generally centres on the potential risk of harm to those people. Although the identified potential professional risk to staff is minimal due to the fact that they were largely being asked to comment in a professional capacity about official practices and policies, several instances of personal opinion arose during the interviews. These opinions related to relations with councillors, members of the public, lobby and citizens’ groups, businesses, and others. There was therefore a potential risk of harm, including perceived favouritism or antipathy, in such views being associated with particular staff or with their local government employers more generally. As such, comments of this type have been excluded from publication or de-identified as appropriate.

After choosing to provide confidentiality, questions arose about the level of potentially identifying detail that could be provided without compromising this anonymity. There were eight interviewees in total, of which two were elected councillors and six were staff members. Staff from three councils were interviewed, but councillors were only selected from two
councils. Since certain staff within councils know which other staff were suggested for interview, if the councillors were identified it could potentially give away the identity of the relevant staff. Given the concerns expressed above that general managers (or their representatives) are aware of the staff interviewed, I have chosen not to associate any given quote by either councillors or staff with any particular council entity. This is another level of protection for staff, but must also extend to councillors. The other difficulty arises given the relatively small number of councillors from the selected local governments who are visibly active on social network sites. A search on the widely-used and more ‘public’ social network site, Twitter, revealed accounts by only 15 councillors (of 47) across the five original local government areas. This small number further necessitates not associating quotes with any given council, even though one of the interviewed councillors expressed an interest in waiving anonymity. Finally, Wright (2008; 2009) has established a precedent for facilitating anonymity for elected councillors even in relation to their public web activities.

The question may then arise as to why the councils themselves have been identified. This is an even more complex problem as identifying the councils in the research can suggest which councillors were involved - there is potential for a ‘breadcrumb’ trail leading from the councils to councillors to staff or from councils directly to staff. Following Gatson and Zweerink (2004), it was decided that the difficulties in de-identifying the councils involved - including the loss of theoretical richness provided by being able to refer to their particular cultural and geographic histories and relationships - would have outweighed the potential benefits (such as obscuring the breadcrumbs). Furthermore, it would also have been difficult to “set up an… appropriate setting of distance” (Gatson and Zweerink 2004, p. 18), given the researcher’s stated involvement with the studied local governments.
The significant contextual decisions involving how to protect the privacy and confidentiality of interviewees have in some ways constrained this research. Those limitations include being unable to explicitly discuss relationships between staff and councillors and with other councils that were identified by interview subjects, and not having the opportunity to explore stated connections as they appear in the social network mapping exercises. However, the need to retain trust and the ethical obligation to do no harm to participants outweigh these challenges. In order to maintain the focus on the politics of place and particular community engagement techniques, there is some detailed discussion of particular developments, events and activities within each of the councils, but I have attempted to obscure links between any given information provided by informants and those specific events.

Digital research methods and visualisation

A method employed throughout this thesis as a way of organising and analysing information is the visualisation of data especially that extracted from social network sites and digital traces such as location histories. Pink et al. (2016, p. 125) note that there have been many “recent theoretical attempts to understand the relationship between the tangible physical environment and the experiential, invisible and mobile elements of everyday life”. In a significant way, my work in this thesis also responds to this dynamic in part by deploying digital methods which engage with the ways in which digital media and digital traces shape interactions with place.

Hutchison (2016) describes digital media methods as a “methodological approach incorporating Internet-based data, while also including other communicative and social media platforms” (p. 2). The data accessed, visualised and analysed in this thesis largely fall into this description. For example, in chapter 6, I have deployed media analysis techniques alongside social network mapping and analysis to consider some of the ways in which
citizens create media about place and contest or negotiate their ideas of place against others.

Section 4.1 explicitly maps the digital media networks established and maintained by the case study local government authorities. Each of these is a digital media research method.

The approach taken in this thesis of exploring the ways in which place is imagined by those who govern and inhabit it lends itself to the kinds of data visualisations practiced here. In a way, such visualisations are themselves a way of imagining place: as networks of associations in social network analysis; as traces of movements collected in digital maps; or as information architectures. Such approaches are prepositions which indicate a certain sense of place not unlike the film and television productions considered in chapter 7 or the tourism brochures studied in chapter 4.

The digital research methods employed have made use of a range of tools. These have included the social network analysis software Node XL, which allows visualisation of networks of associations between different ‘nodes’ (Smith et al., 2014). It was used to visualise both networks of local government public internet sites and citizen-initiated campaigns on Twitter and Facebook and associations between user-generated tags of photographs on Instagram - a bespoke method developed for this research. In one section (5.2), citizen responses to local governments on social network sites were analysed through the Facebook data-extraction tool NetVizz and Twitter data-extraction tool Twitonomy. These are all ways of using digital tools to imagine and contest aspects of place, but which have been deployed here for the purpose of conducting the analyses of this thesis.

3.4 Conclusion

The methodology developed and deployed during the course of the research presented in this thesis draws primarily upon ANT approaches combined with media analysis techniques to
examine a complex network of heterogeneous agents involved in the politics of place. The case study approach is a particular methodological choice that gives focus and form to this research, ensuring it is responsive to the need to examine the selected places in close detail, while various digital research methods indicate additional ways of imagining place and space. It is in this way that the work proceeds from the standpoint of social and political life manifesting in place to the study undertaken here.

The following chapter begins the main discussion section of this thesis. It examines the ways in which the case study local government authorities construct imaginaries of the spaces and places that they govern. The following chapter blends consideration of the councils with their role in sparking participatory action from their residents, while the final discussion chapter more closely explores the media making of residents acting of their own accord. Each chapter relies heavily upon the case study methodology described, although some additional methods - including those drawn from digital media research - are deployed for certain aspects of the analysis. The overarching framework, however, is informed by actor-network theory.
Chapter 4: Council created mediated imagining of place

The work presented in this chapter examines selected mediated imaginings of place and some of the contestation of those imaginings by those who govern the local government areas that constitute the case studies. Many of the examples given here demonstrate the media architectures in which the politics of place are conducted. Thus the chapter examines prominent examples of mediated imaginings of place produced by the three local government authorities. In doing so, the chapter argues that claims inherent in the media items examined are engagements in the politics of place by a wide range of heterogeneous actants. Such actants in this chapter include the councils as collectives, individual council staff, the media items they produce, and the places they govern.

Although it is clear that local governments and citizens are not the only makers of media about or representing place, the focus in discussion chapters 4, 5, and 6 is primarily those two groups and the interaction between them. This chapter begins with the local governments themselves, while Chapter 5 examines the participatory interactions between councils and their publics and Chapter 6 reports almost exclusively on the actions of publics in their own right. Chapter 7, however, deals with imaginings that originate with professional media makers (who are often not local).

In the first section of this chapter, I map the media networks that have been developed by each of the local governments. The following sections present close examinations of two particular examples of mediated imaginings for distinct purposes. Section 4.2 is devoted to mediated imaginings for the purposes of planning. Section 4.3 focuses on mediated imaginings of place for the purposes of tourism. Both of these are key areas of responsibility for councils.
4.1 Mapping local government media networks

Each of the case study councils maintains a network of media properties, including social networking accounts, home and project/initiative-based websites, engagement hub websites, tourism entities, and occasionally smart-phone applications. These are what I call the local government media networks. However, it is worth noting that these networks largely include only participatory and digital media as the mapping extends only to those properties which could be considered wholly controlled by the relevant council entity. This is a result of the sampling process described in Chapter 3. This section draws on data gathered during the scoping phase of the project which involved mapping the overall network of web properties maintained by each council and relevant sub-units such as libraries and tourism organisations. The mapping undertaken is also a deployment of ANT in practice, as it reveals the interrelationships between various media properties and council units at a particular moment in time.

The purpose of developing what is in effect a social network analysis (SNA) map of the media properties in this way is to (1) provide a clear visual indication of the types of technologies employed by each of the councils, (2) indicate the purposes for which they may be used, and (3) guide additional discovery in the project. Furthermore, it is possible that staff at some councils were not aware of the extent of their media networks, suggesting a potential utilitarian use for this kind of visualisation. During the interview phase, it was made clear that while independent units such as tourism bodies and libraries operate within certain guidelines, their use of media technologies is nonetheless not controlled by the relevant council.

33 Notwithstanding the ownership questions arising from the use of social media platforms provided by others.
The following three figures were manually prepared using the SNA software NodeXL (Smith et al., 2014). No sorting algorithm has been applied to these graphs. The approach depicted is a form of SNA adopting a sampling methodology to identify relevant entities for inclusion. Entities have been identified by searching the relevant networks (especially Facebook and Twitter) for keywords relating to the councils and examining the websites of the selected local governments for links to accounts and other websites. Some information was provided during the interview phase of this research identifying the extent to which entities were controlled by the relevant council. An example of the information provided by interviewees in this regard is the following comment from S3:

we have Facebook, we have Twitter, we have, um, [local event] and the [other council-owned entity] also have Twitter accounts. There's a lot more areas that also have a Facebook account than a Twitter and we have just the single Instagram account which is just [council], and that is not as much of a priority for us as Facebook and Twitter (S3, interview).

These graphs have been designed to reveal how the selected local governments operate as key players in the politics of place within a complex media network that they have established and direct. The overall pattern of each network is laid out in loose concentric circles with the main council unit placed near the centre due to the density of connections. The second ring in each graph consists of the particular media technologies, including:

- Facebook
- Websites
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Flickr

Each of these social network sites allows users to develop unique profiles based on the content they post, and to connect those profiles to other users, either through mutual connections or unidirectional follow connections. In January 2016, Wollongong City Council’s main Facebook account had accumulated almost 12000 fans and 3800 followers on Twitter; Wingecarribee had over 4000 Facebook fans and almost 500 Twitter followers; and Wollondilly around 3500 Facebook fans and almost 1000 Twitter followers.\(^{34}\)

The outer ring of each network represented in the figures below includes the sub-units of each council. These graphs are directional. The effect of this directional layout is to indicate, in Figure 4 for example, that Wollongong City Council corporate has a relationship with both Facebook and its various operational units who, in turn, have their own distinct relationships with Facebook. In each instance, a connecting directional line indicates that distinct accounts or websites are maintained by or behalf of the relevant sub unit or the corporate council entity. In each of the following diagrams, the term ‘website’ refers to the main website of each of the three councils, which are hosted on NSW Government subdomains in the format: [council].nsw.gov.au.

\(^{34}\) Council social media use is considered in more detail in chapter 5.
Figure 4: Wollongong City Council's web properties
Wollongong City Council’s media network is unsurprisingly the most complex of the three case study local governments, given its wider range of activities. For example, included in the figure above is the Wollongong City Art Gallery, Memorial Gardens, Conservatorium, Tourist Parks, and Illawarra Performing Arts Centre. All are council-owned facilities operated by largely independent sub-units. Neither of the other two councils have similar facilities. Destination Wollongong is somewhat more independent than the tourism organisations at the other two councils.

Nonetheless, the graph indicates the complexity in this kind of network centred on a council organisation and its sub-units and related entities, many of which control their own websites and social media accounts. Wollongong’s ten sub-units maintain twenty participatory media properties in addition to those maintained by the council itself.
Figure 5: Wollondilly Shire Council's web properties
Figure 5 demonstrates that Wollondilly Shire Council’s participatory media properties are spread over five sub-units and the council itself. These six entities maintain accounts on six different platforms. This council’s overall participatory media network is less complex than either of the other two, but even so it contains in excess of 20 properties, including multiple websites (at www.engage.wollondilly, and www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au). This council also maintains a site dedicated to the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) (www.wollondilly2033.com.au). It is interesting to note that all three of the Twitter accounts maintained by Wollondilly are either dormant (Leisure Centre) or operate solely as feeds from Facebook (council and the Libraries). This suggests that Twitter, at least, is being used largely in a broadcast capacity rather than for any form of participatory communication.
Figure 6: Wingecarribee Shire Council’s web properties
Wingecarribee Shire Council and five of its sub-units maintain properties in six different web-based participatory media formats. Five of these are social network sites, with the fifth being websites, of which there are several considered in this study. Figure 6 demonstrates which of the six council entities operate which properties. Council itself maintains three websites, most prominently a primary website (www.wsc.nsw.gov.au), and a media engagement sub-domain website (www.media.wsc.nsw.gov.au). The third active website is the ‘engagement hub’ (www.yoursaywingecarribee.com.au). An economic development site (located at www.highlandsalive.com.au) expired during the study period and has not been reinstated.

The Wingecarribee Shire Council media website (www.media.wsc.nsw.gov.au) incorporates a range of material including videos, links to many other websites (especially social media sites), embedded posts from various social media sites, photographs and press releases. Wingecarribee’s home page site contains very few interactive elements. It is primarily focused on providing a few e-government services such as electronic payments of fees and charges, and operating as a contact centre. To this end, there is a multi-use contact form. The media site and engagement hub are discussed in section 5.1, below. The distinction between participatory media and e-government functions is further delineated in section 4.4 below.

The participatory media network maps in Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6 can be read as both an outcome of this research and as a tool upon which further development could be based. They indicate for interested stakeholders the key nodes in participatory media for each of the three councils. Additionally, these graphs served as useful tools for contextual discovery and analysis in their own right. They demonstrated, for example, the relatively strong usage of Twitter by Wollongong Council entities as compared with the other two case studies.
Interviewee S6 noted that councils tend to use different components of these networks for different purposes, rather than broadcasting all messages across all of them:

> We try to target information. So if we know that the [particular town/suburb] Community Group is looking at the Facebook stuff, we'll try and target some information... If we know old mate [resident’s name] on the Facebook site, he's one of our older users, we'll try and target some of our messages to him and his groups (Interviewee S6)

Interviewee S5 added: “It's just sort of a menu that I go through depending on who it is that we're trying to target and how we approach them.” Thus, while these graphs appear to present a whole media network of the particular councils, they should not be read as presenting the networks as experienced by citizens, who may access only one or two (or none) of the given media properties.

From the politics of place perspective, these maps themselves are propositions - or ways of seeing - the places represented, and responsive to the needs of an ANT-informed methodology, which seeks to trace relations between ontologically distinct entities. These ‘network maps’ suggest a particular version of place dominated by the local governments in question and assist in organising the spatial imaginaries of the local government areas. They are themselves methods of imagining a particular version of place as dominated by networked local government authorities. Further, such representations indicate something of the information architecture available in each location through which the politics of place is conducted. In establishing accounts on these particular participatory media networks, the councils structure modes of interaction with their publics. These network diagrams also provoke a need to further consider the usage of participatory media by not only the councils but also their constituent publics. This is explored further in chapters 5 and 6.
4.2 Imagining tourist places

This section examines the creation of place imagery through tourism brochures and guides associated with the three case studies. It is argued that the powerful and pervasive nature of tourism brochures represent clear attempts by local government authorities at constructing representations of place defined by simple, repetitive motifs and the erasure of complexity such as hiding unfavourable elements of the landscape. Such practices, which inherently make claims about what elements constitute a given place, in part by turning those elements into a marketable commodity, are part of the politics of place. The point of including tourism brochures at this juncture is to emphasize the broad heterogeneity of objects which contribute to place imaginaries.

A single brochure was selected for close analysis for each of the three regions, and these were collected from the Southern Highlands Visitor Information Centre in Mittagong in late 2014. These brochures were selected because they were the main tourism brochures for their regions at the time of sampling meaning they are somewhat authoritative accounts of place at that point. The brochures examined are Welcome to Wollongong (Destination Wollongong, 2014), the Spring Southern Highlands Visitor Guide (Southern Highland News, 2014), and Wollondilly Visitor Guide – Discovery (Wollondilly Shire Council, n.d). The ways in which place is imagined in these brochures was submitted to a content analysis, the results of which are outlined below in Figure 7. Both photographs and their captions have been included in this study.

It is important to note that council tourism bodies are typically separate entities, although they are controlled or funded by the relevant council. As interviewee S3 noted:
they’re what’s considered an affiliate. So they’re actually a separate legal body but they’re tasked by council to do the... general area marketing. It's more than just tourism, it’s also event promotion to local audiences as well, and destination marketing (S3, interview)

Nonetheless, as key entities involved in the creation and circulation of images and ideas about place, tourism organisations are entirely relevant to the work presented in this thesis.

Included in this study are both textual and visual elements of the images in question. The semiotician Roland Barthes (1993, p. 193) argues that both photographs and the accompanying words are important as “the structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text - title, caption, or article”. Since, according to Barthes, the text is in a “parasitic” situation with the image, it is entirely appropriate to include these multiple ‘structures’ in this analysis. Each element of each image could in turn be interpreted as an individual actant within the wider networks of place.

In the course of the content analysis, the following coding system was applied to all photographic images in the tourism brochures:

- a brief researcher-generated description of the photograph
- the specific named location where available (for example, ‘WIN Stadium’, ‘Warragamba Dam’, or ‘Corbett Gardens’)
- which town that location is in, if available
- the type of location (accommodation, wine, food, activity, building/shop, historic building, outdoors, garden, person only; multiple labels were applied to some images)
- any caption or title associated with the image
- the type of image (advertisement, story image, or directory listing image)
Figure 7: Analysis of photographic images in tourism brochures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Wingecarribee</th>
<th>Wollondilly</th>
<th>Wollongong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Photos</td>
<td>106 (1.65/pg)</td>
<td>92 (1.53/pg)</td>
<td>147 (1.96/pg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Identifiable Locations</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Towns/Suburbs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Advertisement</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Story Image</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Directory Listing</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accommodation</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wine</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Food</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This figure makes clear some trends in the depiction of these three regions. Whereas the Wingecarribee tourism brochure is advertising heavy and imagery tends toward food, wine and shopping, the Wollongong brochure strongly promotes activities and the outdoors - especially beaches and bushland. The focus on commercial activity, especially evident in the Wingecarribee brochure, reflects Burgess and Gold’s (1985, p. 10-11) argument that “place promotion is part of the strategy of many new economic development schemes.” Burgess and Gold further suggest that the “officials involved often have no clear conviction about the effectiveness of such work and tend to resort to simplified and stereotyped advertising” (1985, p. 11). The economic imperative of tourism promotion plays into this practice.

The Wollondilly brochure similarly makes strong use of outdoor imagery, highlighting rural and bushland elements such as farms and food production and preserved lands. Further, paid advertisements are much more clearly demarcated in the Wingecarribee brochure since they do not adopt the same style as the rest of the brochure, whereas in the Wollongong and Wollondilly brochures many of the ‘listings’ are potentially paid advertisements but are well-
integrated and do not superficially appear as such. This somewhat complicates the coding instruments applied and may be an effect of the method of production. The Wingecarribee brochure is produced by commercial news media company Fairfax Media for the tourism organisation rather than in-house as is the case for Destination Wollongong and Wollondilly Tourism. An artefact of this mode of production is the fact that the Wingecarribee brochure includes a pointer to the website of the Fairfax-owned *Southern Highland News* paper on its cover.

What are classed as ‘story images’ in the Wingecarribee brochure are usually images accompanying written articles covering a page or more. However, in the Wollongong brochure, the stories are usually quite short and appear more as long captions. On the other hand, the Wollondilly story images are often presented without text, or with only a title or short caption, as illustrative or filler material. This minimalism extends throughout the Wollondilly and Wollongong brochures, to the extent that the images themselves become the stories - as story images, in fact. Again, the newspaper/magazine-type format evident in the Wingecarribee brochure stems from its mode of production by a commercial media organisation. For Wollondilly, the location and content of images are often indeterminate. However, many offer commodious landscape views across one or two whole pages. This use of imagery effectively combines with the rougher cardboard cover of the Wollondilly brochure to give a more tactile, immersive experience than either of the other two, both of which have glossy covers.

The initial impression given by the *Welcome to Wollongong* visitor guide is of a smiling, warm, beachside place. There is no hint of the dominant industrial landscape around Port Kembla in the city’s south, or the gleaming new shopping malls at its heart. A photographic essay unfolds on this front page alone, but little is shown of the city’s people and nothing of
its politics. This is an airbrushed imagining, but we can read much into what is missing, a reductionist tendency of tourism advertising that lends itself to a simplified discourse about the nature and characteristics of the places represented.

The dominant type of photographic image in the *Southern Highlands Visitor Guide* is the advertisement. A further 15% of images are directory listings, mostly for viticulture businesses, while possible commercial motives behind the listings in the other two tourist guides are obscured. Though I am not assessing the aesthetic quality of these brochures, the style of listings which appear to be paid advertisements in *Welcome to Wollongong* and *Wollondilly Visitor Guide* make them difficult to distinguish as such due to the consistent style of presentation throughout. This is in stark contrast to the *Southern Highlands Visitor Guide*, which has a series of narrative type articles in-filled by advertisements and a few pages of listings.

Returning to the *Welcome to Wollongong* visitor guide we see the city presented in its state and national context on page two and alongside the nearby regions on page five. These include the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Shires, though neither are labelled as such. The two rural shires are sketched in by way of the road network, a few images and major towns Picton, Bowral and Moss Vale. The massive coal mining lease areas, water catchments and national parks are all absent. Tourist attractions are drawn in, represented by colour-saturated photos and a caption. It should be noted, however, that one of the listings in the Wollongong brochure is for Australia’s Industry World, a museum of sorts located in the steel-making complex at Port Kembla, so the industrial economy of the city is not completely absent.

Two of the more prominent image types in *Welcome to Wollongong* are food and the outdoors. High profile infrastructure like the picturesque Sea Cliff Bridge at Coledale are used repeatedly throughout the brochure in both advertisements and stories. Meanwhile, fine
dining - most often at seaside restaurants or cafes - is also promoted throughout. Taken together, the imagery presents Wollongong as a fine-dining, activity-full destination in a natural setting.

The *Southern Highlands Visitor Guide* presents much like a glossy magazine with feature articles about events, activities, venues and people in the region. There are also many full-colour advertisements including a number that cover whole pages and an introductory letter from the editor, who is also the editor of the *Southern Highland News*. This further indicates a reason behind the distinct presentation of the Southern Highlands guide compared to the Wollongong or Wollondilly brochures. Being the Spring edition, the brochure focusses especially on the annual festival Tulip Time, which is featured on the cover and multiple internal pages. There is a very strong focus on wine and shopping given the Southern Highlands is a cool-climate wine region. The next most popular categories for photographs in the brochure are food (especially fine-dining and local produce) and accommodation. There are also four pages dedicated to advertisements and feature articles on private schools. In all, this particular combination of images suggests the Southern Highlands as a destination of indulgence and escape, but one with a price tag.

The *Wollondilly Visitor Guide* is somewhat more balanced than either of the other two and yet still resorts to a fairly simplified discourse. The tagline on the cover, ‘Discovery… is closer than you think’ suggests an assumed audience of people from the Sydney region. Inside, the first double-page photographic spread bears the caption, “At just over an hour’s drive from Sydney, this hidden gem will embrace the discoverer within” (Wollondilly Shire Council, n.d., p. 3). There is a liberal use of landscape photography in this brochure - especially of both farmland and protected bushland areas - including in the page 3-4 spread and on the cover. This indicates early on two of the three main concerns of the imagery - the
other being historic buildings. These three are captured in the categories ‘activity’ (for example, bushwalking, sky-diving, and viewing dams), food, and historic building in Figure 7. The strong focus on farms/food and historic buildings gives rise to the rustic-rural place persona mentioned earlier.

The work of the Wollondilly brochure in particular in representing landscape vistas points to an important way in which media practices contribute to experience of place. Casey (2002) suggests: “To be a landscape at all, to be an integrated part of a sensuously qualified place-world, is already to have entered the encompassing embrace of the representational enterprise” (p. xv). The motive to package places into landscape representations is inherently an act of active construction. Importantly, this is not an enterprise undertaken solely by the image maker nor the designer who selected it for inclusion in a tourism brochure but also by those who view the image.

Given the broad mechanics and content of the images described above, it is now pertinent to turn to how such images can produce place at all. I contend that the actual production of place comes about not in the representations themselves, but in their connoted or received meaning. Although (perhaps because) images such as those in tourism brochures speak from a position of authority, their placemaking role must be left to the ordinary user.

Barthes (1993, p. 197-8) suggests images are deceptive due to their perceived objectivity:

Of all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a ‘denoted’ message… In actual fact, there is a strong probability… that the photographic message too… is connoted.

Thus, the viewer must take an active role in deconstructing the meaning behind a photograph. In the tourism brochures described above, each image operates both on its own and in
multiple wider contexts: in association with any captions or titles; alongside images on other or nearby pages; as one of roughly 100 images in each brochure; in the context of the brochure itself as a tourism-promotion mechanism.

The wide usage of photography to represent place for the purposes of tourism responds to its nature as seemingly objective and because “photography speaks an accessible language that’s both multivalent and open to anyone who pauses to look at what’s there” (Hoelscher, 2014, p. 18). For Craine (2007) the image is a means to “intervene in the production of the ‘real,’ which we can understand to be a rendering of spatial data” (p. 148). In other words, the image is a rendering of place open to challenge and enquiry.

Craine et al. (2014) trace the emergence of an advertising-tourism complex to westward frontier expansion in the late-nineteenth century United States of America. A sense of freedom and mobility is conveyed in the images surveyed in order to invite “the viewer physically into the picture” (Aikin, 2000, cited in Craine et al., 2014, p. 233). Such campaigns “depicted the wilderness in pristine form, offering on one level a familiarly romantic, nostalgic vision of nature” (Craine et al., 2014, p. 236). These kinds of large, cross-page splash images of nature are evident in the Wollondilly tourism guide in particular. Just as with the American campaigns, the Wollondilly photographs suggest a sense of nature waiting to be accessed. In the American examples, description of “the wilderness invokes the city rather than provides an escape from it” (Craine et al., 2014, p. 239). The Wollondilly Visitor Guide plays from the same handbook:

Wollondilly tempts you with pristine forest, untarnished history, diverse produce and a vibrant culture.
Each of these descriptors - ‘pristine’, ‘untarnished’, ‘diverse’, ‘hidden’ - lays bare its opposite: dirty, tarnished, singular, common. Each of the latter apparently describe the city from which tourists are escaping.

The place claims made in the tourism brochures examined in this section are constitutive of the politics of place through their erasure of complexity, the emphasis on marketability and commercialisation, and the counter-positioning of other places. Originating as they do from entities associated with the local government authorities of each region, such claims bear the imprimatur of authority. These practices are visual examples of the politics of place in action in each of the three local government areas, which are here differentiated from one another and other neighbouring areas through varying motifs and language. They are one of the many heterogeneous actants within the broad networks of place considered in this thesis.

4.3 Planning space and mapping

In Australia, local governments have local carriage of state wide development laws and also create and implement planning zones which specify what type of developments can occur in which locations. Reproduced below (Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10) and examined in this section are three Land Application Maps maps produced as part of this planning process by each of the local government authorities studied in this work. These maps are part of the Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) gazetted under Part 33A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (New South Wales). Local governments in New South Wales are responsible for producing LEPs for and on behalf of the state government. LEPs are constituted of a great many documents, including further, higher scale local area maps which provide the same information as the Land Application Maps but in much more detail. In the
context of this thesis, LAPs are an example of media which themselves constitute the kinds of
geographic-dependent imagining to which local governments are bound.

Such maps give order to the unruliness of landscapes both settled and unsettled, rural and urban, named and unnamed, planned and unplanned. Land use planning and development management are among the most prominent and controversial responsibilities of the many duties of local governments in New South Wales. Land Application Maps open up consideration of many of the ways in which council-produced media items imagine and produce a sense of place. Such maps, like the tourism brochures above, could be considered actants which are allied to the councils for the particular purposes ascribed by planning regulations. Land Application Maps are designed to broadly communicate the geographic distribution of development patterns within the relevant local government area.
Figure 9: Wollongong City Council Land Application Map 001
Figure 10: Wingecarribee Shire Council Land Application Map 001
The maps above, just like those presented in the introductory chapter, are “propositions” (Presner et al., 2014, p. 15) though much less the kind of personal propositions presented earlier than those which strive for objectivity. Wood (2010, p. 9) says that to conceive of atlases as narratives would “force the admission… that maps constituted a semiological system indistinguishable from other semiological systems”. The propositions inherent within the maps above similarly seek to deny their nature as sign-based constructions by strongly presenting geographic boundaries, which are seemingly fixed on the earth. Thus they become a proposition not only in and of themselves but also for the organisations which produced them - a way of seeing and marking the place as geographically-bounded both from the outside and within internal zones.

David Turnbull (1989) suggests two general characteristics of maps, firstly that they are:

selective: they do not, and cannot, display all there is to know about any given piece of the environment. Secondly, if they are to be maps at all they must directly represent at least some aspects of the landscape. (p. 3, original emphasis)

Thus, maps are propositions of both elision and disclosure. They simultaneously erase or hide many features of the landscape while emphasising others. The Land Application Maps examined here emphasise the planning space - that which is available or unavailable for developments of particular kinds. As an imaginary of place, they can obfuscate and cover, or reveal and disclose. The details contained within such maps are fundamental to the way they perform and create space and place for both those who produce them (the local government authorities) and those who access them (developers, planners, and citizens).

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35 An atlas being a collection of maps.
The prominent features of the maps above are the white canvases and jumbles of grey lines demarcating various planning zones. This is the nature of planning that Relph (1979, p. 23) decries as understanding space to be “empty and undifferentiated and objectively manipulable according to the constraints of functional efficiency, economics, and the whims of planners and developers”. While such maps are indeed only meant as LGA-wide overviews compared to the more detailed and coloured inset maps which accompany the LEPs, they nonetheless give an impression of geographic space divided up and ready for development, further contributing to place shaping practices.

One way in which local governments facilitate the appearance of place in media is via what Seamon (1979) calls “encounter”, meaning “any situation of attentive contact between the person and the world at hand” (p. 99). Seamon suggests, but does not explore, the possibility of “encounter for other entities besides man” (1979, p. 99). In this regard, his description of encounter does not accord with object-oriented philosophies which argue that “humans are elements, but not the sole elements, of philosophical intent” (Bogost, 2012, p. 4). Seamon’s ‘attentive contact’ alludes to perception, at the centre of which Merleau-Ponty positions the body, “our means for having a world” (2012, p. 147). By producing media about the place over which they have jurisdiction, local governments invite the possibility of moments of encounter between the world and people taking place across those media. They also further extend the networks of heterogeneous agents capable of acting upon politics of place processes. However, Bogost (2012) suggests that human perception (what Seamon calls encounter) is “just one among many ways that objects might relate” (p. 9).

In a response to Moores (2006), Seamon (2006) appears to dismiss the possibility of media enhancing encounter and yet simultaneously argues for studies broaching “a phenomenology of encounter and media”. His view seems to be that media can only diminish encounter with
the world, a claim I contest. Media items about place come to act as a space within which encounter occurs, enriching and producing the places of everyday habitation and allowing local governments to contribute to place via media. Encounters with the world are not limited only to bodily mediation, but are further mediated by items like the maps reproduced above.

A feature of apparently objective maps like those above is the erasure of the local and specific. The kinds of maps above perpetuate what Anderson describes as the “logo-map”, from which “all explanatory glosses could be summarily removed” (1991, p. 175). The encounter between people and logo maps are examples of decontextualised place, presented above but also on the website of every local government authority case study. For Turnbull (2007, p. 141), maps “subsume differing spatialities and temporalities into one abstract space-time [and] omit the multiplicitous and interactive dimensions of the local and the practical, the stories and the journeys, the spiritual and the experiential.” Although the maps above give some outline of possible journey routes (roadways) and certain methods of experience (settlement patterns), they nonetheless inhabit this mode of elision, which is especially prominent in logo-maps due to the sparseness of their external routes of connection. Thus, planning maps seek to prohibit the possibility of both internal and external performance of connection, movement, and experience.

One of the more striking features of the LAPs above is the consistent presence of large tracts of protected land - national parks, state parks, and ‘special areas’ which have restricted access conditions imposed for the protection of the Sydney basin water supply. These exist in the western part of the Wollongong LGA, the eastern, central and western parts of Wollondilly LGA and the north-east, north-west and south-east of Wingecarribee LGA. Such maps starkly present the juxtaposition of these protected areas alongside the more densely-zoned parts of the maps, demonstrating the complex relationships between both the daily “lifeworld”
(Seamon, 1979) in which human populations exist and the less-commonly accessed supporting environment. As Seamon (1979, p. 152) argues, there is an important role for residents when planning places: “They begin to recognize the inherent order of people-in-place and strive to create a lifeworld which supports a satisfying human existence grounded in a liveable environment.”

Baudrillard argues the simulation induced by the map has come to supersede the ‘real’. This has proceeded to the point that “present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their modes of simulation” (1994, p. 2). Whereas Baudrillard’s greater point was about the abject emptiness of a culture which has come to rely on signs and symbols for all meaning, the instantiation of planning maps like those above clearly “engenders the territory” (1994, p. 1) perhaps more than any other form of media. Such maps are intended to directly influence the form and method of development, or lack of development, in the areas depicted. In line with the aims of this thesis, planning spaces and instruments are yet further actants within the series of heterogeneous agents participating in the performance and co-participation in the politics of place.

In many ways, the geographic boundaries within which councils operate help to create, in their mind, the simplest form of community. As interviewee S3 said “the reason you're all going to be interested in anything to do with council will be because you are in that geographic area to begin with”. The reasoning here is that the very act of being located within a specific geographic territory makes a person part of the public group to which the council responds. As such, maps themselves seek to shape and represent the public at least as much as they represent the location.

Council staff demonstrate a way of seeing the public as located within and therefore defined by geographic boundaries that plays strongly into these mapping processes. Indeed, this is a
method of understanding the public-in-place that helps imagine community. As S3 suggests: “even though it’s not a real group, it has that link based on geography”. There is a hint here that councils understand the kinds of collective construction that Anderson proposes when he says “all communities… are imagined” (1991, p. 6). Publics, places, and representational tools, such as maps, all have a role to play in this process.

In the case of the Land Application Maps maps above, the specific zoning guidelines which indicate what is and is not permitted in a given location within the broader LGA also seeks to construct a sense of publics and populations. Such maps prescribe areas where people cannot enter without special permissions, or those zoned as business areas, or spaces set aside just for housing. The streets themselves can be seen in the detail of these maps, marked usually as rigid easements between zones or plots within zones. Wood (2010, p. 14) protests this rigidity, arguing streets on maps seem to be “the irreducible subject, the what-it-was that made neighborhoods neighborhoods.” Even at the level of the LGA-wide maps above, given over to the abstraction of planning zones, streets permeate and outline the physical shape of communities.

One council uses mapmaking to visualise where complaints or enquiries originate, as explained by interviewee S3

one of the reasons that I have to refer things to customer service is that it then gets logged in our proper system, it has all the record keeping, it has a history, it gets tracked, that’s integrated with our mapping system

These processes seem mundane, but they demonstrate how tools of mediation like maps seek to control and construct publics and place within the mediated environment, contributing to the collective imagining of the communities under consideration. Likewise, maps seek to impose a certain sense of place. Land Application Maps in particular suggest place as
ordered, as controlled, as planned, and as firmly geographic - almost solely as a location in which humans exist, rather than as a place in which they live. These are the rather limited imaginings of place to which local government mapping processes subscribe.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to reveal the extent to which councils have produced and operate complex media networks on participatory media sites that inevitably shape their interactions with residents (as will be further explored in the next chapter). The inclusion of powerful and pervasive tourism imagery, which comes stamped with the authority of the local governments as it is distributed through their information and visitor centres, has demonstrated how the complexity of place may be flattened and reduced for particular purposes.

The role of maps such as those examined in section 4.3 in further producing place for desired ends (in this case, as planned space) sets up some of the processes of contest and negotiation to be considered in coming chapters. Such maps, as with tourism brochures, are propositions of place, or ways of seeing and presenting place that make claims about what it is and could be.

The next chapter extends the discussion to the relationship between residents or citizens and the local government authorities. It focuses strongly on participatory media as the key link between these two groups and demonstrates the process of co-creating certain imaginaries of place. The media networks of the selected local government authorities are revisited in some detail, with particular attention to the designated community engagement websites and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter where they are used by either citizens or councils to initiate dialogue with the other party. These are key sites in the negotiation of place.
Chapter 5: Contesting the politics of place through council initiated public participation processes

Each of the local government areas considered in this thesis have had serious proposals for major developments, including infrastructure such as an international airport at Wilton in the Wollondilly Shire, coal mines, and major residential developments. Often, such proposals are turned away in the face of objections and concerted campaigns mounted by citizens. Sometimes, the citizens involved are perceived to be the “usual suspects” (S4, interview). These are citizens who are “very, very actively involved citizens [and] participate in everything” (S4, interview).

Growing expectations of open and participatory government systems have emerged alongside participatory media technologies. This approach to government has been named, in the parlance of both governments and researchers, ‘governance’, and is evident in participatory approaches such as those examined in this section. The distinguishing feature of the governance model involves the recognition or implementation of citizen- or people-centric systems rather than organisationally focused techniques. According to Brunet-Jailly & Martin (2010, p. 8), governance is “a more contemporary concept” than government and “more about the processes of public policy and engagement than it is about the structure and institutions of government”.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says governance is comprised of “the mechanisms, processes and institutions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are made on issues of public concern, and how citizens articulate their interests, exercise their
legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (2010, p. 14). The involvement of citizens is crucial to this definition, which underpins approaches to governance and consideration of both participatory media and the politics of place in this thesis. The UNDP further explicitly sets out that governance “is the result of interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society)” (2009, p. 5).

This chapter examines council-initiated processes of community engagement, which could be considered part of the emergence of governance, through which the politics of place is often conducted. In the process, different imaginaries of place are contested and negotiated, often over decades at a time. This is partly the process by which place is co-produced as different proposals are made, mediated and then modified and accepted or rejected, each proposal typically relying upon a wide network of agents for its success or failure.

Throughout this chapter, examples of the ways councils use social network sites and other participatory media tools to create and construct ideas about the places they govern as part of the politics of place are considered. Section 5.1 examines the phenomenon of community engagement undertaken by councils with legislative prompting. 5.2 considers the participatory behaviour of citizens who propagate, challenge and respond to councils during community engagement processes on Twitter and Facebook. The media items considered here are part of the wide network of items available to members of the public attempting to engage with councils and others involved in politics of place processes.
5.1 Mediated spaces of community engagement in the politics of place

Section 7(c) of the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) states that one of the purposes of the Act is to provide for the “effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government” (s. 7). This section of this thesis examines the operation of this and related legislative provisions in relation to the deployment of participatory media technologies by the case study local governments in the process of community engagement practices. It identifies the extent to which various local government participatory media practices meet each of three levels on a continuum of communications practices, namely (1) informing (2) consulting and (3) engaging. This chapter is informed by the IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) ‘Public Participation Spectrum’, which is cited by each of the three local governments in their community engagement strategies. This entails mapping the overall communications and engagement practices and relationships of local government, with particular reference to the use of participatory media. Selected examples of the politics of place in action are then explored, with a view to furthering the ANT-informed approach of mapping traces of associations across networks of heterogeneous agents.

Local governments also have very specific ideas about what participation means, often as this relates to the phrase ‘engagement’. Section 7 of the Act, cited above, suggests a purpose is to encourage “effective participation”, but it is Section 402 that contains the detail specifying that each council

must establish and implement a strategy (its community engagement strategy), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan (s. 402)
Several staff members interviewed for this study sought to define this engagement within the context of their daily communications practices. Two staff members each suggested engagement meant similar things: “involving the community in decision-making” (S5, interview) or “giving the community opportunities to be involved in decision-making” (S4, interview). The Office of Local Government’s (OLG, 2013) Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines (IPRG) specify that each council “must identify relevant stakeholder groups within the community and outline methods that will be used to engage each group” (, p. 9).

Although local government staff speak in broad terms about engaging community members in decision-making, the IPRG and the Local Government Act only specify that the community is to be engaged in the preparation of the Community Engagement Strategy in order to underpin the Community Strategic Plan. That is, the engagement strategy is positioned within the context of a post facto accountability regime related only to the council’s overall planning document and not individual decisions. This means that any decision to incorporate community engagement activities are largely directed by the relevant councillors and council staff while the Act only applies to very broad planning documents. Indeed, the title of Chapter 13 of the Act, which contains section 402, reinforces this view by posing the question ‘How are councils made accountable for their actions?’

There are, however, other provisions and regulations which suggest the responsibility of local governments to engage with citizens. Of fourteen clauses in the council charter contained within the Local Government Act 1993, four relate directly to community engagement practices. These are:
● “to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively”

● “to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights”

● “to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government”

● “to keep the local community and the State government (and through it, the wider community) informed about its activities” (s.8[1])

Each of these provisions, all of which councils are required to account for when undertaking activities, includes communication inputs and outputs. Nevertheless, and despite their level of detail, these provisions fail to specify what techniques and technologies might be used when conducting such community engagement.

At a broad level, the participation and engagement of citizens have been defined as a positive aspect of democratic local government. Indeed, the idea of engaging the public in the practices and decisions of government is central to many conceptions of democratic representative government generally. John Stuart Mill, in the foundational essay *Representative Government*, argued that the “pure idea of democracy... is the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented” (Mill, 1861 [2005], n.p.). Mill recognised there was more to representative democracy than just the practice of voting, even if other participation in 1861 was limited to “(r)eading newspapers, and perhaps writing to them, public meetings, and solicitations of different sorts addressed to the political authorities” (Mill, 1861 [2005], n.p.). Interestingly, Mill also noted also that there is more opportunity for citizens to be elected and serve other roles in local government than in
national government, a prescient observation in relation to the focus of this thesis. More recently, Evans and Reid (2013) made the same argument, suggesting “Public participation is… a key measure of the quality of democratic life” (p. 9).

Freeman (2013, p. 32) suggests “participatory e-government practices offer citizens possibilities for additional involvement, understanding and engagement in the democratic system.” These participatory approaches are, however, distinguished from e-government, which is service-oriented and non-dialogic. The idea of “involvement, understanding and engagement” extends citizen participation beyond simply voting at regular intervals to more regular communicative action. It suggests a more proactive approach to communicating with citizens and others.

As highlighted above, community participation is a mandated practice for local government in New South Wales. However, the legislation does not seek to define participation beyond identifying general social justice principles (of which participation is one) and outlining the requirement for all local governments in the state to have a community engagement strategy for major plans. The NSW Division of Local Government (DLG) states that participation within social justice principles means “all people... are consulted in appropriate and meaningful ways and otherwise have the opportunity to participate in decision-making that affects their lives” (2010b, p. i). From this source, we can take it that participation in the context of local government in New South Wales means all people to whom a given local government provides services (such as residents, business owners, employees, visitors and non-resident voters) have a right to have input into that local government’s decision-making processes. Such rights may be enacted through accessing and commenting on proposals and plans, standing for and voting in elections, attending council meetings, joining council committees, and giving feedback on services (Local Government Act, Ch. 4).
For the purposes of this thesis, exclamations of involvement, participation and engagement between citizens and local governments are considered within the framework of the participatory media practices of community engagement. The remainder of this chapter examines the common practices of community engagement, with particular reference to participatory media, in the case study local government areas. It outlines the common tools and techniques used, such as those hinted at above, and analyses the thinking about community engagement and participation at each of the councils, based on information provided in the interviews.

Use of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

In their Community Engagement Strategies, Wollongong City Council, Wingecarribee Shire Council and Wollondilly Shire Council each refer to the International Association of Public Participation’s (IAP2) ‘Public Participation Spectrum’. The Spectrum “is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program” (IAP2, n.d.). It is intended to define, for both the public and practitioner, the level of engagement expected at each stage of any given project.

Figure 11 below demonstrates the five levels of public participation, with an opportunity for those designing community engagement processes to determine the appropriate level based on their goal and to make a clear statement to the public with regard to the level of participation that can be expected.
Figure 11: The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IAP2’S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the ‘Inform’ level, those managing the engagement process are promising only to keep the public informed of progress on decisions, while the ‘consult’ level adds the requirement to “listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations”. This level suggests a fairly straightforward level of engagement which might include the opportunity to respond to plans or development applications on display. At the ‘involve’ level of the Spectrum, a promise is made to “ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed”. Such an approach is beginning to be truly participatory in that it embeds the possibility of a public-developed alternative being selected as the final outcome.

The final two levels of the Spectrum are much more directly participatory. The ‘collaborate’ level, for example, commits to “work together with you [the public] to formulate solutions”. To this point, all levels have retained decision-making power with those managing the engagement process (in the case of this thesis, the local government authorities). However, the final level ‘empower’ places final decisions in the hands of the public and commits the council to “implement what you decide”.

Wollongong City Council’s (2013) Community Engagement Policy includes an adapted version of the Spectrum that removes the fifth level, ‘empower’. However, it includes more detail than either the original Spectrum or the Local Government Act, as it specifies techniques, tools and channels designated for particular levels of engagement in addition to the goals and promises contained within the original Spectrum.
Table 12: Wollongong City Council’s levels of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT *</th>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Clear communication from Council to the community to assist their understanding of decisions that have been made.</td>
<td>Council seeks feedback from the community on draft plans, services, projects or policies. The community has an opportunity to have their say before a final decision is made.</td>
<td>Council works with the community to understand issues and involves community members in designing possible solutions.</td>
<td>Council will offer opportunities for members of the community to work with us to understand issues and develop a range of solutions. We will work together to make a decision on a preferred solution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Promise**            | - We will use a variety of communication methods to keep the community informed.  
- We will strive to ensure that information about Council services and plans is accessible and readily available.  
- Council will provide community updates and information on decisions.  
- Council acknowledges that sometimes it has to inform the community on decisions the community cannot change. | - Council will provide opportunities for the community to provide feedback on plans and projects that will be considered in decision making.  
- Council is committed to providing clear information about how and when the community can have their say and how feedback will be used. | - Council will provide opportunities for the community to work directly with Council to ensure we understand aspirations, opportunities, and concerns and that these are incorporated as often as possible into plans.  
- We will provide feedback on how community input influenced decisions. | - Council will partner with the community on the development of alternatives and solutions. |
| **Techniques**         | Council’s website and online media channels  
Council newsletters  
Letters and emails  
Fact sheets  
Customer service  
Events and festivals  
Kiosks and information sessions | Public Access Forum  
Ward meetings  
Community forums  
Kiosks  
Surveys and submissions  
Online engagement  
Communication channels  
Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel | Ward meetings  
Community forums  
Kiosks  
Reference and Advisory groups  
Focus groups  
Workshops  
Online engagement  
Communication channels | Focus groups  
Workshops  
Reference and Advisory groups  
Online engagement  
Communication channels |

* Adapted from IAP2
Each of the higher levels of engagement on Wollongong’s spectrum (consult, involve, and collaborate) specify ‘online engagement’ and ‘communication channels’ as techniques to be used in community engagement initiatives at those levels. These two points in particular are likely to involve participatory media, in that these media forms have the opportunity for a public dialogue between the council and the community.

Interestingly, Wollongong’s version of ‘Inform’ is the most detailed option available in terms of what it promises to the community, and is more detailed than the inform level in the IAP2 Spectrum. Here, ‘Inform’ appears to entail the need to implement social justice principles such as ‘access’ when communicating with the community, but also acknowledges what council sees as the need to make decisions that “the community cannot change” (n.p).

The ‘Involve’ level in Wollongong’s plan is a slightly less ambitious version of the involvement that seems to be imagined by the IAP2. Where the IAP2 Spectrum states “We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed”, Council mitigates the opportunities for involvement at this level by saying suggestions will be incorporated “as often as possible”. This is a clause not included in the original Spectrum.

Wingecarribee Shire Council’s (2014a) Community Engagement Policy directly quotes from all five levels of the IAP2 Spectrum, rather than adapting it as Wollongong has. Yet, like Wollongong, Wingecarribee clearly states that the level of engagement that will apply at each level is to be determined on a case-by-case basis. This is a statement designed to mitigate council’s commitment to the engagement practices the Spectrum is designed to foster.

In a wider Communications Strategy (2014b, p. 4), Wingecarribee Council writes it is “already actively exploring new technology while maintaining its presence across traditional
channels and has an extremely proactive approach to communication and engagement”. This claim would appear to be reinforced by the fact that Wingecarribee Shire Council was asked to give a presentation on the development of their new ‘media centre’ website to other council staff from across southern New South Wales, as recounted in the interviews. Interviewee S6 views Wingecarribee’s role in setting up the separate media centre site as innovative, and hopes this model would catch on with other councils: “We’d like to think that a few of the other councils go, ‘hey this is a great idea’ in a couple of years or months’ time and come on board” (S6, interview).

Wollondilly Shire Council’s Community Engagement Framework (2013) reorganises the IAP2 Spectrum into three “elements”, namely:

1. Information
2. Consultation
3. Participation

The descriptions of the first two are drawn almost word for word from IAP2, while the third is further divided into the remaining three elements of IAP2’s Spectrum (involvement, collaboration, and empowerment). The reason for this rearrangement is unclear, although the final empowerment option makes clear that “All final decisions rest with Council or a delegated officer of Council”, unlike the potential inherent in the ‘Empower’ level of the original IAP2 Spectrum.

In each case, the councils have adapted the IAP2 Spectrum for their own ends and in their own way, yet each council is also careful to avoid leaving too much decision-making power in the hands of community members. Wollongong does this by ignoring the ‘Empowerment’ level of the Spectrum entirely, while Wollondilly and Wingecarribee have each inserted provisions that largely render the ‘Empower’ option as proposed by IAP2 unviable.
Further, it is unclear to what extent each council seeks to implement the Spectrum (or their adaptation) when conducting community engagement via participatory media. Informant S4 suggested community members were more likely to participate at the ‘Involve’ level of the Spectrum, but only if they were asked face-to-face: “we try to move more to an involve level, but you don't necessarily see that in the online space”. For an LGA wide cycling/bike plan, the informant explained “we had thousands of people respond to the Involve level and now we've had about eighty respond to the exhibition, which is 'here's the plan, do you like it or not?'”

Public participation spectrums are just one tool deployed by the case study local governments in their efforts at establishing community engagement processes. They also adapt and use specific communications technologies like social network sites and designated community engagement websites for these purposes. Innovative models like media centre websites, hosting imagery and resources for access and use by both members of the public and the professional media, can also underpin community engagement processes by making councils seem more open.

‘Anytime, any place, any topic’: Bang The Table and Engage Wollondilly

In part, it is possible that limitations in engagement practices may be driven by the widespread adoption of proprietary software for the purposes of community engagement. All case study local governments have specific engagement websites separate from their main websites, two of which are provided by the Australian private company Bang The Table, which offers a series of software options designed for councils and others who conduct formal public engagement processes. Reasons for adopting this software, according to Bang The Table’s founder (Butteriss, 2014) include: accounting for internet saturation; overcoming time poverty; engaging under-represented groups; making better decisions;
building community ownership; building community; driving cultural change; managing the conversation; debunking myths; unearthing issues; and reducing cost.

Wingecarribee and Wollongong Councils each have a site provided by Bang The Table, respectively called ‘Your Say Wingecarribee’ and ‘Have Your Say Wollongong’. Wollondilly Council, however, has developed a custom community engagement site called ‘Engage Wollondilly’.

Community engagement sites like those provided by Bang The Table shape the way in which engagement is conducted by the nature of the tools they offer. On Facebook and Twitter, residents seeking to comment on issues and concerns were repeatedly directed to those outside sites (see Holland, 2015a; and section 5.2 of this thesis). Informants supported this observation, with S3 saying: “the social media side of the equation is meant to enhance that [engagement hub], by not so much taking the conversations over to Facebook but by letting people know we're talking about something and encouraging them to visit that site.” Thus, these sites become the locus of seemingly all dialogic community engagement practices, with the so-called social media sites like Facebook used by councils primarily to broadcast messages about consultations taking place on engagement sites.

The engagement sites themselves are typically used as a document repository, hosting (for example) draft plans and policies on which residents are invited to make submissions. They have capability for comments, forums and surveys. Councils also post stimulus questions which are meant to provoke discussion of the issue at hand. However, a majority of the recent consultations on both ‘Your Say Wingecarribee’ and ‘Have Your Say Wollongong’ have utilised the survey or submission option which does not display comments and questions publicly. This may be due to privacy concerns, although other consultations do use open forums. Used this way, the community engagement sites offer little in the way of
participatory engagement compared to placing documents on public exhibition and seeking formal submissions. Furthermore, there is no obvious justification for using the community engagement sites in a limited manner when interested parties have already been directed there from other online locations that could have just as easily hosted the documents in question.

Figure 13, Figure 15, and Figure 16 on the following pages show screen captures of the main engagement hub websites for each of the three case study councils. Each figure provides an overview of the state of those sites at time of writing, including the open and recent consultations. These images are provided for illustrative purposes.
Figure 13: Have Your Say Wollongong
Your Say Wingecarribee

Wingecarribee Shire Council's community engagement hub

WE ARE LISTENING : HAVE YOUR SAY

We value your involvement and encourage you to have your say. Our current consultations are:

- Investing in our Future - special rate variation proposal
- Draft Street Tree Master Plan on exhibition
- Draft Community Safety Plan on exhibition
- Landscape plan drafted for Mass Vale Cemetery

If you prefer to engage with Council using traditional methods, simply pop into the libraries located in Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale or visit the Customer Service counter or our Civic Centre on Elizabeth Street, Moss Vale. For further information please call 02 4860 3988.

Draft Street Tree Master Plan on exhibition

We listened to your ideas about street trees earlier this year. Did we interest you correctly? Check out the draft Street Tree Master Plan currently on exhibition and let us know what you think.

Write to Council or complete an online submission form by 13 January 2018. Further information please contact Callum Gowan, Vegetation and Tree Management Officer on 02 4860 3988.

Consultation continues for SRV. Exhibited documents provide detail.

On Wednesday 8 December 2016 Wingecarribee Shire Council resolved to notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of councils intent to apply for a Special Rate Variation in the near future.

Councils considering rate increases must comply with the requirements set out in Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal’s (IPART) guidelines, including a notification confirming that “intention to apply” which they continue with consultation. Wingecarribee Shire Council has confirmed this intention and will now notify IPART as per the requirements set out in the IPART guidelines.

This consultation is currently on exhibition. For more information please contact Callum Gowan on 02 4860 3988.

Are you wise? Tell us how you manage your waste

This consultation has now concluded but you can still view related information using the links below.

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with the community to manage, reduce and recycle waste. Wingecarribee currently tops the State for recycling but we can do it better.

Please take a few minutes to complete our survey and let us know how you are going with your domestic waste management. Our current surveys are focussed on Ocean Garden Bins and Community Recycling Centres.

Draft Community Safety Plan on exhibition

This consultation has now concluded but you can still view related information using the links below.

Wingecarribee Shire Council is currently finalising a new Community Safety Plan. The draft plan was developed in consultation with our Community Safety Committee and Police from the Hume Area Command, using information gathered from a Community Safety Survey and road safety statistics. The draft plan identifies four key issues and details how Council will work with relevant stakeholders to respond to these issues in order to enhance community safety in the Wingecarribee Shire.

Continue reading

Landscape plan drafted for Mass Vale Cemetery

This consultation has now concluded but you can still view related information using the links below.

A draft Landscape Master Plan has been prepared in consultation with financial directors and other stakeholders to identify the historic Mass Vale Cemetery. The plan aims to strengthen the cemetery’s meaning as a place and utilise its inherent natural features and views, thereby promoting the funeral industry, as well as being an relaxing place for people to reflect and return, with the future.

Continue reading

Have your say Wingecarribee

This dedicated website is now method Wingecarribee Shire Council is using to connect with our community, providing a direct link to Council’s decision making processes. We hope you will find this an easy and convenient way to contribute your ideas, feelings and opinions on key projects and services.

Take a look around and see how others have already participated, view the list of current projects and access the consultation.

It’s quick and easy to register and contribute anonymously with confidence of your selection. Registration is required if you wish to complete surveys and feedback forms. Just click on the orange discussion button, select topics and post a story about an experience or idea. Your privacy is protected and the discussion topics are moderated externally and independently of Council.

Dear Consultation Co-ordinator,


Important Links

- Wingecarribee Shire Council
- What’s On: Exhibition Items
- Waste & Recycling

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: ‘On Public Exhibition - what does this mean?’
A: This means we have become involved in Council consultation activities.

Q: Does Council have a Community Engagement Policy or Strategy?
A: Yes, it’s available on our website.

Wingecarribee Shire Council

Community Engagement Co-ordinator
Email: engagement@mossvale.nsw.gov.au

Customer Service Team
Phone: 02 4860 3988
Email: mossvalcshc@mossvale.nsw.gov.au

Figure 14: Your Say Wingecarribee
Figure 15: Engage Wollondilly

ECO\'MIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY EXHIBITION
14 Dec 2015

DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY EXHIBITION
1 Dec 2015
Council is seeking community feedback on its Draft Social Media Policy. The Policy outlines how Council intentions using social media as a resource, and provides direction for how we will use an organisation social media. Social media is an important tool that allows Council to engage with.

PICTON PLANE TREES
20 Nov 2015
Wollondilly Shire Council was seeking community feedback on the Plane Trees in Picton main street. Why were we asking for feedback? The Plane Trees have created differing views within the community about whether they should be replaced, removed or replaced with.

PICTON SPORTSGROUND OFF LEASH AREA
20 Nov 2015
Wollondilly Shire Council has an ongoing commitment to providing off leash animal areas across the Shire. Wollondilly currently has five off leash areas, including Alpin Park, Alpin & Babara Sportsground, Banjo ERA, Supplies and Stakes Park, Tannitha & Corndell Reserve, Thirteenth Mortensburg Sportsground, ...
Wollongong City Council’s *Have Your Say* site was being used, at the time of the study, primarily for ongoing consultations related to the large ‘Public Spaces Public Life’ study (considered further in the next section). Additionally, it was hosting documentation related to a new access road being planned for an expanding suburb. This mixed usage that Wollongong deploys the site for both an everydayness - that is, related to mundane activities such as road building - and larger overarching strategies.

Wingecarribee’s site, headlined ‘We are listening: have your say’, contained varied topics open for discussion. These included a street tree masterplan (another callback to the Shire’s image as having arcadian or natural features), and a contentious consultation on a special rate variation application which would increase rates by up to 40% over several years. Both Bang the Table sites had clearly marked registration options and would only accept feedback and submissions from registered users. Wollondilly’s site was custom built rather than using the pre-designed engagement package offered by a site like Bang the Table. At the time of writing, it contained a few open consultations including a tree strategy and social media policy.

Multiple interviewees noted that a particular advantage of using dedicated engagement software compared to social network services is the reporting tools offered by that software:

> I don't use social media for that [engagement], specifically Twitter and Facebook, is because it’s really hard to pull it out as a record, so you can't do a spreadsheet based on what was in there as simply as you can in 'engagement site' (S5, interview)

> We have used Facebook to some extent, but its not very successful in getting feedback. It has no reporting mechanisms, unless you sit down with paper and pens and actually write down how many likes, how many shares, you know, it's not great (S4, interview)
Interviewees were not aware of tools available through Facebook pages to download and capture such content. S3 indicated they keep an eye on the analytic information that Facebook provides, saying: “I haven't looked at geography on Facebook for a long time but, yeah, I'll have to go have a look when I go upstairs now” (S3, interview). However, others not aware of these capabilities, as the following exchange demonstrates:

   Researcher: Have you matched the demographics of the Facebook fans with the [council’s]’s demographics? Have you done anything like that?

   S2: What do you mean?

   Researcher: So on Facebook, you can get data about age of users, and where they live for example.

   S2: I don't think we have.

   S1: No, we haven't made those connections. (S1 and S2, interview).

Interviewees also thought that certain tools available through the engagement software made identifying important contributions easier. For example, one noted that staff could bypass their own value judgements on submissions made in the software discussion forums by considering the number of other commenters who had indicated support:

   The thing that the online engagement software takes care of is actually asking people to vote on people's comments, so I say it's rubbish and you say it's great, then five other people might actually tick on your comment 'that's great' (S4, interview)

Again, such tools were positioned in contrast so more widely used social network sites such as Facebook, even though those sites have similar mechanisms for identifying support for a particular point of view.
For geographically large local governments, the affordances offered by always-open consultation mechanisms and platforms allow many citizens to participate in decision making and feedback processes, which might not be possible if they had to attend town hall meetings of the past. S1 noted of their council’s engagement site:

the aim of the online forum, or portal, would be to access everybody - young, old, and those that work… outside of [the LGA], and give them the opportunity to have their say any time, any place, on any topic (S1, interview).

Thus the politics of place becomes open to more people through the use of tools such as these sites. In specific cases, it allows people the opportunity to promote their ideas about what their places should look like, or what developments should take place, and respond to or support the contributions of others.

Public Spaces Public Life Wollongong

Beginning in 2014, Wollongong City Council conducted a Public Spaces Public Life (PSPL) study intended to “complement the revitalisation of the city centre” and further progress on the 2007 City Centre Revitalisation Strategy and the City for People update (Wollongong City Council, 2015, n.p.). Such studies are an example of some of the processes by which local governments seek to exert influence over how places under their control develop and change.

The PSPL study and its outcomes and recommendations are an example of the politics of place in action as they produce particular imaginaries of place for endorsement by the Council. However, they indicate a complex layer to these processes which draw on global trends. Conducted by Gehl Architects, PSPL Wollongong is very similar to other PSPL from around the world, but with certain local additions. The banner image below in Figure 16 is
from the Have Your Say Wollongong community engagement website for Wollongong PSPL.

*Figure 16: Wollongong Public Spaces Public Life 2014 banner*

This figure represents an aspirational statement for the city insofar as it indicates a sense of a walkable, bright and youthful place. To represent walkability, it includes people on foot and numerous pathways they might take representing a simplified map of the city. It is a bright image, and many of the figures appear to be either younger people, or even children. The tagline (“towards a great city for people”) reinforces the suggestion that Wollongong is a city accessible and open to all residents, such as those represented by the diversity of the carefully-selected silhouettes.

The planning and consultation processes undertaken by local governments tend toward a production of place imaginaries that are stamped with the authority of the particular government in question given that they are conducted by and for those councils and used to inform plans and policies originating within them. The Wollongong PSPL study is an attempt to counteract such claims given the depth of its work. However, councils tend to only accept contributions to these processes in specified forms, an aspect of their work that diminishes claims of openness and inclusiveness.
5.2 Facebook and Twitter engagement\textsuperscript{36}

On September 12, 2013, the Wingecarribee Shire Council posted to its Facebook and Twitter pages an image of a former professional athlete restraining a kangaroo in the middle of a coffee-shop filled plaza. The human subject of the photograph was former Australian rules footballer Tony Lockett, who retired to the semi-rural Southern Highlands some years earlier. The kangaroo whose tail Lockett was holding had wandered into the middle of the town of Bowral and narrowly avoided being struck by a vehicle on the nearby main street. It was dazed and distressed but otherwise okay. The image is presented in Figure 17, below.

\textsuperscript{36} Portions of this section were first published in Holland (2015)
Figure 17: Tony Lockett captures a kangaroo in the middle of Bowral (Wingecarribee Shire Council, 2013a)
On Facebook, the post quickly became the council’s most interacted-with since their page was set up in March 2012. At time of writing, it remained the most re-shared post of any the council has created. 287 Facebook users and pages shared the image and post with their own networks. In terms of other posts on the council’s page, this post was only outdone on Facebook’s ubiquitous ‘like’ function by photos of volunteer firefighters battling local blazes later in 2013, but it was never bested on the share count. The image and story of how Tony Lockett came to grapple with a kangaroo in Bowral, a town of only about 8,000 people, soon spread around Australia on Fairfax Media websites, including that of the Melbourne metropolitan daily newspaper *The Age* (Sygall, 2013). Thus this relatively mundane story of a kangaroo finding its way into the main street of a rural township presents an interesting case study into how imaginings of place form and circulate online, often well beyond their original sites of production.

Just eighteen months earlier, public communication from this local government was mainly in the form of a broadcast model that consisted of: press releases emailed to local media and others who had asked to receive them; an occasional email newsletter; a quarterly shire-wide mail out; and articles and reports carried by local professional media organisations. Tony Lockett and the kangaroo never appeared in an official council press release and were only ever published by the council on the social network sites Facebook and Twitter, the accompanying image duly acknowledged as having been “sent in” by a fan of the Wingecarribee’s Facebook page (Wingecarribee Shire Council, 2013a). So how did this medium-sized local government authority come to have this offbeat, irreverent story published so widely when, even by their own standards, it was not really newsworthy (since it was never published in a press release)? And what does this tell us about how the politics of place is conducted in the media networks under examination here?
It would be simple, and it is a logical seduction, to say that the novelty of this image was partly its appeal. But to attribute the spread of this particular post only to novelty would be to ignore Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism that “the medium is the message” (1964). By ignoring the method of distribution in favour of acknowledging only the content, we are missing the underlying behaviour, the medium through which it occurs, and the meaning inherent in that medium. These dynamics are part of the phenomena of the emergence of participatory media technologies that potentially empower audiences to create, alter, share and comment on material in new ways. McLuhan argues, “[t]he effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as ‘content’” (1964, p. 19). The post is only content for the medium of the social network site, which has an internal logic geared to sharing, replication and spread of content. By establishing a presence on Facebook and other social networks, the council inevitably became a node in the process of data proliferation and concurrently invited other users to take agency and control of some content on the network. By participating in these networks and inviting participation and comments from residents, Councils are also starting to hand over some of their role in conducting the politics of place. Council organisations invite their Facebook fans to initiate contact and co-decide what content comes to represent the region. This is part of creating, shaping and circulating ideas of place. In other words, it is part of the conduct of the politics of place as it is a method by which publics can extend their senses to gather information about what is occurring in the sites with which they are engaged.

This section considers the interaction of users on the online social networks sites Facebook and Twitter with council-produced media on those sites. It will reveal how individual users and groups on social network sites take an active participatory approach to content shared and created by local governments on social network sites, by challenging, commenting on, questioning, and propagating the content on these channels. Such processes are part of an
active negotiation of the users’ position in relation to the places with which they have affective ties and, therefore, their active role in imagining those places. In seeking to have some influence over the decisions and actions of local government authorities, users are establishing their claim to place by participating in a process of collective imagining.

Jenkins identifies three potential levels or moments of media participation: “production, selection, and distribution” (2006b, p. 275). As each of these occur on the social network channels of local governments, they have the potential to become visible and therefore lay claim to being genuine attempts to influence, engage or collaborate with local government, and especially to being participatory. It is these three activities, exemplified by specific actions undertaken by users on the local government channels on the social network sites Facebook and Twitter, which underpin the description and interpretation of participation in this section.

Any methodology intended to address the complex situation laid out in previous sections of this thesis must account for a wide variety of underlying and competing factors in the use of internet-based media as an engagement mechanism between councils and their publics. Australian councils have reported that social media (typically meaning specific social network sites – see Glossary) have the most value for events, general community engagement, engagement with young people and project-based engagement, amongst other factors (Purser, 2012). In addition to accounting for the theoretical depth and wide motivation for using such media, the actual practices of councils must be taken into account.

For local governments, the active participatory behaviour of users potentially introduces a new element to the legal requirements imposed by state governments for consultation with their communities. In New South Wales, local governments must prepare an integrated Community Strategic Plan accompanied by a Community Engagement Strategy, both “based
on social justice principles” (DLG, 2013, p. 8), one of which is “participation and consultation about decisions” (DLG, 2010, p. 1). Further, the NSW Local Government Act (1993) lists numerous ways for the community to “influence what a council does” (Ch. 4), the primary focus of which is making submissions and commenting on or objecting to proposals and plans. The Act specifies that these are to be written submissions (s. 706), but does not restrict the medium of delivery. Therefore, the Act appears to be open to a variety of forms of mediated participation that might take place on social network sites.

Practices usually associated with audienceship become visible when performed online and are therefore implicated as active, participatory and social (Burgess and Green, 2009). These include: “quoting, favoriting, commenting, responding, sharing, and viewing” (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 57). The online environment offers visibility to these actions by generating quantifiable and collectable data. In part, it is the availability and ubiquity of this data that presses the case for councils to reconsider what is counted as participation and consultation. Macnamara convincingly argues that user actions on social network sites should be understood as “cultural practices of participation” (2013, p. 167) in order to appropriately institute listening practices in civic institutions. Jenkins (2006b) and Jenkins et al. (2013) apply the term “spreadable media” to content that users freely and actively engage with. Jenkins argues that spreadable media “carries with it a greater sense of agency on the part of the user” (2006b, p. 274) than widely used terms like meme. The data discussed in this section was generated by users exercising this very agency, further underlining its potential understanding as active participation in the imagining of place.

The data collected for this section was sourced through two third party applications from the social network sites Facebook and Twitter, and from the interview series outlined earlier. These two websites were selected for the availability of data extraction tools, their relative
use by the councils as compared to other social media sites, and data comparability. Posts were sourced for the whole calendar year 2013 in order to give a robust comparative sample as this was the first year that all three councils had both Twitter and Facebook pages.

Furthermore, by selecting data from an entire calendar year, a full series of annual events and activities could be considered. Both suites of data were collected in mid-February 2014 and are not guaranteed to be free from error, although manual inspection of a selection of posts indicates that they are accurate to the extent that such posts remain visible on the sites in question. Bruns et al. note that: “no retrieval methods guarantee a comprehensive capture of Twitter data” (2011, p. 20). The same can be said for Facebook, though both datasets appear to be representative samples. Neither dataset includes posts that may have been deleted prior to collection of the data.

The tables below (Figure 18 and Figure 19) set out some key comparative characteristics of the Twitter and Facebook accounts of each selected local government.

*Figure 18: Twitter Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Profile Established</th>
<th>Followers*</th>
<th>Number of Tweets (2013)</th>
<th>User Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wollondilly</td>
<td>03/01/2010</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>1379</td>
<td>@wdillycouncil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>11/02/2011</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>@Wollongong_City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingecarribee</td>
<td>15/08/2013</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>@wsc_media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Followers as at date of data collection: approximately February 15, 2014*
The first of the third-party applications used for data collection is NetVizz, a “general-purpose data-extractor for different subsections of the Facebook platform” (Rieder, 2013, p. 354). NetVizz calls on the Facebook Application Programming Interface (API) to capture data from selected Facebook pages or groups. This application was used to collect data from the main Facebook page of each of the three selected local governments. The data extracted included:

- text of posts made on and by each of those Facebook pages during 2013
- extensive metadata related to posts (time, date, links)
- images in posts
- whether the post was made by the page or a user
- number of likes, comments and shares on each post

The data was anonymised. NetVizz provides an engagement score that proved useful in deciding which posts had proved particularly popular. This score is a simple whole figure that
comes from adding up the total of number of likes, comments and shares on each post. However, more work needs to be done to deduce the relative value of each of these actions, so the resulting figures are used with caution.

Data from Twitter was gathered via the service Twitonomy (www.twitonomy.com), which calls on Twitter’s API to return a variety of information from selected Twitter accounts or hashtags, and also displays some data graphically. The information returned includes:

- text of the original post
- metadata (links to the post, the platform from which it was posted, the type of post)
- retweet and favourite counts.

Unlike NetVizz, Twitonomy does not provide the text of replies made by other users to posts. However, these are available on Twitter itself and were briefly considered. Twitonomy provides information indicating which users were most replied to, mentioned and retweeted by each of the studied accounts, indicating the level of public engagement occurring between council accounts and other users. On the whole, the service allows efficient collection and retrieval of Twitter data within chosen parameters.

The data from the Facebook and Twitter accounts of each of the three local governments show that the councils largely make informational posts to these channels and often ignore attempts at interaction from users. Nonetheless, users continue to undertake participatory activities by commenting, questioning, challenging, liking, and sharing content. There are indications that the councils undertake limited response behaviour, usually by directly addressing comments in a customer-service like paradigm. This aligns with McNamara’s (2013) observation that governments tend not to resource architectures of listening despite seeking out voices. The data indicates that although the three local governments post
regularly on both Twitter and Facebook, in 2013 one of the councils (Wollondilly) posted to Twitter almost exclusively as cross posts from Facebook and, as such, did not make use of the technical and cultural features of Twitter such as hashtags and the retweet function.

It is important to acknowledge that local governments face resource and institutional constraints that may impact upon their ability to adapt to new technologies. Evans and Reid (2013) suggest widespread consultation might slow down decision-making and make it easily influenced by sectional interests, while Artist et al. (2012) identify a focus on financial concerns and efficient decision making as barriers to implementing changes to consultation practices. Such constraints are potentially part of the reason why local governments may not seek to incorporate additional forms of information gathering into their consultation and engagement practices.

During the sample period there was a series of bushfires that impacted all three of the local government areas and this is reflected in the data. In addition to direct fire impact on areas within their boundaries, the councils were also affected by major road closures related to the fires. Towns and villages in the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Shires were directly impacted by the fire, as were roads and outlying areas in Wollongong City Council. All three local governments posted on their social network channels about these fires, and those posts are among the most widely shared and commented upon on both Twitter and Facebook.

Interviewee S5 noted that there was a definite upturn in engagement metrics on those social sites during this period, but that capturing and measuring that data was difficult:

when we had the bushfires, we were having such a great level of interaction with the community and we were trying to capture all the comments they were making, but you basically have to go through and copy and paste each individual one and that's not a cost-effective use of your time. (S5, interview)
These considerations inform decisions about what tools to use in everyday public engagement practices, although in the case of emergency management they are secondary to providing information for council staff.

In particular, the bushfire incident offers an opportunity to consider the spread of content and impact of extensively network media in these local governments in the context of recent research on the role of Twitter in the Queensland floods of 2011 (Bruns et al., 2011). Interviewees C1, S1, S2, S5, and S6 all raised their experiences of using social network sites during emergency events such as these fires. Of particular relevance is the role of retweeting in “amplifying the visibility of messages sent by ‘official’ media and emergency authority accounts” and “mythbusting” posts which aim to correct misinformation (Bruns et al., 2011, p. 29). On Facebook, the equivalent action is sharing posts by official emergency service accounts, which distributes the original post in context with a link to the source page.

Wingecarribee Council undertook both amplifying and mythbusting approaches, frequently retweeting and sharing posts from the main NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) accounts as well as posts by the RFS Southern Highlands Team (SHT). Indeed, @RFSSHT and @NSWRFS were the two most retweeted accounts by Wingecarribee Shire Council in 2013, with 32 and 20 retweets respectively, accounting for over half of all retweets by the @WSC_Media account. Tellingly, retweets of @NSWRFS posts were the only time Wollondilly Council made use of the retweet function during the sample period. In both cases, the councils were acting to amplify messages for their own audiences in order to help spread information during the fire crisis. The @NSWRFS Twitter account is also prominent among retweet counts for Wollongong council.

Councillor C1 was present in an RFS command centre during the fire events, and commented: “as soon as there was a briefing then I would get that information out there and
then it would be shared, or directing our staff to actually put it out there” (C1, interview). This practice ensured information was quickly amplified amongst community members, giving some insight into the importance of timely, place-based and accurate information during such events. S2 was similarly effusive about the potential of social network sites to contribute to information-spread, noting:

One of the reasons we started with social media in the first place was for this purpose, so that we could grow our community on social media so that if an emergency came up, that’s how we could communicate with them (S2, interview).

Wingecarribee additionally undertook what Bruns et al. (2011) refer to as mythbusting practices: posting updates that seek to address misinformation. For example, when residents of the village of Hill Top were worried that State Emergency Service (SES) crews were undertaking an evacuation order, the council responded by tweeting:

There is NO evacuation order in place for Hill Top. SES Crews were doing a familiarisation run only. #Nswfires (@WSC_Media, 3:19pm, October 23, 2013)

A similar message, though with more detail, was shared on Facebook. The Facebook post was onward shared 29 times, and ‘liked’ by 60 users (Wingecarribee Shire Council, 2013b). Additionally, a number of the comments were simply users tagging other users to alert them to the post. The total engagement metric provided by NetVizz, which takes account of all of these data points, indicates that there were 117 active engagements with that post, with each moment of engagement further replicating and spreading the content in the network and building up layers of place information.
In comparison, four of Wollondilly Shire Council’s five most popular Facebook posts in 2013 involved crisis content. In June, the council posted a photograph of flooding that included a list of road closures in the shire (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2013b). This post was widely shared. Three other popular posts by Wollondilly council related to the October fires, including an image of dozens of fire trucks at the town of Wilton overlayed with text (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2013c). This format was evocative of popular online memes that make use of textual and visual templates which users combine as they see fit (Whitman, 2004; Pullum, 2004). This post also attracted significant attention. Another post discussed options for people seeking to move animals to shelter and attracted many comments from site users seeking to collaborate with the council in that endeavour (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2013d), while notification of a town meeting for a village under threat was also shared by many users (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2013e). Despite these four posts being on the same topic, they each took a different approach. Bruns et al. (2011) suggest three common types of social network posts in response to crisis events are: sense-making; information sharing; and practical offers of assistance. All three of these are apparent in these posts by Wollondilly Council. The socio-technical features of social network services facilitate these and many other types of participatory practice. Though the council initially published these posts, users actively shared, liked and commented on the content, propagating it throughout the network and spreading its impact.

On both Twitter and Facebook, other users actively participated in propagating the information shared by councils by sharing, liking and retweeting. The responses to these natural disasters, in which users collaborated with the local governments to spread important information on social network sites, demonstrate participatory principles at play in the management of space. These actions are socio-technical in nature, taking advantage of the inbuilt features of the particular social network, but also requiring active participation of
users and the trust of communities built up in place and performed in mediated spaces like social network sites.

The data indicates that users posting to the local government Facebook pages are often seeking to directly influence council activities involving the management of space in very specific, often prosaic ways. The visibility of these posts as well as their further propagation by way of comments and likes adds strength to the proposition that they are genuine attempts at participation or engagement in a politics of place. However, Vigoda (2002) argued that deployment of the customer/client paradigm by governments denotes a certain passivity on the part of citizens that privileges the role of government as service provider instead of participant. This underlines Mcnamara’s (2013) suggestion that voice is favoured over listening by governments. That is, customer service approaches to participatory media seek to hear and respond to voices, not to listen and understand them. The data in this study demonstrates that users are sometimes directed to make formal written submissions to council that, presumably, are dealt with privately rather than in public, unlike posts on social networks. Staff member S6 said that other parts of the council organisation “aren’t on the same page”, meaning that it was difficult to direct citizen enquiries unless they were delivered through the “right channels” (S6, interview). Partly, this was also due to the technical limitations of social network sites through which the residents are reaching out: “it’s really hard to pull it out as a record, so you can't do a spreadsheet based on what was in there as simply as you can in [specific engagement website]” (S6, interview). These responses can be categorised as customer service like responses (Vigoda, 2002), and often attracted criticism from the original poster and other commenters.

Based on the NetVizz engagement score (total of likes, comments and shares), Wingecarribee Shire Council’s most engaged-with post in 2013 was the image of Tony Lockett holding a
kangaroo. The nature of the Facebook platform and user activity meant that many users were drawn into the conversation as more comments and likes were posted on the original photograph, propagating the material throughout the user networks. The nature of the content helped to form a temporary public around the post, signalling the social nature of participation on social network sites. danah boyd refers to these context-dependent user groups as networked publics, which means “the space constructed through networked technologies and… the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (2014, p. 8). Users enrolled themselves into an imagined public and sought to re-imagine the spaces and places of their communities in a very real sense.

The most engaged-with posts on Wollongong City Council’s Facebook page in 2013 were more diverse than those on other pages considered in this section. This may be on account of the fact that Wollongong has both a much higher number of followers on their Facebook page and larger population than either of the other councils. There are six posts on Wollongong’s page that have a NetVizz engagement figure higher than 100, indicating their relative popularity. Of these, one relates to the aforementioned bushfire, two were informational posts reminding users of forthcoming smoking bans in the city’s main open air mall, two were user complaints, and one was addressing public concern about the financial position of the council. The two user complaints were also about very different matters, with one seeking support for more skate parks in the Wollongong local government area and a second complaining about the state of the mall after council-funded renovation works had finished. Wollongong Council sought to actively address these complaints by posting timely and factual responses. Other users joined in and debated the merits of the developments, their comments attracting further participants. However, in both cases, Wollongong Council only made a single response to the post and then allowed users to continue discussion amongst
themselves. The no smoking posts attracted a series of largely positive comments and likes, as well as a high number of shares.

A post about Wollongong’s financial position, which was part of a larger attempt to consult the community about potential strategies to address the issue, attracted 68 comments, including a mix of negative and positive feedback (Wollongong City Council, 2013b). In total, the post’s NetVizz engagement score was 167 – the highest of any in the Wollongong sample. Council participated in this conversation and often encouraged users to provide their feedback via the official website. The irony of this approach is that users were actively participating in providing comments and feedback on the plans at hand, and yet their input was not acknowledged beyond being asked to provide it somewhere else. The council seemed to be seeking this input on Facebook and yet was asking users not to provide it in that space. I argue that given users are actively taking the time to participate in social network site-based conversations, this participation should be seen as legitimate, especially when it has apparently sought out. The conversations that took place on Wollongong’s most engaged with Facebook posts in 2013 attracted a variety of users from both within and beyond the local government area and many attempted to influence council decision-making by actively participating and sharing information.

This section provides some evidence for the active participatory intent of users who connect and interact with the selected local governments in public on social networks sites. In the context of this thesis, such participatory actions can be seen to be strongly linked to the experience of place for the participants and, more directly, to the habitation of place by those seeking to exert some influence over the relevant local government authority. In this way, Jenkins’ moments of participation – production, selection, and distribution – (2006, p. 275)
have the potential to become visible and lay claim to being genuine attempts to influence, engage or collaborate with local government in a politics of place.

The local governments themselves have access to tools that can draw out the data behind these moments of participation, in addition to the actual written text of many of the user posts. The written posts alone strongly lay claim to being recognised by the local governments as genuine acts of participation, whether or not associated data such as likes are taken into account. Whether making original posts or comments on posts or mentions on Twitter, users are demonstrating agency, thus supporting the case that the content of such posts constitute valid types of submissions or comments as invited under the *Local Government Act 1993*. Moreover, such practices are part of the complex mediated imagining of both place and publics that may occur on social network sites.

What account of place could extend to include the variety of ontologically distinct elements described in this section (a kangaroo, Tony Lockett, bushfires, potholes, and budgets)? The only reasonable approach for taking account of the wide diversity of actants in the networks of associations that make up place is that suggested by ANT: tracing entities across the associations that make them visible and relate them to each other. Place emerges from the complex negotiations between the various entities about what imaginaries are valid or worthwhile for a given locational referent.

### 5.3 Conclusion

Although local governments deploy a rhetoric of engagement, their activities generally fall toward the lower levels of communication (informing and consulting), and never achieve fully participatory goals as indicated in their own adaptations of the IAP2 Spectrum. The process of participation is most often initiated through action on behalf of the relevant council.
authorities as there is no specific legislative provision for the public to raise issues outside of those already being considered by the council in some way. This is demonstrated by the lack of engagement and listening practice that occurs in social network sites even when councils directly ask citizens to provide feedback.

Nonetheless, the mediated spaces opened up by the local government authorities, including community engagement websites and social networking sites, provide opportunities for citizens to contest and negotiate aspects of place, including proposed developments and by raising their own concerns. As such, these mediated spaces can be seen as part of the politics of place, contributing to the overall perspective on the role of media in the networks of the politics of place that is developed in this thesis. Such processes are also part of the broader trend towards governance, which involves co-created services in which citizens have at least some say over the way that governments go about conducting the business of managing place and space.

The next chapter considers the ways in which citizens create their own mediations of space in order to open up and contest politics of place processes in alignment with a broad range of other actants. This is a further demonstration of the potential role of participatory media in creating opportunities for public groups to orient themselves toward place as an object of concern.
Chapter 6: Citizen imagining of place

In July 2013, a reporter for the non-profit citizen-founded and run website Illawarra News arrived at a press briefing with Wollongong City Council to hear about some controversial land re-zonings. The reporter expected, like the representatives of other media organisations present, to be given access to council information in order to prepare his reports for publication. But the reporter wasn’t representing a traditional media organisation. He was writing voluntarily for Illawarra News. Council’s media liaison told the reporter that since he wasn’t “accredited”, he couldn’t gain access to the documents before they were released publicly (Illawarra News, 2013, n.p.). Until that point, Illawarra News say they had been treated like all other media organisations by Wollongong City Council. They had been given access to the media desk at Council meetings and copied in to emailed press releases. But now, an accreditation policy – one which was not subsequently released despite requests for access (Illawarra News, 2013, n.p.) – stood in the way of this reporter and his organisation participating in his local government.

There are numerous intertwined issues that can be unpacked from this short anecdote.
Wollongong City Council was under pressure about the controversial matter, which was slated for discussion at a forthcoming Council meeting. Those meetings are “required, as a general rule, to be open to the public” under the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW, Ch. 4). The Act makes mention of media organisations only insofar as requiring councils to make certain things public in newspapers and regulating filming in public places. It does not designate who can act as a media person, nor does it require councils to draw such a distinction. The Act, then, presumes representatives of media organisations to be members of the public. It does not set them aside in a particular category and assign attendant responsibilities and rights. How, then, do councils seek to decide who gets to participate in
decision-making processes and who does not? Why do they designate special responsibilities and special access to certain members of the public and not others? Members of the *Illawarra News* had chosen to participate in local government in a way previously reserved for recognised and accredited media organisations, and in the process raised questions about the distinctions between the media and the public. Individuals, governments and citizens now all have access to participatory media tools that were formerly the preserve of media professionals and specialists and as a consequence, the ways in which governments operate is also being challenged.

As shown earlier, a purpose of the *Local Government Act 1993* is to “encourage and assist the effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government” (s.7), a provision which suggests not only something of the aims of local government generally, but also the role of citizens. While local governments make some effort to identify and engage with particular publics, as described in the previous chapter, citizens themselves may self-organise via participatory media and seek to contribute to local policy and the way their places are imagined. This chapter considers how publics like those reporting for *Illawarra News* and their audience use participatory media to engage with local governments and conduct a politics of place beyond the direct community engagement spaces created by local governments themselves.

The first section below will examine several discussions around the public mobilisation of place imaginaries via the social networking service Instagram, the method for which is described in that section. The second section will build upon this review to consider how publics use social media platforms to engage in campaigns around proposed developments that they believe are detrimental to place. Finally, the third section turns to a more established participatory technology - blogs - in consideration of how these have been deployed in the
case study local government areas in the enactment of the politics of place. Each of these examples relies upon broad networks of associations between agents such as individuals, the places concerned, technological devices, and the local governments with whom they are often seeking to interact.

6.1 ‘Gramming’ place

Heidegger argues that “The human’s relation to places, and through places to spaces, inheres in his dwelling” (cited in Elden, 2001, p. 87). He goes on to note “The relationship between the human and space is none other than the dwelling” (ibid. emphasis added). This section takes up this concern with the nature of place as something to be found or made through dwelling, as habitation made rich with experience, especially when the resultant place images are captured and propagated throughout user networks. The interest here is in how this place experience is received and performed in relation to a recently-prominent media object - Instagram hashtags. Such a process is necessarily relational, in that it occurs in and through relationships with others as well as with the media within which it occurs. In addressing these perspectives, this section demonstrates a method of place habitation which is practiced and received through media objects in a network of many actants.

The co-occurrence of hashtags examined below is a particular form of tracing relations between actants, assuming that each hashtag is an actant in its own right. These hashtag networks are themselves situated amongst wider networks of heterogeneous agents who have certain influences upon place, in part by mobilising other actants (allies) to their cause. This section demonstrates how Instagram users undertake such mobilisation through a process of actively associating themselves with specific places and co-locating disparate Instagram hashtags together with posts.
Both Heidegger and Foucault suggest the daily lived experience of interaction with others as a way of being, and, importantly, as a way of asserting existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that that “Everydayness is a way to be - to which, of course, public manifestness belongs” (1996, p. 339, original emphasis). Everyday presence, then, exerts itself in “the being-with-one-another of publicness” (ibid.). In other words, it is a way of being that can only exist in relation with others. Foucault (cited in Elden, 2001, p. 116) also understands space/place as a relational concern: “This problem of the human site [l’emplacement humain] is… that of knowing what relations of proximity, what type of storage, circulation, mapping [reperage] and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation”. Elden (2001, p. 119) notes that “Foucault understands both physical and mental conceptions of space to be merely parts of a greater whole, abstractions from the more fundamental level of the lived experience.” Moores (2012) extends this point to argue that everyday media are part of an “at-homeness” (pp 54-74), or a way of knowing place itself through frequent interaction. By exploring competing idealised images of place produced by tourism organisations and user-produced media that similarly seek to represent place in stylised photographs, the paper argues for media-making as a performative act that constitutes place through experience by imprinting users and their bodies onto space, or the everydayness of being in place.

Instagram is a popular smartphone application with social networking capabilities that displays user photos in a reverse chronological stream. It allows users to apply a pre-set series of manipulations (which Instagram calls ‘filters’) to their images before posting, which pushes posts into the home-screen feeds of those who have chosen to follow the user. The company was purchased by the larger social network site Facebook in 2012. In addition to a caption, users often assign hashtags to their content. These short tags preceded by the ‘#’ symbol are used for a variety of reasons: “disambiguation (chips #futurism vs. chips
There is a burgeoning field of research that considers social media technologies like Instagram from a wide variety of methodological and theoretical standpoints. Such studies range from typologies for the kinds of content posted to Instagram (Hu et al., 2014); novel visualisation approaches of very large datasets (Hochman and Manovich, 2013); identification of semantic text-based practices (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2013); for establishing identity in contested spaces (Olive, 2015), and a consideration of the functional role of Instagram for tourism (Hays et al., 2013) or local government (Howard, 2012). There is also some popular precedent for attempting to establish the character of Wollongong based on Instagram photos since an exercise in assessing the supposed happiness of Australian cities was conducted by the company behind iPhone application Jetpac City Guides in 2014 and reported in popular news media (for example: news.com.au, 2014; Butler, 2014). Despite an unclear methodology ("image processing to count and size the smiles on people’s faces from all the cities in Australia", Jetpac City Guides, 2014), the study has established some popular credence for considering Instagram usage in Wollongong in this manner.

Hu et al. (2014) suggest an eight-fold typology in Instagram posts, consisting of: friends; food; gadgets; captioned photo/meme; pet; activity; selfies; and fashion. This includes one category that explicitly names place: activity ("both outdoor & indoor activities, places where activities happen, e.g., concert, landmarks", Hu et al., 2014, p. 3). Many of these categories
could include elements of placemaking or place-experience. The likelihood of this is especially obvious in ‘friends’, ‘food’, ‘pets’, ‘selfie’ and ‘fashion’, where such posts are composed in relation to a physical environment (especially a public physical environment).

Aside from the images themselves, the tags in Instagram posts can be understood as “a valuable representation that provides contextual information surrounding the perception and experience of the image” (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2013, p. 8). This element of the media object is just as performative as the image itself. Olive (2015) frames Instagram use by female surfers in Byron Bay, New South Wales, as a way of performing identities such as ‘local’ and ‘surfer’, claiming both identity types for women who previously had been excluded from surf media. I suggest that by capturing images for presentation on Instagram (that is, publicly), users are adopting an ideological position in regard to the subject/s of their photographs. By examining a stream of public images associated with particular places, a collective vision of those places can be constructed. It should be noted, however, that such a representation could be quite different from the image that individual users might have of a given place since their stream is likely to be limited to only a selection of users.

There is an ethical concern in choosing to sample and analyse Instagram data. Although it is strictly public in a technical sense (in that it can be accessed without restrictions such as signing in), Highfield and Leaver caution that users do not necessarily perceive privacy options on social network sites as a binary choice:

Researchers who collate datasets may also, inadvertently, reduce the experience of privacy by removing the original context of social media posts, including Instagram images and videos and metadata about them. By highlighting examples, or surfacing particular notable users from data not necessarily visible to everyday users, there is potential to alter the experience of privacy for an Instagram user (2015, n.p).
This is a concern echoed by Sveningsson Elm (in Markham & Baym, 2009, p. 77): “It can sometimes be that even if a certain internet medium admittedly is public, it doesn’t feel public to its users.” The issue here is that de-contextualising photographs or other information from posts on Instagram (indeed, on many internet services) can expose users to a level of publicity that they did not expect. In these instances, it would be desirable to obtain informed consent; a task that Sveningsson Elm (in Markham & Baym, 2009) notes is difficult if not impossible in large user-centred online communities. Given this, researchers should take steps to protect users by de-identifying and aggregating data and not replicating images that users might consider private or shared with only a small group.

Caution should also be applied in making comparisons between two distinct media types as there is some considerable difficulty in determining an appropriate sample of a user-curated site like Instagram compared to the relatively static and somewhat authoritative nature of tourism brochures. There are choices to be made in selecting, for example, the means of collating and extracting photographs from Instagram as there are a number of ways to undertake this work (for example, by geotagged location or hashtag), and there is no guarantee that users are even applying this information to their posts, or they could be applying it in unexpected ways. Highfield and Leaver (2015) argue: “while we can, and do, access Instagram photos using hashtags as a means of organisation, in many cases this affordance is likely to be more the focus of researchers, not individual users.” The folksonomy (a folk or popular taxonomy) (Highfield and Leaver, 2015) of hashtagging practices combined with slang and varied terminology for the same referent complicates these matters. For example, while I have broadly used the terms Wollondilly and Wingecarribee (following the names of the local governments), there are no geographic locations with these names so users are less likely to adopt them as hashtags compared to town-specific tags like #Bowral (Wingecarribee) or #Picton (Wollondilly). Other difficulties arise in that some
names (like Picton) are not unique to the studied region. By contrast, #Wollongong is a common tag. In this regard, the researcher’s own positioning as a member of the publics of these regions can help suggest appropriate sampling criteria. There are also technical barriers to accessing posts by geotag, not to mention questions about whether posts are accurately tagged in the first place, that similarly present difficulties for sampling.

Given the difficulties of choosing appropriate hashtags for this kind of work, I have been guided by the frequency of town mentions in the tourism brochures as outlined in Figure 7 (on page 105). That is, the town’s most dominant in each of the tourism brochures from that section of the thesis are largely those selected for hashtag extraction in this section. Of the identifiable towns in the Wingecarribee tourism brochure, the town of Bowral dominated, featuring in a quarter of photographs (number=27), followed by Mittagong with 15% (n=16). It was on this basis that the hashtag #Bowral was chosen for inclusion in the Instagram study. Similarly, Wollongong city (n=51) was by far the most dominant suburb of the 35 identifiable suburb locations in the Wollongong brochure, so the corresponding hashtag was chosen for the Instagram study. However, Wollondilly offers a more complicated case. Whereas Picton (n=20) was the most commonly mentioned town in the Wollondilly Visitor Guide, this town name is not unique to the Wollondilly Shire. Indeed, test searches on Instagram for the hashtag #Picton mostly surfaced images from the New Zealand town by the same name. The next most commonly mentioned towns are Tahmoor (n=10) and Thirlmere (n=8), the home of the Trainworks museum and annual Festival of Steam (both of which appear multiple times in the guide). The strong use of the word ‘Wollondilly’ throughout the tourism brochure suggests a useful alternative tag which did produce an appropriate sample. As a result, the hashtag adopted for the third Instagram search was simply #Wollondilly.
There are few or no off-the-shelf tools for extracting a large number of images from Instagram, so alternate methods must be devised. In this study, the Google Docs add-on Supermetrics was used to search for and collate into a spreadsheet the relevant tags. This file was then loaded in a web browser and parsed through a custom workflow in the Apple Mac Automator application. This method limits the number of images that can be extracted to a few hundred for any individual account. The collection of images from Instagram was undertaken in multiple iterations over the course of January and February 2015 and captured some images posted to the site as far back as June 2014. Each time, the sample was manually checked and cleansed of spam-type posts (especially by non-local users). Typically, spam posts removed were those that appeared to have no connection to the local region including physical retailers based in Sydney or elsewhere and a large number promoting an illegal European sports betting ring. Local retailers and users who displayed information on their profile or linked website indicating a presence or other connection to one of the three regions were not excluded.

below in Figure 20 are the key statistics from the sampled Instagram posts for the three hashtags. Though these are only small sample sizes, the dominance of the default ‘normal’ filter is clear. Although normal presents as a filter in the data, using it applies no obvious post-photography manipulation and should be considered to be a choice of no filter. The figures of 65-75% usage of normal suggest a significantly greater usage of no filter than previous studies. For example, Hu et al. (2014) imply a majority of users apply other filters, while Hochman and Manovich (2012) state that users do apply filters to a “large proportion of photos”. The discrepancy between my figures and those of earlier studies could be explained by changing user behaviour such as users applying manipulations in other applications before posting to Instagram. However, more work would be needed on this aspect of Instagram usage to make any clear statements in this regard.
## Figure 20: Key Instagram information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#Wollondilly</th>
<th>#Wollongong</th>
<th>#Bowral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. Posts</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Tags</td>
<td>1385</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>1122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Tags</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Users</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Popular Filters</td>
<td>Normal (65%), Mayfair (5%), X-Pro II (5%), Amaro (5%)</td>
<td>Normal (71.2%), Mayfair (4.5%), Amaro (4%)</td>
<td>Normal (52.1%), Ludwig (12.6%), Crema (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Comments</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Likes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17.99</td>
<td>19.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tags commonly co-occurring alongside #bowral include the regional descriptions #southernhighlands (n=52) and #highlands (n=52), #nsw (New South Wales, n=20), and
Australia \((n=13)\). There are also a series related to local businesses (#bestofvintage, #dirtyjanes, #miltonpark, #weknowpets, #mantragroup, #pepperscraigieburn and #bradmanmuseum). #Wedding, #weddings, #venue and #weddingvenue were also present a combined total of 27 times, suggesting the region’s association with luxurious and escapist celebration. Such tagging practices demonstrate that places exist within broader networks of other places. In this case, #bowral is clearly presented within a broader state and national context and, importantly, as something that can be captured and exported within media networks in those communities. It is my contention that the particular assemblage of tags used alongside those sampled indicate a kind of user-generated view of the character of the place in question, in turn shaping the experience of place for both the users applying the tags and others who might view those posts.

The #wollondilly tag is also co-occurrent with #southernhighlands \((n=23)\) and #sydney \((n=21)\). This user practice is slightly at odds with a comment in the introduction to the Wollondilly tourism brochure that the area is “at the foothills of the Southern Highlands” - in other words, nearby but apart from the Wingecarribee. However, it further strengthens the point that places are often presented in concert with nearby or otherwise related places. Other common tags that further highlight this usage are #lovelocalcamden \((n=20)\), the town names #buxton \((n=8)\) and #picton \((n=8)\) and the regional descriptions #dilly (short for Wollondilly, \(n=7\)) and #shire \((n=8)\). The #lovelocalcamden tag references another town at the border of Wollondilly. The presence of both this tag and a series of others related to #gardening \((n=20)\) and various garden products with 18-19 mentions each seems to be largely driven by the marketing efforts of a business located in the region. Tags related to weddings such as #wedding, #weddinginspo (‘wedding inspiration’) and #weddings (total \(n=42\)) are also common in this sample. One user in particular made a series of political statements about bushfire protection, making heavy of use of the tags #bushfire, #national (park), #protection
and #fuckthegreeniestheydontknowshit (all \(n=7\)). This usage indicates a particular political motivation for posting.

Tags that commonly occur alongside #wollongong show similar patterns to those of the other two areas. In particular, #sydney \((n=39)\) demonstrates the relationship between Wollongong and the nearby capital city as performed by users on Instagram. The tag #australia \((n=36)\) was also common, as was #nsw \((n=16)\). Other frequently used tags in the Wollongong sample include #summer \((n=29)\) and #beach \((n=34)\). These latter tags are more closely suggestive of the kinds of imagery of beach and seaside locations used throughout the Wollongong tourism brochure examined in section 4.2, highlighting how both governments and citizens occasionally draw upon common elements in framing their places.

There was a high prevalence of coastline and beach imagery, as well as a number of photographs taken from lookouts on the Illawarra escarpment, in the Instagram posts extracted from the #Wollongong hashtag. A reason for this might be found in the not insignificant scholarship on reciprocal links between community and place suggested by Kemmis (1990). Relph (1976) additionally argues:

> The relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values (p. 34).

Like Olive’s (2015) surfers, imagery of the landscape produced by these Instagram users is a way of expressing some affinity with the geographic features of the locality and, by extension, experiencing it as place.

The nature of landscape as an apparently unrepresentable object might explain its appealing nature. Casey (2002, p. 6) writes: “That which appeals to the full body sensorium must itself
be an encompassing whole: if it is an object at all, it is an object of a higher order… It follows that to such an ‘object’ no simple imitative representation can adequately correspond”. That is, photographs such as those in this sample which strongly and repeatedly capture specific elements of a given place are a way of both expressing and experiencing a sense of place that otherwise seems unattainable.

I find that there there is also a strong sense of embodiment or emplacement within the photos. What I mean by that is that Instagram users are active in placing themselves within the places represented. In particular, female bodies37 are very common throughout the sample. Female bodies at beaches are the most common multi-unit motif (after the coastline on its own). The high number of beachside photographs is probably an effect of the time period in which the sample was collected (summer), but nonetheless emphasises an affinity for the coastal landscape as part of the experience of Wollongong as a place.

Other common elements in photographs from the Wollongong sample included images of products in local and non-local stores, photographs of activities around the region such as sporting groups, skydiving, paragliding, and a few images taken at the WIN Entertainment Centre. There were also various meme-type images such as quotes overlaid on abstract images.38 Like the landscape imagery, the shopping and activity images are largely reminiscent or reflective of the types of images in the Wollongong tourism brochure.

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37 I acknowledge the problematic and subjective nature of using this term without having contacted each of the individuals in the photographs to ascertain their gender identity. Nonetheless, given the prominence of this content in these photographs, it cannot be ignored in this study.

38 These memes often consist of recurring visual motifs overlaid with phrasal templates, the combinations of which are (often) prescribed by social convention. In a conversation across the blogs Language Log and Agoraphilia in 2003 and 2004, the linguist Glen Whitman coined the term “snowclone” to describe these combinable units (Whitman, 2004; Pullum, 2004). The snowclones used in these memes are “a multi-use, customizable, instantly recognizable, time-worn, quoted or misquoted phrase or sentence” (Pullum, 2003, n.p.) coupled with an image that also possesses these properties.
considered in section 4.2, while the meme images bear little or no clear correlation specifically to Wollongong.

The data gathered from Instagram posts demonstrates an insistence by users on placing themselves within the locations they photograph, and of linking significant places together. This reflects Foucault’s (1984) observation that “Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.” That is, one of the most important aspects of places is the way they are related to other places and, indeed, objects (including human bodies). This element of place as embodied experience is frequently produced by users on social networking sites, in contrast with the tourism brochures which seem to suggest the places they present are empty, vacant, and waiting to be explored just like American western frontier. Emplacement within Instagram photographs is one method by which users lay claim to space as a place created through experience and dwelling, while co-locating tags of a number of nearby towns and regional descriptors also assists in building up a network of places within the context of which particular places have affective meaning.

The mediated performance of place in Instagram photographs and accompanying tags comes to give effect to the imagining of the Wollondilly, Wollongong, and Wingecarribee communities. In other words, it is an example of the way that the politics of place is conducted in the projection of representations of various agents by users across mediated networks. Anderson (1991, p. 7) showed that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (the community) that in part is brought about by shared imaginings much like those visible in the production and circulation of media items by Instagram users in these places.
6.2 Negotiating place on participatory media

Whereas organised and semi-formal publications like Illawarra News are established and used by citizens for particular purposes (considered further in section 6.3 below), many other informal campaigns are conducted by citizens on various participatory media platforms. This section considers a few examples of such campaigns. In the examples discussed, competing visions of localised places are advanced by the campaigners in clear enactments of the politics of place processes I have described throughout this thesis, including through the mobilisation of additional agents from across place networks. It is also argued that these campaigns can be viewed also as orientations of caring toward the places activists see themselves protecting.

I have selected one example of a campaign utilising digital participatory media technologies from each of the three case study local government areas. These are all campaigns initiated in response to proposed developments in the areas of concern, highlighting the importance of contestation over competing visions of place. Two of the campaigns concluded with withdrawal of the proposal in question, although I have not evaluated the extent to which the campaign actions - on participatory media or otherwise - contributed to those outcomes. The third development has not yet been thoroughly resolved, although one of the more prominent campaign groups was disbanded. A range of participatory media technologies were used by the activists, most prominent amongst them Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and websites.

Green Mile Action Group

The Green Mile Action Group (GMAG) was established to oppose a development application lodged for Stuart Park, in North Wollongong, at the northern end of Wollongong’s ‘Blue
Mile’ foreshore area. The GMAG’s online presence consisted of a Facebook page (since deleted), a Twitter account @greenmileaction, and the website www.greenmileaction.com.

The group attempted to position Stuart Park as Wollongong’s “village green” and sought out Wollongong businesses, community groups, individuals and councillors on Twitter to advance their ends. Figure 21 below presents the @greenmileaction Twitter account’s network, with network members labelled as follows:

- Wollongong Community (groups and individuals) \(n=8\)
- Media \(n=8\)
- Wollongong Business \(n=7\)
- Wollongong City Council accounts \(n=3\)
- Politician (state or federal) \(n=2\)
- Councillor \(n=2\)
- National community organisation (1)
- Unknown \(n=4\)

The graph is directed and was laid out in NodeXL using the Fruchterman-Reingold layout algorithm. Each edge on this network map represents a connection between users formed by either a following-follower relationship or mentions. There are 36 nodes (or vertices) and 59 interactions (edges).
This network is relatively unconnected and simple due to the fact that the account was only active from April 13-29, 2014. However, it reveals part of the way in which this particular organisation went about conducting the politics of place on participatory media - tweeting about the campaign and mentioning and following councillors, media representatives and organisations, members of the community at large and state and federal politicians in a short period of activity. The account has been dormant since April 29, 2014, a period which coincides with the abandonment of the redevelopment plans.

Smith et al. (2014) identify six types of network patterns that can be discerned using NodeXL. The pattern presented in the graph above fits the “hub and spoke” structure of what they describe as a “support network”, in which a central account responds and connects with
many other disparate accounts (Smith et al., 2014, p. 4). Although the GMAG network mimics this pattern, it has developed that way because the central account followed and mentioned many disparate accounts rather than responding outwardly to other users as in the support network model.

Accounts closer to the centre of the network are those mentioned most often by the main @greenmileaction account during its operation. Two of those closest to the centre are Wollongong city councillors, one of whom was interviewee C2. During the interview, C2 suggested that the Green Mile Action Group was specifically targeting his/her account:

they actually started up a social media campaign in order to target specifically people such as myself… because they know I’m active on Twitter. (C2, interview)

C2 did not know who was running the accounts, but still believed they were voices worth listening to:

it [social media engagement] can be dominated by the squeaky wheel or the loud voice that seems to be representative of the majority but may not necessarily be so. But, you know, it's still about taking on those views and the things that people are saying. (C2, interview)

The informant is attempting to keep an open dialogue with the community even when s/he is unsure of who is speaking back. This perspective is not shared by council staff, who prefer to have participants in forums and social media networks register or provide real names, ostensibly to allow follow up. S4 said their council was under “a lot of pressure to the registration process off” (S4, interview) in community forums. S4 offered a number of reasons for keeping the function turned on:
We try to keep it on because it’s the only way we can validate the data, check the data, check the demographics. It also means that we’ve got a database of people we can contact and encourage to participate again. The local newspaper’s blog, you have to register, you know, it’s not an uncommon thing, it’s amazing how many people object. (S4, interview)

S4 said one constituent in particular wanted to “put several submissions in online”, which the council rejected in order to keep balance in the submissions.

The examples discussed above demonstrate a few aspects of the negotiation of the politics of place in participatory media spaces. Whereas the GMAG sought (or were seen) to pursue a path of anonymity on their social media accounts and website and were still acknowledged by C2, this type of approach was not accepted by S4 as legitimate. GMAG conducted the campaign by following and mentioning apparently specifically targeted users on Twitter, which may have resulted in the limited reach of the account, although the short timeframe is also likely to have contributed to this result.

The politics of place as conducted on Twitter here involved pursuing a particular ideal of the Stuart Park area, and putting forward alternatives to those proposed in the development application. The contestation of ideas was to be decided in the council chamber, but was conducted in the public sphere on social network sites, and in relation to the specific site which itself was imbued with certain characteristics by way of labelling it the ‘village green’.

Stop Wilton Airport Group

The Stop Wilton Airport Group was a residents’ action group established in 2012 to campaign against consideration of the town of Wilton in the Wollondilly Shire as the site for Sydney’s second large commercial airport. This option was eventually ruled out by the federal government (Truss, 2014). The Stop Wilton Airport Group utilised a range of media,
establishing a Facebook page, Twitter account (@swag2571) and website at www.stopwiltonairport.org.

This campaign positioned Wilton as “an active and growing community, with a long history going back almost 200 years, and much further through its original indigenous owners” (SWAG, n.d, n.p.). This statement is an example of how groups might seek to establish certain visions of place on which to build their broader campaigns. It is a reaching for and highlighting history as a claim to legitimacy, an approach to community imagining commonly identified in studies of nationalism (for example, Elgenius, 2011; Ting, 2008; Anderson, 1991).

Figure 22 (below) represents the network of the Facebook page ‘Wilton Airport is Plane Stupid - Stop Wilton Airport’, from which 162 posts (representing 4400 interactions) were sampled using NodeXL in February 2016. The Clauset-Newman-Moore cluster algorithm identified five groups in this graph, the largest of which includes the page itself. Other users within the network are identified by the action that underpinned their inclusion, such as ‘liker’, ‘commenter’ or ‘post author’. Additionally, I have labelled one Wollondilly Councillor on the graph (red group, lower right) and one other politician (mid-top left, blue group). This graph indicates the Facebook network to be what Smith et al. (2014, p. 22) refer to as a “tight crowd”, which “illustrates high levels of internal connection [and] few or no isolates”. Indeed, those who are isolated (indicated in black, bottom right) are both individual posters to the Facebook page well after the bulk of posting behaviour had dissipated. Although the Smith et al. analysis refers to Twitter conversations, the Facebook network represented in Figure 22 does seem to fit this pattern.
The SWAG Twitter account is represented below in Figure 23. Similar to the Green Mile Action Group Twitter account examined above, @swag2571 has generated a ‘hub and spoke’ network (Smith et al., 2014). Again, the central account followed and mentioned many disparate accounts rather than responding outwardly to other users and building a broader network. There are 73 vertices and 186 edges.

Each node in Figure 23 represents a different Twitter user connected to the central account either through a following or mention relationship. Scattered throughout the network are individual journalist or media organisations, and state and federal politicians. Also present is a Wollondilly councillor and Wollondilly Council itself.
The Battle for Berrima

Since 2011, portions of the Wingecarribee Shire have been the subject of new coal-mining proposals that have been resisted by a series of community organisations that, in part, have conducted their campaigns using participatory media. This section reviews the participatory media activities of the group known as The Battle for Berrima, who have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and a website.

The aforementioned coal mining proposals have come via a company trading under the locally-inflected name of Hume Coal but now ultimately owned by the much larger Korean
steelmaker POSCO. The action of naming the project Hume Coal is in itself a salvo in the politics of place contestations described in this section. The name Hume is widely used in and around southern inland New South Wales and Victoria after early European explorer Hamilton Hume (Australian Town and Country Journal, 1873). In particular, it is the name of the Federal electorate of Hume that covers part of the Southern Highlands region, and the Hume Highway that dissects it. Adopting this name is an attempt at appropriating a sense of localness for the Hume Coal project.

Hume Coal (n.d) further seeks to claim a sense of history of the project by noting on their website that “Coal exploration and mining has occurred in the area since the 19th century.” The site lists a series of such developments. These statements seek to position the mining proposals within the historical context of the region, a political manoeuvre to engender support and neutralise opposition arguments by showing that mining has occurred unobtrusively in the past. This is an attempt to position the Wingecarribee as a ‘mining place’. Within that context, the more recent mining proposals are therefore compatible with the region’s historical identity.

Multiple community groups have been established to campaign against the Hume Coal proposal. One, variously known as either Shoo Cockatoo or the Southern Highlands Coal Action Group (SHCAG), was placed into voluntary liquidation in late 2015 (Sanda, 2015). It was this group that was the initial focus of this research. However, following the liquidation, website and social media accounts were closed or deleted, making analysis more difficult. The Battle for Berrima group established their social media accounts around August 2015.

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39 This name/campaign slogan was adopted when the project was initially owned by Cockatoo Coal which sold its 30% stake in the project to POSCO in 2013 (Cockatoo Coal, 2013).
Battle for Berrima (n.d) states it “intend[s] to stop coal mining in Berrima and the Southern Highlands in order to protect groundwater, the environment, air quality, heritage significance, our sustainable economy and the visual beauty of Berrima and its bushland surrounds.” As with other campaigns described in this section, this approach positions the natural features of the location prominently among the claims as part of producing an ideal vision on which to build the politics of place.

Figure 24 (below) represents the Twitter network of the account @Battle4Berrima. As with the accounts discussed previously in this section, the spoke and hub pattern suggests that there has been little interaction within the wider network that is not directed toward or from the central account. This account, however, has produced significantly greater number of interaction relationships than either of the other two discussed in this section. From 272 nodes in this network, there are 517 edges. A great majority of the edges (relationships) have been created from a following action, but those closer to the centre of the network are involved in further connections such as mentions and retweets. The outer ring is dominated by accounts of media organisations or journalists which have been followed by the central account, presumably to gain the attention of newsmakers.

There are a number of Twitter accounts prominent in this graph. The main account has followed dozens of journalists, media organisations (media), politicians, and a range of other (largely anti-mining) community groups. The account appears to be following the media organisations, in particular, in an attempt to draw their attention to matters of concern. These are all labelled.
Conclusion

The participatory media networks considered in this section suggest that community organisations on Twitter tend toward a ‘hub and spoke’ pattern of interaction identified by Smith et al. (2014), following many disparate accounts in an attempt to gain attraction or influence, but ultimately lacking strong interactional networks. This view is further supported by the reciprocated edge ratios (RER) of each account, which suggest that it is possible to gain some level of interest even by conducting this dispersed pattern of following behaviour.

The level of reciprocity on Twitter in general varies. Kwak et al. (2010) found that “77.9% of user pairs with any link between them are connected [only] one-way, and only 22.1% have reciprocal relationship” (p. 593). Hopcroft et al. (2011) argue there are several factors which
increase the likelihood of reciprocal following, including geographic closeness and homophily (or shared connections). The RER figure for each of the three Twitter accounts considered in this section indicates how many accounts followed or mentioned by the central account responded in-kind (for example, by reciprocal follow, retweet, or reply). GMAG’s RER was very low at around 11%, perhaps due to the account’s relatively short lifespan and very localised nature. SWAG attained an RER in the order of 15%, while Battle for Berrima’s was double that at 31%. It is likely the high RER figure for the Battle for Berrima account was in part due to the number of like-minded community groups it followed and interacted with during the sampled period. This is a degree of homophily (or likeness, indicated by shared interests and tight networks) suggested by Hopcroft et al. (2011).

Each of the participatory media accounts considered above make claims about the places they seek to protect from what they perceive as inappropriate development. The GMAG campaign was relatively short-lived and may have been hampered by confused messaging, while the other two were simple oppositional campaigns in response to large proposed developments. In deploying Twitter, Facebook and websites as participatory platforms, they seek to draw other users into the campaign. Linking with a pre-existing community interested in similar issues, as Battle for Berrima did, appears to be a good strategy for boosting reciprocal relationships upon which successful participatory platforms are built.

The relational networks established by each of the activist groups discussed in this section open up spaces within which users are oriented toward each other and place in an act of care. Their role in the politics of place thus positions them as active public citizens expressing concern for the place in which they dwell. Such publics, through their use of participatory media, represent a clear orientation, or turning-toward, place.
6.3 Imagining place in blogs and community news sites

Early in this thesis (section 3.2), I proposed to consider participatory media in my selected local government areas from the perspective of a situated interpreter. As a participatory media user (a produser, in the phrasing of Bruns et al., 2011), I am deeply embedded in the practices under consideration here. For example, several of the network visualisations in the section above include my personal Twitter account as one of the nodes. More pertinently to this section of the thesis, I here present a study of blogs selected from each of the case study local government areas. Those selected focus on these places as a matter of course rather than incidentally. Each of the blogs was selected through internet searches for relevant terms, specifically place names (Wingecarribee/Southern Highlands, Wollondilly, Wollongong) and the word ‘blog’. One of those that featured prominently in search results was my own politics blog, *Highlands Votes*. I have selected that blog alongside *Illawarra News* from Wollongong and the blog of the Wollondilly Museum as case studies here.

Returning to my positioning as a situated interpreter, the selection of *Highlands Votes* enriches this research with the autoethnographic method and makes explicit what I have already claimed but which has been largely implicit in the data thus far. I have also contributed articles to *Illawarra News*. In a study such as this which draws on local networks and technologies that the researcher uses frequently (if not every day), any positivist assumption that the researcher is able to access and use data and information in a wholly objective mode is rendered obviously false. However, this positioning also emphasises the need to approach such work with reflexivity and attempt to strike a sense of “empathic neutrality” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). As I reasoned in Chapter 3, this is a position which makes open acknowledgement of the researcher’s bias but nonetheless insists upon the validity of the research itself due in part to such open disclosures.
Following Hills (2002, p. 43), the autoethnographic aspect of the research presented in this section “aims to create a partial ‘inventory’ of the ‘infinity of traces’ deposited within the self by cultural and historical processes.” Further, the approach to all three blogs considered in this section is largely alike. Thus, the emergence of particular elements of the politics of place within the *Highlands Votes* blog can be usefully contrasted with similar elements in the other blogs considered herein.

Blogs (a contracted form of web-log) emerged in the early phases of the web 2.0 phenomenon as a method of self-publishing short textual and visual posts in a reverse chronological stream. Later, platforms such as Blogger, LiveJournal and Wordpress enabled these writers (bloggers) to participate in blog networks and posting activity without requiring technical skills to create and host an individual website. Such sites were largely the forerunner to social network newsfeeds or timelines which also consist mostly of reverse chronological stream of content posted by users.

There is a particular narrowness of approach suggested in the methodology of this research which limits the potential selection of blogs in this section to a specific genre called place blogging (Lindgren, 2009), often conflated with ‘hyperlocal’ journalism, which means:

> Hyperlocal media operations are geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news-reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement. (Metzgar et al., 2011, p. 3)

Each of the blogs considered in this section complies with this description although in two cases the operation of the blogs themselves appears to be too small to class as an ‘organisation’.
Bruns and Burgess (2012) place the “heyday of blogs in the early 2000s”, but argue “blogging continues to be a major genre of Internet-based communication”. Their seeming popularity notwithstanding, there were some difficulties with locating suitable blogs for each of the three case studies. I describe these concerns in more detail below.

In this section, I examine each of the selected blogs for their stated purpose and focus on articles that represent the places they purport to cover. This approach identifies a few more participatory media practices focused on place, which contributes to my overall study of how the politics of place operates within participatory media in these three local government areas.

*Illawarra News*

The Wollongong-focused blog considered in this section was established in 2012 with an opening editorial identifying “a gap in the local news sphere, particularly when it comes to print and electronic news media” (*Illawarra News*, 2012, n.p.). It is located at [www.illawarranews.org](http://www.illawarranews.org). That same editorial argued that only around 30% of articles in the region’s main conventional newspaper, *The Illawarra Mercury*, were locally focused. *Illawarra News* (hereafter, *IN*) was managed by a voluntary committee under a non-profit incorporated association structure and published its last article to date in July 2015. It is hosted on the Google-owned platform Blogger.

As an organisation dedicated to publishing news and features relevant to a specific geographic area (the Illawarra), in a non-profit community model in response to a perceived gap in coverage, *IN* neatly encompasses hyperlocal media described above. Given it seeks to publish articles by those not otherwise contributing to the public sphere, and does so online, *IN* is also a participatory media organisation.
In its first-edition editorial, IN stakes a claim about journalism in the Illawarra, arguing that the region “needs a better daily newspaper than the one we’ve got [the Mercury] and more rigorous, diverse opinion” (IN, 2012). This somewhat belligerent approach to the Mercury continued, with a statement in 2014 that “the Mercury was the only media organisation to complain about Illawarra News attaining public information from Council like other media” (IN, 2014). In taking these positions, IN is acting not only as a member of the ‘fourth estate’ but is also attempting to keep in check other media organisations. Bruns et al. (2008) identify a similar stance among Australian political bloggers critiquing The Australian newspaper in the lead up to the 2007 Federal Election.

IN was less focused in its coverage of specific issues than either of the other two blogs considered in this section. While the Wollondilly Museum blog covers very specific topics around history of the Wollondilly area, and Highlands Votes looks only at formal politics in the Southern Highlands/Wingecarribee, IN spread its interests across all of these and more. Ultimately, this greater remit provides IN with the opportunity to contribute in more detail to the politics of place in and around Wollongong.

By also covering the Southern Highlands (largely, it should be noted, through cross-posts from Highlands Votes), and the Shoalhaven City local government area, IN’s imagining of the Illawarra region is more expansive than some. This too is a form of the politics of place, as described in section 4.4, which conceives of place primarily as geographically bounded, and defined by the jurisdictions of governing authorities.

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40 A term attributed to Edmund Burke by Carlyle (Oxford English Dictionary, cited in Schultz 1998, p. 49), for the idea of the press keeping watch over the other three estates of civil society - clergy, nobility and commoners.
Wollondilly Museum

The Wollondilly Museum blog (www.wollondillymuseum.org.au/blogs) is one of very few identified when searching for hyperlocal or place blogs for the Wollondilly shire - that is, blogs that were specifically focused on the place. It contains only 13 posts categorised or identified as blog posts. These canvas a range of topics, and some appear to be miscategorised.

Before turning to the content of this site, I recount briefly the rationale for selecting this blog and its role in affirming my claims to the role of a situated interpreter. Having identified only a single blog (the Wollondilly Museum) site through internet searches described above, I posted on Twitter asking for suggestions as this site initially appeared inadequate for the purposes of this thesis. A Wollondilly councillor responded to the tweet, suggesting one blogger who occasionally referenced or wrote about Wollondilly. On review, it was determined this site had only incidental references to the Wollondilly Shire, although it did contain content that criticised council. It was this conversation, also recounted in section 3.2, that confirmed my role as a situated interpreter given my work as a produser intersects with this study in a number of significant ways. Having identified no further candidates, this site has been included in the study.

The Wollondilly Museum blog is maintained by The Oaks Historical Society, a community group based in the town of The Oaks in the Wollondilly Shire. Unlike the other two sites examined in this section, this blog is part of a larger website. Given that architecture, there is no identifiable blog purpose described on the site, although the Museum itself is described as “a repository for archives, records and objects relating to the early development of the villages in Wollondilly Shire” (Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum (WHCM), n.d. a).
Although geographically focused, there is no apparent intention to incite civic participation expressed by this site. Accordingly, there appears to be very little interactivity and no comments on the site. There are also few outgoing links from the site. Thus, this site is participatory only insofar as it allows the administrators to publish articles without external gatekeeping practices.

Given the purpose of the Wollondilly Museum, the posts on this blog are largely historical in nature, documenting various pasts of the region. Interestingly, in the context of the imaging of place described in Chapter 5 (especially the tourism brochure claim to “untarnished history”), the Wollondilly Museum blog aligns well with an overall trope in the Wollondilly politics of place, which is the foregrounding of the history and natural elements of the Shire.

In addition to the history suggested above, the Wollondilly Museum blog also makes claims on the Wollondilly as a rural and semi-natural place in posts such as ‘The Wild Cattle of the Cowpastures and their influence on The Oaks’ (WHCM, n.d. b),^41^ ‘When was the last time you saw a koala in Wollondilly?’ (WHCM, n.d. c), and ‘With the best of intentions’ (WHCM, n.d. d). The foregrounding of rurality is also a claim about Wollondilly that is evident in other media considered in this thesis (such as tourism brochures). Thus there is a strong convergence in the imaginings of Wollondilly shire between several different media formats.

**Highlands Votes**

The final blog site selected for consideration in this section of the thesis is one that was established and maintained by the researcher as a way to provide “commentary on elections and politics in the Southern Highlands” (*Highlands Votes [HV], n.d.*). *Highlands Votes* is

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^41^ Although the posts are dated with day and month, they do not have a year.
located at www.highlandsvotes.com. It was active for four years from prior to the September 2012 local government elections until a final post on May 8, 2016 announced “goodbye from Highlands Votes” (Holland, 2016).

Given the formal political intent of content on Highlands Votes, it is clear that it would make claims and pursue particular imaginings of place related to the Southern Highlands. As with Illawarra News, the site repeatedly criticises the local professional media, noting that: “existing outlets were too tied up [with] commercial imperatives to bother with proper coverage, a problem that has only gotten worse over time” (Holland, 2016). Thus, it fits into the description of a hyperlocal news publication given above.

The conceptions of place evident in Highlands Votes extend only as far as the geographic boundaries of the various state and federal electorates on which it reported, and to reporting of the activities of politicians and candidates from those electorates. Federally, this encompassed the large inland electorate of Hume and the smaller coastal seat of Throsby, as well as the state seats of Goulburn and Wollondilly, and the Wingecarribee Shire. The politics of place as it relates to this conception of place is therefore limited to formal political processes such as elections and democratic representation.

One post (Holland, 2015b) included portions of writing that have been earlier included in this thesis as examples of the politics of place in action at pre-federation town hall meetings. That post notes that the Bowral Free Press’ exhortation that existing townships not be disadvantaged by development of a capital (A.N.V., 1899) may be “the first instance of the ‘green between’ mantra popular in more recent times” (Holland, 2015b). This claim, which relates to controlling development patterns to prevent the towns and villages of the Southern

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42 Renamed Whitlam at the 2016 election.
Highlands from merging together, is yet another reinforcement of the popular image of the region as having a natural or environmental appeal.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a variety of heterogeneous methods that citizens deploy to shape the places they inhabit, often in direct contest with local governments and development proponents across the wide networks of associations evident in the places examined here. In the case of Instagram, users make claims about the nature of their places and practice the emplacement of themselves within the landscape images they capture, a strategic mobilisation of allies within already technically-networked spaces. Photographs such as those in this sample strongly and repeatedly capture specific elements of a given place as a way of both expressing and experiencing a sense of place.

Whereas Instagram posts considered in this sample could be seen as projections of place ideals, citizens engage on other social media in a more active contestations against developments they perceive as inappropriate or unsuitable. The relational networks established by these groups open up spaces in which citizens and residents are oriented toward place as a means of experiencing and participating in the politics of place.

Finally, place bloggers also undertake politics of place practices through making claims about the political, media, and environmental or natural aspects of the places they write about, enrolling yet further ontologically distinct agents into their political networks and attempting to mobilise other allies to their causes. Although the potential sample of blogs was relatively small, it is clear that each of those selected, through their inherent focus on small local places, contributes to the politics of place.
This chapter has focused on the interrelated roles of citizens and local governments in negotiating the politics of place, especially on participatory media. The next chapter in this thesis turns to professional media makers such as entertainers and members of the news media to consider how their perspectives contribute to the politics of place in the case studies.
Chapter 7: Non-local professional media imaginings of place

*Have you ever seen Wollongong from a 747 at night?* - Kitty Flanagan (2014)

During the opening to her show at Wollongong’s Illawarra Performing Arts Centre (IPAC) in October 2014, the comedian Kitty Flanagan posed the above question - in song - to her audience. Flanagan’s adaptation of Paul Kelly’s bluegrass ditty ‘Have You Ever Seen Sydney From a 747 at Night?’ included lines about the recently demolished Port Kembla smoke stack and the delays to Wollongong Council’s upgrade to the Crown Street Mall. This latter line in particular drew raucous laughter and groans from the crowd, who apparently appreciated the references to local developments and politics43 (Flanagan, 2014).

Flanagan’s routine is just one of the myriad ways that entertainment and media industries present Wollongong and the other areas considered in this study. Thus, having considered in detail how local residents, governments and groups make claims about the nature of places, this chapter examines a selection of representations drawn from non-local popular media including film, television, and newsmedia. Though they are not part of the mediated imaginings of place of either councils nor residents, the examples nonetheless reflect an image of the case study local government areas that forms part of the broader media geography in which they are enmeshed. As with the other imaginings of place examined in this thesis, such representations are positioned as part of the vast network of heterogeneous agents that comprise and participate in the everyday media environment that make claims about what these places are and ought to be for both citizens and visitors to the areas. They

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43 Local references to the city she was performing in were apparently part of Flanagan’s schtick throughout the *Seriously?!* tour, as noted by Carr (2015) in reviewing her show in Newcastle, New South Wales.
are essentially methods of gathering information about the places of interest prior to physical experience.

Although the representations of place considered in this chapter originate with non-local professional media organisations, they do further demonstrate some of the intricacies of the situated interpretation position which has motivated this work. I am inextricably tied up with the presentation of these events in these places by way of my personal history - a pattern of association which has influenced both the design and content of this study. It has also informed my thinking about the ways in which assemblages of media representations and practices are intimately tied up with place experiences, layering upon already complex negotiations of space and location.

The first section in this chapter (7.1, below) describes representations of the case studies through the mediated representations of crimes that have occurred there. There are unfortunately a wide selection of such representations from which to sample given that each of the three has in recent decades been the scene of shocking crimes of violence and corruption. The second section reports instances where the case studies have been either the setting or location for television and film, events which can trigger economic opportunities related to tourism or ancillary jobs.

7.1 Place of crime

In recent decades, Wollongong City, Wingecarribee Shire, and Wollondilly Shire have all attracted national and even international attention as the locales in which serious crimes have played out. In each of these events, coverage in both the news media and in items like books and television programs has played up the role of the locations in which the crimes occurred. Amongst these crimes are a series of events surrounding the Milat family, in particular
convicted serial killer Ivan and his great nephew Matthew (involving locations in both the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires), hearings at the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption into Wollongong City Council, and a July 2013 unsolved murder at Tahmoor in the Wollondilly. Each time, television and newspaper reporters from Sydney-based media outlets have turned their attention south in search of answers. Each time, the locations of these crimes feature as strongly as any of the people mentioned within them. This section reviews a series of media items relating to each of these cases which carry sometimes imaginative depictions of place. It is argued that for both locals and non-locals, these examples contribute to a sense of place: a way of seeing and experiencing these locations which shape the collective imagining.

Geographers and media theorists have argued that the representation of crime in media can influence how place is understood and how people relate to place (Hay and Israel 2001; Avraham 2000; Banks 2005). This can result in restricted mobility and media access for those perceived to be at risk of crime, such as young people (boyd 2014, chapter 4). Such crimes also result in attempts by local governments to alter perceptions of crime through public relations (Avraham 2000). It has been show that local governments are prompted to implement “advanced interactive services” for crime reporting (Holzer and Kim 2007, p. 26). Additionally, citizens develop inflated concerns about crime rates (Hay and Israel 2001). Finally, Couldry et al. (2010) suggest that citizens turn to mass media to “keep up with” crime (p. 161). The crimes described in this section are represented in a diverse range of media objects, including a television series, a book, newspaper articles and a play. Each representation describes events that give a sense of a real place, which may, in turn, become implicated in how both locals and non-locals alike experience these places. In particular, the representation of certain aspects of the crimes discussed in this section as inherently of a particular place contributes to this understanding.
The backpacker murders

A string of locations in both the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires are associated with a series of killings – popularly known as the Backpacker Murders – which occurred between 1989 and 1992. The history and representations of these killings have been absorbed into the place narratives of several such locations. This section examines the representations of place evident in the depictions of these crimes in the book *Sins of the Brother* (Whittaker and Kennedy, 1998) and the television series *Catching Milat* (Andrikidis, 2015).

Ivan Milat was convicted of seven counts of murder and one count of detaining for advantage in 1996 after seven bodies were discovered in Belanglo State Forest near the village of Sutton Forest in the Wingecarribee Shire. During the investigation, raids on properties associated with the Milat family had taken place throughout the Wingecarribee, Wollondilly and south west Sydney suburbs, many of which were shown in news bulletins at the time. The locations with which I am primarily concerned in this section are Belanglo State Forest, plus the towns of Hill Top, Buxton, and the rural locality of Wombeyan Caves, where various members of the family owned properties. Additionally, Bowral was a focus of attention as the main police hub in the region. Each of these events is depicted in *Sins of the Brother*, and a few of them in *Catching Milat*.

These are all towns with which I have a close association and recall many of the developments as they unfolded, including particularly intense media scrutiny by way of helicopters and reporters, in addition to a heavy police presence. As noted earlier in this

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44 Milat himself was arrested at his home in Eagle Vale, an outer suburb of Sydney, near Campbelltown.
45 The nearby town of Bargo and Belanglo State Forest were then implicated in a ‘copycat’ murder committed by Ivan’s great nephew Mathew Milat in 2012.
thesis, indicating the nature of this study as a complex example of situated interpretation in which analysis originates both with my intertwined emic and etic roles.

The author’s note in the book Sins of the Brother says, “This is a story from the places that don’t make the brochures and the postcards. It’s a story about [Ivan] Milat’s narrow little world and what happened when he let his delusions and fantasies become reality” (Whittaker and Kennedy, 1998, n.p.). This promise of obscure places brought into the light is born out when, several chapters in, readers first glimpse Milat’s activities in the Wingecarribee Shire in a description of his arrest at the locality of Paddys River for abducting and raping two women south of nearby Goulburn. These events were only a short distance from the Belanglo State Forest, which became the focus of events related to Milat decades later. Later in the book, at a property in Yanderra in the Wollondilly Shire, Milat’s brother Alex is said to have warned a friend “He’d [Ivan] put a knife in you as quick as look at you.” (Whittaker and Kennedy, 1998, n.p.) Both times, the physical landscape is a dominant feature of the detail. At Paddys River, it was the winding nature of the (old) Hume Highway at that point that allowed Milat to be caught, while in Yanderra the adults talked as Alex’s “kids were hooning around in circles and through the trees” (Whittaker and Kennedy, 1998, n.p.). The rural nature of the Highlands is being depicted here as a key part of the story.

After a tour through the Milat siblings’ formative years, the book turns to Ivan’s most notorious crimes, carefully positioning them within a longer history of European settlement of the Southern Highlands/Wingecarribee. In chapter 23, it describes how Charles Throsby was granted 700 acres of land as thanks for his road-building efforts: “He occupied an area which he referred to as being in Belanglo, which was one of the first, if not the first, written reference to Belanglo”. Here, the authors draw a direct link between the later activities of Milat - who worked on expanding the same highway in the 1980s and 1990s - and the very
genesis of the Wingecarribee Shire as a known location. They also seemingly draw a parallel between Milat’s status as a second-generation European migrant and that of Englishman Throsby and locally-born Hamilton Hume (after whom the highway was renamed in 1928).

For English tourist Paul Onions, a lift down the Hume from Ivan Milat was “his first look at the Australian bush. It’s great really, that first hour, as they rise up into the [Southern] highlands” (Whittaker and Kennedy, 1998). Shortly afterwards, Onions is at the Bowral Police Station after having escaped Milat’s attempts to tie him up. The scenes described by the authors as they retell Onions’ story are set in places familiar to many, both local and non-local, who know the Southern Highlands. Regular travellers could pick out the spot by the highway just north of Belanglo where Onions escaped, and they might know the look of the Bowral Police Station or the route he took from there to the railway station past the gardens where the annual Tulip Time festival is held. These are locations which might be viewed in a different light after reading *Sins of the Brother*.

Whittaker and Kennedy (1998) note the impact on Bowral of the unfolding investigation as two more bodies were found in Belanglo:

> The discovery couldn’t have come at a worse time for Bowral businesses, right in the middle of the annual Tulip Festival… The media and police had solid bookings in the hotels and motels, but the message they were sending to the world was hardly from the brochures. (n.p.)

The television miniseries *Catching Milat*, which was in turn loosely based on *Sins of the Brother*, later depicted locations on the Highway and Belanglo Forest itself as well as surrounding towns and villages. In particular, a heavily stylised scene depicted a local

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46 At least, as known by European settlers, given the much longer history of Aboriginal peoples.
information session in the Bowral Memorial Hall. Whittaker and Kennedy (1998) note that “the nature of Belanglo suggested the killer was not a tourist”, so this meeting was also an opportunity for investigators to discover whether any local residents met the criteria for suspects.

Catching Milat was criticised from several quarters for being loose with the truth, most notably by former NSW Police Assistant Commissioner Clive Small (2015), who led the task force that eventually charged Milat. In part, this further demonstrates the ways in which even well-known histories produced by reputable media organisations or journalists can be publicly contested, a process intimately tied up with the politics of place.

Elsewhere in the book, Whitakker and Kennedy recount another story that is replete with details of the Southern Highlands bushland. In 1977, two female university students from Canberra hitchhiked from Sydney and found themselves in a vehicle with a man they later identified as either Ivan Milat or one of his brothers. Near Mittagong, the driver exited the Hume Highway toward Wombeyan Caves, telling them it was a short cut and a “scenic drive”: “the narrow bitumen road cut through pastures where kangaroos and wallabies grazed in small groups among the cattle.” Shortly thereafter, the women escaped the car into the bush: “Covered in dirt, she lay in the scrub, amid the damp soil and dead leaves”.

Regardless of the gravity of the story being told, the representations of the Southern Highlands in Sins of the Brother and Catching Milat reflect the overall imagining of the region through their repeated and continual focus on the landscape and location in which the crimes occurred. The dense and foreboding bushland becomes part of the accounts of place

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47 Incidentally, the original part of this building was formerly known as the Bowral School of Arts Hall, and used for the town hall meeting described in the introduction to this thesis.
due to these media depictions, while the history of Milat’s crimes and the drama of the raids and arrest are infused into almost any telling of place.

‘A town called malice’

The second example of crime media discussed in this section is an article by journalist John Safran (2014) published simultaneously online and in Fairfax Media’s Good Weekend magazine insert of the Sydney Morning Herald and Age newspapers. In the article, Safran reports on his investigation into the unsolved 2013 murder of Scott Hammond, a resident of Tahmoor in the Wollondilly Shire.

Safran paints an unappealing image of the town, arguing that “everyone in the town was a suspect. That's how hated Scott Hammond was” (2014, n.p.). While he was in town, Safran claims to have been threatened by the man he suspects was Hammond’s killer. He recounts the conversation:

"Is your little blue car parked out in front of your room?"

Fear bolts through my body. I have never been more frightened. "Walk out the front," he commands.

"No, please don't."

"Come on, walk out the front."

"Please don't."

"Walk out the front!" he screams. (Safran, 2014, n.p.)

Shortly afterwards, Safran left Tahmoor under police escort, and he concludes the piece with a quote from one of Hammond’s relatives claiming “I don’t think they [police] genuinely care” (2014, n.p.).
Several residents of Tahmoor have contested Safran’s version of events on the *Sydney Morning Herald* Facebook page (SMH, n.d), arguing for example that “Whatever Safran saw, or thought he saw, is at odds with my experience of this town” (8174095, 2014). Such comments are typical of these left on the piece, and strongly contest the imagining of Tahmoor painted by Safran. These contestations are equally part of the politics of place negotiations examined throughout this thesis as the original article by Safran, although they do not have the same prominence in public discourse as the piece itself given the institutional power of the news publishers with whom it originated.

Corruption hearings

In February 2008, the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) conducted a two week public hearing into allegations of corruption at Wollongong City Council - the details of which were extensively reported in the news media. The investigation had come to the public’s attention in 2006 when ICAC raided the council’s offices and was revisited in a play called *The Table of Knowledge* (Williams, 2011) co-presented by Wollongong’s Merrigong Theatre Company and Sydney-based production company Version 1.0 in 2011. It is this play which is the subject of this section of the thesis.

The play - named after a plastic table outside a Wollongong cafe where many of the meetings later investigated by ICAC had taken place - used verbatim transcripts from the ICAC hearing as source material. The investigation stemmed from “an anonymous complaint [that] a senior Wollongong City Council planning officer, had given favourable treatment to a developer” (ICAC, 2008c, p. 8). It later found that there was a “straightforward opportunity for corrupt developers to influence the DA [development application] assessment process

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48 Cited by Facebook comment ID rather than by name given the potential sensitivity of the topic.
from start to finish” (ibid., p. 120). Given the lurid descriptions of the location at the source of the investigations and the potential for development processes to heavily influence the physical environment of Wollongong, there is a clear case of this being part of the politics of place processes described in this thesis.

The show’s creator, David Williams of Version 1.0, wrote in an article intended for entertainment publication Time Out Sydney that it “allowed us to consider what kind of relationship we want to have with the places in which we live, and with the governments that run those places” (pers. comm., 2016).\(^{49}\) This is further evidence of the role of the play in documenting and identifying some of the ways in which the politics of place occur.

Williams (ibid.) went on to note that the events depicted could not be at all unique to Wollongong, and that they highlight more systemic practices within local politics and local government:

> As we made the show, we joked ‘This is a very unique story, the kind of story that could only ever take place in a place like Wollongong.’ Or Port Macquarie. Or Randwick. Or Burwood. Or Warringah. Or three times in Melbourne. ‘But this is a very unique story that could only ever happen in a place like Wollongong.’ Apart from all the other places where stories like this keep taking place.

Following the opening night of The Table of Knowledge, the Merrigong Theatre Company (2011) published a video on YouTube with interviews from audience members. Most of the interviewees rated the play highly, with one commenting on the timeliness of the play just three days ahead of the first local government election for Wollongong since the council had been sacked by the New South Wales government. The Table of Knowledge (Williams, 2011)

\(^{49}\) The published version of this article was unable to be located, but Williams communicated a draft version to the researcher.
is thus an example of representational media presenting a particular imagining of a place for a wide audience, which is then reflected back into the ongoing formal political processes of the city. It is yet another example of the ways in which various actants, such as journalists, media production companies, comedians, and council, engage in a politics of place within a broad relational network of competing ideals.

7.2 At the movies: finding place in film and television

A series of film and television productions have either been filmed in or set in each of the three case study local government areas, each of which carry some representations of those places. This section examines a selection of such film and television enterprises, demonstrating how on a few occasions they closely relate to other ideas about place already discussed in this thesis and contribute to the layering of meaning about place. At other times, though, the filming locations stand in for places on the other side of the world and the level of place content is questionable. Nonetheless, these examples are often held up by local politicians and businesses as being economically valuable and they therefore have implications for a politics of place. I argue that they are also part of the emotional orientation towards place that residents and visitors may have before they experience it for themselves.

The selected case studies in this section are: the 1970s television comedy *The Aunty Jack Show* (Bond, 1972-73) and television drama *Tricky Business* (Monaghan et al., 2012), both of which were set in Wollongong; the early 2000s television series *Always Greener* (Lee, 2001-03) and film *The Wolverine* (Mangold, 2013), which were filmed in Wollondilly; and the *Babe* movies (Noonan, 1995; Miller, 1998) that were filmed in the Southern Highlands.

Ash (2009) considers the “geographic function” of images on screens, as they are in the television and film portrayals examined here, and argues that “images create spaces and are
themselves material blocks of space-time” (p. 2106). Such an approach might appear at odds with the arguments in this section which respond largely to the nature of place images as being referential to existing spaces rather than creating or recreating their own. Yet, these examples do not merely seek to replicate place (as, for example, the tourism brochures or Instagram posts of earlier chapters might), but to warp and extend them. Building upon the ‘doubling’ of space that occurs during broadcasts, (Moores, in Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; Moores, 2012; Scannell 1996), I argue here that mediations of place such as those found in film and television produce a layering effect, which thickens our understanding of the places filmed or represented.

Thus the items considered here are not merely referential as they also provoke or facilitate a level of shared experience of place beyond simply viewing. In that sense, they could be considered in the framework of what Reijnders (2010) has termed lieux d’imagination (places of imagination), which transcend the boundaries between ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ due to their portrayals on screen. Such imaginaries are taken up within the networks of place and excitedly circulated through such media forms as newspaper articles, providing further examples of the relational aspects of imagining that are embedded in the media.

Tricky: finding Wollongong on television

The Australian television drama Tricky Business (Monaghan et al., 2012) which aired on commercial broadcaster Channel 9 and affiliates for one season, was largely filmed and set in and around Wollongong. As such, it both referred to and represented various elements of the city. As with the other media items examined in this thesis, I argue that these representations have become part of the collective imagining of Wollongong, both for citizens, visitors, and others who may have never accessed the city in person.
*Tricky Business* portrayed the life of a family who run a debt collection business and, as a result, occasionally came across unsavoury characters, or were themselves implicated in crimes. In the course of the show, both mundane and extraordinary places within the Wollongong local government area are represented. These included, for example, frequent shots of the Sea Cliff Bridge and shops in the Crown Street Mall. Such deliberative practices of representation feed into place imagining processes by extending, or potentially extending, the frames of reference available to viewers whether they are familiar with the locations or not. Depicting such locations has the effect of expanding potentially knowable space.

Following the series premiere, local newspaper *The Illawarra Mercury* (Langford, 2012) profiled it. Langford (2012) wrote that “*Tricky Business* could only be Wollongong” (n.p.) thanks to the prominence of the region’s natural landscape rather than the fact that “some people find themselves in financial trouble here [in Wollongong], and the number of vacant development lots testifies to businessmen gone bust” (n.p.). *Tricky Business* extends pre-existing ideas of Wollongong into additional media, layering and enriching the experience of place for viewers.

Another television production to have prominently featured Wollongong is the 1970s *The Aunty Jack Show* (Bond, 1972-73) and associated media, including a spin-off series called *Wollongong the Brave* and an album titled *Aunty Jack Sings Wollongong*. The titular character Aunty Jack, created and played by moustachioed performer Grahame Bond, styles herself as the Queen of Wollongong. She is violent and fond of expletives.

*Aunty Jack* was set in Wollongong and contained frequent - often derogatory - references to the city. For example, in the 1975 revival of *Aunty Jack* that introduced colour television to the ABC, the character remarks that despite the coming of colour, “always remember, the proud colours of Wollongong, black and grey will fly at full mast and there will still be
hope.” Another character then uses binoculars to look toward the Port Kembla steelworks and notes happily that there was “nothing but pitch black”. These examples continue *Aunty Jack’s* frequent depictions of Wollongong as a dirty, polluted city.

The combination of national television depictions of Wollongong in *Tricky Business* and *Aunty Jack* contributed to an imagining of the city as one dominated by industrial landscapes like those of the steelworks, and prone to corruption and crime. Such imaginings may underpin ideas of Wollongong as they are subsequently deployed in the politics of place and certainly stand in contrast to the more idealised imaginings in media such as tourism brochures.

Standing in: Wollondilly or Canada?

The central Wollondilly Shire town of Picton was used as a filming location for one key scene of the film *The Wolverine* (Mangold, 2013), which depicted the life of the title character (played by Hugh Jackman) several years after he left the X-Men following the death of his friend Jean Grey in *X-Men: The Last Stand*. In the film, Picton stands in for the Canadian province of Yukon, where Wolverine lives a solitary existence taunted by both his past and local residents.

Figure 25 and Figure 26, below, depict two images of the same location in Picton’s main street - the first is a shot from the film (which also featured in the trailer), and the second is screen capture from Google Earth Streetview tool.

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50 This clip has been uploaded to YouTube by the National Archives of Australia: https://youtu.be/vIqqiK4ncfs.
Figure 25: Picton on film in a still from ‘The Wolverine’

Figure 26: The same intersection in Picton as it appears in Google Earth’s Streetview
In Figure 25, Jackman’s character cuts a lonely figure in the scene between two real buildings from the town. The scene has been digitally altered to insert snow and mountains in place of the native Australian trees and much smaller hill and creek-scape visible in Figure 26. Additionally, elements such as snow on the ground and particular car models were part of the set dressing during filming.

The filming of this scene was widely reported in local newspapers, including Illawarra Mercury (Cox, 2012) and Macarthur Chronicle (Partridge, 2013; Thomson, 2013). In those articles, elected officials from Wollondilly Shire Council, as well as the state Member of Parliament (MP), talked up the potential economic benefits. The mayor, Col Mitchell, said "I think it will prompt a lot of people to come out to Wollondilly and see what it's like. I hope it will boost our tourism from that point” (quoted in Partridge, 2013). The MP Jai Rowell went further, stating “Wollondilly is the place to be” (ibid.). Thus the filming itself was enrolled in local political processes, with politicians acting as spokespeople for the town.

The relationship between tourism and appearances in films appears to be more complicated than local politicians imagine. The literature does suggest there are flow-on economic benefits of filming, with extensive interest by visitors in locating and accessing Reijnders’ lieux d’imagination. Reijnders (2010) argues that filming locations act as physical points of reference to an imagined world. By visiting these locations and focusing on them, tourists are able to construct and subsequently cross a symbolic boundary between an ‘imagined’ and a ‘real’ world. (p. 49)

Yet, the case studies presented by Reijnders are supported by tours and the direct association of the fictional settings with the places in which those tours are conducted - an association Picton cannot claim given it is representing a non-fictional place on the other side of the globe. Other studies (Carl et al. 2007; Tzanelli, 2004) have noted the relationship between the
entirely fictional settings of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of films and their filming location of New Zealand finding that “the more perfect the representation of hyper reality in the tours, the higher the satisfaction and thus the more enhanced the tourist experience” (Carl et al., 2007, p. 60). Again, these findings suggest that without supporting infrastructure such as tours and ‘hyper-real’ settings, it is unlikely Picton would gain the economic advantages of tourism from its small role in *The Wolverine*.

The television series *Always Greener* (2001-03), which screened on Channel 7 and affiliates between 2001 and 2003, has a more direct association with the Wollondilly Shire, although again it serves as filming location rather than setting. The premise of the show revolves around two families - one from Sydney and one from the fictional rural town of Inverness - swapping homes in an attempt to address various personal dilemmas. Thirlmere, near Picton in the Wollondilly Shire, stands in for Inverness throughout the series.51

In this show, the Wollondilly (and Thirlmere in particular) is distinctly imagined as a very rural area and the clear counterpoint to the city. The establishment of a strict urban/rural divide includes reference to different social behaviours that are apparently more commonplace in the different locations and sources of conflict such as the Taylor family receiving a ban from the owner of the only shop in town after upsetting the owner. The new rural reality facing the Taylor family is also strongly reinforced when, on the day they move in, ominous noises on their verandah during a blackout are found to be emanating from a black and white cow.

Though Thirlmere is renamed and dressed as Inverness for *Always Greener*, the town bears much more similarity to reality and appears more frequently than Picton in *The Wolverine*.

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51 Although it is not the location of the family’s farmhouse.
As such, it is much more likely that any visitor wishing to step into *lieux d’imagination* would be able to do so much more easily. Visiting locations depicted or used as settings in television and film could “sustain cult fans’ fantasies of ‘entering’ into the cult text, as well as allowing the ‘text’ to leak out into spatial and cultural practices” (Hills, 2002, p. 116). However, it is unclear to what extent, if any, either *The Wolverine* or *Always Greener* have encouraged visitation to the Wollondilly Shire generally or either of these towns in particular. Future research could consider the role of media in shaping a sense of place for non-cult or non-global media products such as Australian television drama. Further, by feeding into popular imaginaries of place, these representations of the Wollondilly Shire provide at least some opportunity for citizens and others to enrol them into politics of place processes, in which such imaginaries are deployed in active contestation against one another.

‘That’ll do’: rural imaginaries and the Wingecarribee

The Wingecarribee Shire’s most high profile screen imagining was its role as a backdrop to the 1990s film *Babe* (Noonan, 1995) and to a lesser extent the sequel *Babe: Pig in the City* (Miller, 1998). In particular, the village of Robertson at the eastern edge of the Shire was used as the primary location for both Hoggett’s Farm and the film’s climax as the titular pig Babe successfully competed in a sheepdog trial.

As with Wollondilly serving as the archetypical rural location for the filming of *Always Greener*, Robertson’s role in *Babe* is explicitly associated with country characteristics. These include the central premise of the film revolving around farm-life, a county fair at which Farmer Hoggett first encounters Babe, and activities such as sheepdog trialling. It also examines some of the more problematic issues associated with living in a rural area such as the presence of feral animals like wild dogs. At one point, these animals attack the Hoggett’s
sheep and Babe himself is blamed for the crime. Thereafter, Hoggett prepares to shoot Babe - a situation that is avoided due to the intervention of the farm’s regular sheepdog.

The village of Robertson lends itself to *Babe* especially well because it invokes an image of quaint Englishness with rambling hedges, stone walls and sweeping green farming paddocks. Crouch (1992) notes that

> the everyday culture of what has been called rural life is interpreted as Englishness… *Nature* has been identified with *culture* and also *nationality*. The rural [acts] as national identity. (p. 230)

The book upon which *Babe* is based is also explicitly set in England. In this way, Robertson’s identity is drawn in diverging directions – on the one hand toward English rurality and the on the hand toward Australian countryness. These are elements of the contest over the strength and staying power of particular imaginaries that I call the politics of place. Crouch (1992, p. 230) suggests that “in popular *myth*, [rurality] is constituted of evidently small populations; particular landscapes; occupations”. Each of these descriptors could appropriately be applied to Robertson and, in particular, to its appearance in *Babe*. Additionally, there is very little within the film to indicate it is Australian, giving the impression of a kind of universal rurality (which itself could be read as a reinforcement of English rurality). As O’Regan and Venkatatsawmy (1998, p. 19) note: “Although the five-month shoot took place in ‘sheep country’ — the Southern Highlands of New South Wales — there is no clear indication of the film’s ‘Australianness’.”

There has been little attempt to capitalise on the success of *Babe* in the way of tours or associated *lieux d’imagination* infrastructure. As such, it would be difficult to assess economic impact from the filming. Nonetheless, any visitor wanting to step into the world of *Babe* would find themselves in a familiar space in the country lanes of Robertson.
7.3 Conclusion

The inclusion here of professional, non-local media representations of place drawn from film, television, books, newspapers and the theatre complicates the discussion throughout this thesis on the participatory and contested politics of place. Each of these are actants within a complex set of networks within which a sense of place arises. Yet, for residents and visitors, the fact of these mediated accounts of place informs a sense of place and cannot be ignored in a work with the scope of this thesis. There is undoubtedly a need to consider in more detail the experience of residents and visitors who have accessed such material before accessing the spaces in question.

Representations of place such as those considered in this section potentially contribute to the layers of place information available to visitors, residents and governments, accessible through the complex networks of heterogeneous agents that incorporate all of these things. Though these types of media offer very different accounts of place than those considered elsewhere in this thesis, they shape the overall media architectures in which other modes of media production take place, and potentially induce other forms of participation such as those signalled by Reijnders’ lieux d’imagination.

Finally, the addition of further mediated imaginaries of place to this work demonstrates the depth and complexity of the networks of heterogeneous actants within which the politics of place occurs. By enrolling allies into their imaginaries, media items such as film and television contribute to and extend the associations shared by human interlocutors in these place networks.
This chapter has moved away from accounts of place offered by the informants/interviewees quoted throughout this project so far since the purpose and structure of the interviews was established well before the larger inquiry into widespread mediations was created.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

During the preparation of this thesis, the New South Wales government conducted a series of studies, reviews, and hearings intended to reform local government in the state. Beginning in 2011, the state sought to make local government “fit for the future”. Councils across the state have challenged the process in court, with public referenda, and with protests, producing new publics around shared objects of concern. At time of writing in mid-2016, Wollongong City Council is awaiting the outcome of a court case challenging their merger with Shellharbour City Council to form the mooted ‘City of Greater Wollongong’ (McIlwain, 2016). Thus the contestation over the present and future of places continues apace.

Having begun with my own experiences of the politics of place in very local settings, and developed my arguments about how these processes play out in various forms of media across three local government areas, I have continued a rethinking of the view that the emergence of electronic media induced a kind of ‘placelessness’ (Relph, 1976) or collapsing of the sense of place (Meyrowitz, 1985) by demonstrating the vast and complex networks of heterogeneous agents that participate in networks of place, facilitated in part by connective media. This viewed has recently been repudiated by Postill (2011), Farman (2012), Moores (2012), and Evans (2015), each of whom argue that electronic media can facilitate different kinds of interactions with place rather than suggesting it somehow inhibits place or experience. The major contribution of this thesis to existing literature is that is supports and continues this repositioning, arguing strongly that mediated experience of place is no less

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52 This slogan was used widely throughout the process, including as the web address of a NSW Government website, see www.fitforthefuture.nsw.gov.au.
formative or relevant than non-mediated experience. Moreover, the two forms of experience are not exclusive and are in fact complementary.

To counter Relph (1976), Meyrowitz (1985) and Seamon (1979), and in furthering the re-appraisal of media and place, I have argued that the experience of place, as a social phenomenon like many others, is enriched by the use of various media tools, especially those I have referred to as participatory media. My own research agenda has long been animated by a series of interlinked questions around the integrations of electronic media into social structures and relationships. These questions are partially addressed by the kinds of inquiries I have conducted here.

At a more local and precise level, the thesis was structured to address the central research question ‘How does media facilitate the politics of place?’ I have addressed this question by examining two further sub-questions ‘What role do local governments have in this process?’ and ‘What role do citizens have in this process?’ The examination was conducted into three local communities that I know well because I am interested in the future of the places outside of those that are generally the subject of these types of studies. Thus, the thesis has taken as its case studies three non-capital city case studies - the regional coastal city of Wollongong, and two of its more rural neighbours in the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires. The towns, communities, places and governments of these local government areas are the heart of this thesis, and its main driving force. These places are made up of complex associations of heterogeneous agents among whose relational interactions the politics of place emerges and is conducted.

Chapters 4-6 responded to the research questions by addressing various positions along a continuum starting from councils acting on their own, to councils acting in concert or consultation with communities, to communities acting on their own or attempting to
influence councils. Thus the thesis progressed through an examination of council created media imaginings of place, including the media architectures of local government, and their imagining place for specific purposes such as tourism and planning. Thereafter, I considered the co-creative or co-productive processes of imagining place in participatory media spaces through formal processes such as community engagement, before turning in Chapter 6 to the limited ways in which citizens themselves construct, negotiate and contest ideas of place. Each of the objects mentioned here have their role in promoting or challenging specific ideas of place within their networks of allies.

Chapter 7 considered yet further examples drawn from more disparate parts of the networks of place – this time those physically located well outside the places of concern. It examined the role of professional media industries in imagining place in the case studies through a look at reporting of crime, and film and television productions. The contributions made by these media to the politics of place is less obvious, especially as there are few signs of attempts to capitalise on mooted tourism or economic opportunities from media productions. Nonetheless, these accounts do provide additional layers to the experience of place, including less savoury aspects of life such as criminal actions. Additionally, as shown in that chapter, residents do contest, negotiate and otherwise contend with mediated portrayals of their towns originating primarily with outsiders. This demonstrates the expansive nature of networks capable of enrolling and entangling such ontologically distinct entities as John Safran, The Sydney Morning Herald, the town of Tahmoor, and The Wolverine. Each contributes something to imaginaries of Wollondilly Shire.

While the thesis focused broadly on the imagining of selected places in media for and by those who govern and inhabit there, this project was originally intended as a study about local government. The research process was diverted under its own weight by the emergence of
questions of place, as inevitable as they now seem, but the informants who generously provided time and information during the course of the research rightly deserve something of use to their work and thinking, whether their future is as part of an amalgamated council or one that has been deemed “fit for the future”. I would hope that such outcomes have been delivered in the form of clear articulations of the mediated architectures that councils themselves have established and which citizens either choose to respond to or move beyond in their own attempts to shape place. By reconsidering the shape of networks of associations that make up place, councils can further their community engagement processes.

8.1 Critique and suggestions for future work

Given the strong focus on media and the clear emphasis on arguing for media’s role in the networks of human affairs, it is possible that the work in this thesis could be perceived as a media- or techno-centric account of what should be examined as social phenomena. I have attempted to foreshadow such criticism by carefully positioning media within the social conditions generated by the politics of place – an approach that mimics McLuhan (1964) and Shirky’s (2008; 2010) accounts of media and takes note of ANT – by suggesting that place itself is primarily a social accomplishment. As Shirky (2010, p.14) notes, “the use of a social technology is much less determined by the tool itself; when we use a network, the most important asset is we get access to one another.” Place is achieved partly through the politics of place, which is partly conducted in media of communication, the tools and content of which are accessed by a broad range of actants including local governments and citizens. Such networks also consist of other actants, in the Latourian sense (1987). The Heideggerian (1996) influence throughout reinforces what I see as the relational orientation of people toward place and other beings that exist in and shape those places.
Heidegger’s (1977) understanding of the term ‘enframing’ is such that any ‘revealing’ brought about by technology is only possible through entropic decay and death. That is, technology enframes humanity for its purposes, not for ours. I have countered this position by arguing that it is through enframing that participation - from Vromen (2003, p. 82-3) “acts that… are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society we want to live in” - comes about. Thus participation (and, by extension, participatory media) has been positioned almost as a counterpoint to what I see as Heidegger’s pessimistic description of enframing.

The overriding priority in this thesis has been an attempt to discover the ways in which media have been deployed by a variety of actants including citizen and governments to imagine and manage place in the three case study local government areas, I have not attempted to develop a broad conceptual or methodological framework to guide future of similar investigations, thus potentially limiting the scope of the work. Nonetheless, this thesis does suggest possible applications to future work on the role of media of all types in shaping how we access and use space.

As it is there are links established here to a body of work examining the role of co-produced places, which emerges out of governance and political studies literature (for example, Brunet-Jailly and Martin, 2010; UNDP, 2009). This in turn provokes consideration of the role of participation and participatory media, of which the work by Bruns on produsage (2007) and Jenkins on participatory and convergence culture (2006a; 2006b) is especially informative. My engagement with Evans (2015) most explicitly points to the need to examine media as a force for shaping how we interact with space and place. Evident in this thesis, then, is the need to undertake further projects on the interaction between media and place, with a number of possible approaches becoming apparent.
For example, the focus here on regional locations may be usefully extended to consider additional types of media, including cameraphones and location based social networks or geotagging. The very recent massive popularity of alternate reality mobile games,\(^{53}\) which layer digital representations on top of images of the physical world, also suggests an area where the mediation of place might be usefully explored in both regional and non-regional locations. Additionally, the increasing amount of data that is available through other location-aware services may offer accounts of place and mediated interactions with place that have not been considered here.

There are shadows of the field of representational theory in this thesis, which takes as its primary mode of concern the extent to which images and other forms of media adequately capture and represent the objects of their focus to transmit a message from a sender to receiver. The most prominent example of this conception of media is Shannon and Weaver’s (1964) *Mathematical Theory of Communication*. It is important to note, however, that the focus in this work is again essentially the ways in which people themselves use and create such representations rather than the veracity or accuracy of their representational practices. Here, I return once again to Moores (2012), who makes a “general argument… for a joint consideration of physical and media environments as lived spaces” (p. 51). It is my hope that I have made a similar argument, with a view to further shifting the study of media away from the study of what is represented in media. Several key limitations of the work have, however, prevented deeper engagement with relevant citizens that would have supported my arguments about embodiment and lived space. As explained in the methodology chapter, several residents groups were approached for their involvement in the research but declined to

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\(^{53}\)Examples include *Ingress* and *Pokemon Go*, both of which were developed by former internal Google start-up Niantic using Google’s location services.
participate. As such, the extent to which media directly extends experience - as opposed to its theoretical capability to do so - must await future work.

8.2 A final note

In the preface, I prominently quoted Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 6) arguing that “communities are to be distinguished… by the style in which they are imagined”. This thesis has presented many accounts of media imaginings of three specific communities, imaginings which are redolent with varying styles in varying media. These extend from professional media makers, to governments, to citizens. In each case, they relate and create something that can be accessed, shared and known about each of the three local government areas of Wingecarribee Shire, Wollongong City and Wollondilly Shire.

The variety of imaginings has demonstrated the vast heterogeneity inherent in how place is conceived, following the lead of actor-network theory which urges us to examine relations between such actants. ANT has been described by Latour (1999, p. 20) as “a method and not a theory”, which is why I have used its terminology throughout this work to describe, but not explain, the emergence of place within these networks of heterogeneous agents and touch upon their interactional politics.

I offer apologies to media ecology scholars whose work I have treated lightly in this thesis, including McLuhan (1964), and Meyrowitz (1985). It was not my intention to engage media ecology lightly. Their suggestions of the way media operate as environments has clear echoes and similarities to ANT, although both fields emerged relatively independently in the latter part of the 20th century. As such, they could not be ignored, but they were also hard to fully engage in this particular study. Fittingly, McLuhan's observation that we have now moved
from knowledge earned through classification to "the study of configurations" (1964/2013, loc. 87) appears a prescient suggestion of the kind of study I have delivered.

Each of the case studies in this thesis is close to my heart and life as locations I have lived, made media about, and worked. In mid-2016, I was offered and took up a role at Charles Sturt University in the Central West of New South Wales, several hours’ drive from these communities. From this vantage point, I have been able to step back from my role as a situated interpreter and reconsider the potential impact of these imaginings, noting the fate of political campaigns and development proposals that never came to fruition and the success of those which have. The work originated in my own emic positioning, what I have also referred to as a ‘situated interpreter’, and my personal interest in mediated representations of these areas. More than mediation, though, I have always been interested in how these imaginings bleed over into everyday experience, and it is that which I hope is on show in this work.

Whereas for Anderson (1991), national imaginings are inherently ‘limited’, the imaginings presented here are undoubtedly expansive. These media layer and enrich space, and in the process extend what people know and understand about place. They communicate messages of what kinds of developments are and are not welcome in a particular location, and what kinds of tourism should and should not take place there. Each example is a way of contesting and negotiating the politics of place, and each demonstrates how place is imagined in and across the networks in which it arises.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet Example – Councillors

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCILLORS

RESEARCH TITLE: Participatory Media and Australian Local Government

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to contribute to an understanding of the participatory media practices of selected local government authorities in Australia. This research will identify issues that can inform thinking in and about local governments and the way they use participatory media technologies. Participatory media are all those media and communications technologies that encourage or invite participation—such as creation and sharing—by all users, not just traditional broadcasters or those who are part of industrial media structures. In the context of this research, such technologies are part of participatory engagement practices between local governments (including staff and elected officials) and members of their public or publics as collective groups.

This research aims to explore the nature of online citizen engagement with local government. The way that members of the public, and publics as collectives, engage with local governments is coming under increasing scrutiny as a result of emerging information and communication technologies, and this research seeks to explore how and why those dynamics are changing. It will examine five local government areas (Wollongong, Wollondilly, Wingecarribee, Kiama, and Shellharbour), considering the role of both councils and publics in these areas in relation to the issues raised above.

INVESTIGATORS
Professor Sue Turnbull
Supervisor
Ph: 6239 2302
E: sturnbull@uow.edu.au

Dr Teodor Mitew
Co-supervisor
Ph: 6221 4219
E: tmitew@uow.edu.au

Mr Travis Holland
PhD Candidate
E: tah727@uow.edu.au

Version 3 – 17 January 2014
METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS
If you choose to be included, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview at a location of your choosing. The interview will be conducted by Travis Holland. You will be asked about your experiences with participatory media in the course of your role as an elected councilor with Wollongong City Council. The interview will be audiotaped.

Typical questions in the interview include: What role does participatory media play in your public engagement activities? How do participatory media support democratic practices? What are the reasons for using/not using particular participatory media technologies? How do participatory media contribute to your work as a councilor? Are there any negative aspects of using participatory media in your work as a councilor?

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS
Apart from your time for the interview, we can foresee very few risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. You can also choose to withdraw any particular piece of data from the research or restrict it from publication.

Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong or Wollongong City Council. We will de-identify any interview information you provide and will not publish your name or position in the research. Further, you will only be answering questions in your political capacity and no personal information will be sought. This limits your exposure to risk significantly.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH
This research may contribute to a more thorough understanding of participatory media use by local governments, including your own, and provide a basis for future decisions within your local government and other government bodies. Findings from the study will be published in a PhD thesis and possibly published in appropriate journals or presented at academic events.

We will provide a copy of any publication arising from this research on request.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS
This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet Example – Staff

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

TITLE: Participatory Media and Local Government in Australia

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to contribute to an understanding of the participatory media practices of selected local government authorities in Australia. This research will identify issues that can inform thinking in and about local governments and the way they use participatory media technologies. Participatory media are all those media and communications technologies that encourage or invite participation – such as creation and sharing – by all users, not just traditional broadcasters or those who are part of industrial media structures. In the context of this research, such technologies are part of participatory engagement practices between local governments (including staff and elected officials) and members of their public or publics as collective groups.

This research aims to explore the nature of online citizen engagement with local government. The way that members of the public, and publics as collectives, engage with local governments is coming under increasing stress as a result of emerging information and communication technologies, and this research seeks to explore how and why those dynamics are changing.

It will examine five local government areas (Wollongong, Wollondilly, Wingecarribee, Illawarra, and Shellharbour), considering the role of both councils and publics in these areas in relation to the issues raised above.

INVESTIGATORS
Professor Sue Turnbull		Dr Teodor Mitrev
Supervisor		Co-supervisor
Ph: 4229 2382		Ph: 4221 4219
E: sturnbull@uow.edu.au		E: tmitev@uow.edu.au

Mr Travis Holland
PhD Candidate

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS
If you choose to be included, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview at a location of your choosing. The interview will be conducted by Travis Holland. You will be asked about your experiences with participatory media in the course of your employment with Wollongong City Council. The interview will be audiotaped.

Typical questions in the interview include:
What role does participatory media play in broader engagement activities by Wollongong City Council?
What are the reasons for using/not using particular participatory media technologies?
How do participatory media contribute to your work?
Are there any negative aspects of using participatory media in your work?

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS
Apart from your time for the interview, we can foresee very few risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. You can also
choose to withdraw any particular piece of data from the research or restrict it from publication.

Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong or your employer. We will de-identify any interview information you provide and will not publish your name or position in the research. Further, you will only be answering questions in your professional capacity and no personal information will be sought. This limits your exposure to risk significantly.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH
This research may contribute to a more thorough understanding of participatory media use by local governments, including your own, and provide a basis for future decisions within your local government and other government bodies. Findings from the study will be published in a PhD thesis and possibly published in appropriate journals or presented at academic events.

We will provide a copy of any publication arising from this research on request.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS
This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rsorethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix 3: Interview Questions - Councillors

You will be asked about your experiences with participatory media in the course of your role as an elected councillor with [such and such] Council. The interview will be audiorecorded.

- What role does participatory media play in your public engagement activities?
- How do participatory media support democratic practices?
- What are the reasons for using/not using particular participatory media technologies?
- How do participatory media contribute to your work as a councillor?
- Are there any negative aspects of using participatory media in your work as a councillor?
- What specific participatory media do you use? (Do you have your own website? What social media accounts do you have?)
- Do you believe the people you engage with on participatory media about council matters are representative of the general public? Why/why not?
- Are there specific groups of people that seek to engage with you more regularly than others? Do you seek out particular groups?
- Do you use participatory media to communicate with constituents, fellow councillors (at your or another council) or other groups?
- Do you monitor social media for passive mentions or only take account of active mentions?
- How does the use of participatory media fit into governance frameworks?
- Do you think participatory media fits in with a broader shift to participatory culture? If so, how?
- How would you describe the groups who seek to engage with council on participatory media?
- Do you seek to identify particular individuals or groups, or link them to wider issues/movements?
- How do local governments deal with emergent public issues compared to government-initiated issues?
Appendix 4: Interview Questions - Staff

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR: Local Government Staff
RESEARCH TITLE: Participatory Media and Local Government in Australia
RESEARCHERS: Prof Susan Turnbull, Dr Teodor Mitov, Mr Travis Holland

You will be asked about your experiences with participatory media in the course of your employment with [such and such] Council. The interview will be audiorecorded.

- What role does participatory media play in your public engagement activities?
- How do participatory media support democratic practices?
- What are the reasons for using/not using particular participatory media technologies?
- How do participatory media contribute to your professional role?
- Are there any negative aspects of using participatory media in your work?
- What specific participatory media do you use?
- Do you also use participatory media outside of work, and are these the same accounts/channels or different ones?
- Do you believe the people you engage with on participatory media about council matters are representative of the general public? Why/why not?
- Are there specific groups of people that seek to engage with you more regularly than others?
- Do you use participatory media to communicate with constituents, fellow councillors and staff (at your or another council) or other groups?
- Do you monitor social media for passive mentions or only take account of active mentions?
- How does the use of participatory media fit into governance frameworks?
- Do you think participatory media fits in with a broader shift to participatory culture? If so, how?
- How would you describe the groups who seek to engage with council on participatory media?
- Do you seek to identify particular individuals or groups, or link them to wider issues/movements?
- How do local governments deal with emergent public issues compared to government-initiated issues?
Appendix 5: Letter to General Manager - Example

David Farmer
General Manager
Wollongong City Council
Locked Bag 8821
Wollongong, NSW 2500

Dear Mr Farmer,

I write to request your support for my Doctor of Philosophy research project entitled ‘Participatory Media and Australian Local Governments.’ This project is supervised by Professor Sue Turnbull and Dr Tsuor Milieu in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and The Arts at the University of Wollongong.

This research project focuses on the role that participatory media can play in local democracy, and especially communication between local councils such as yours and your residents and other stakeholders. It aims to explore the nature of online citizen engagement with local government. The way that members of the public, and publics as collectives, engage with local government is coming under increasing scrutiny as a result of emerging information and communication technologies, and this research seeks to explore how and why those dynamics are changing. It will consider the role of both councils and publics in these areas in relation to the issues raised above. I have selected five councils as comparative case studies – Wollongong City, Wingecarribee Shire, Wollongolli Shire, Shellharbour City and Kiama Municipality.

The methodology employed in the research includes assessing public documents (policies and similar) and public communications (posts on social media and websites) for the purposes of identifying the types of engagement involved. Additionally, I would like to interview relevant staff at your council in the first half of 2014. The staff most relevant to this research are those in communications or community engagement, and especially those who might manage your online social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or community engagement forums. Typical questions in the interview include: What role does participatory media play in broader engagement activities by [your council]? What are the reasons for using/not using particular participatory media technologies? How do participatory media contribute to your work? Are there any negative aspects of using participatory media in your work?

All I seek from you is your understanding and approval to contact selected staff through the appropriate channels, such as by email, official social media accounts, and telephone.

All information collected will be de-identified and all interviewees will be anonymous to all but the research team. If you wish to review relevant sections of the research prior to public release, please inform the research team. Any staff selected for interview would be free to decline without consequence.

For your information, I have included a copy of the relevant participant information sheet, which I will also provide to staff members prior to the interview. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on tah727@uow.edu.au.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards

Travis Holland
PhD Candidate

Version 3 – 17 January 2014
Appendix 6: List of Council Policies/Plans

Early iterations of this project were focused on how five councils conducted participatory media practices. In the course of that work, a search was conducted for any council plans or policies which would potentially contain information about their relationship with citizens, or their role in media making. The following list includes each of the policies and plans identified, and notes which of those were further examined. Those which were deemed directly relevant to the final outcome of the study were read in more detail, but only a handful were cited.

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Appendix 7: Human Research Ethics Committee Application

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG/ILLAWARRA SHOALHAVEN LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

A. CHECKLIST (for applicants)

Please check the Ethics web page for agenda deadlines [http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/UOW009377.html](http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/UOW009377.html) and ensure this checklist is completed before submission. Applications should be sent or delivered to:

Ethics Unit, Research Services Office
Level 1, Building 20 (North Western Entrance)
University of Wollongong NSW 2522

- Original Ethics Application plus appropriate number of copies.
  - Applications for the full Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) require 17 copies PLUS the original.
  - Applications to the Executive Committee of the HREC (expedited review) require only the original.

- Participant Information Sheet/Package. *(Please include version number and date)*

- Consent Form/s. *(Please include version number and date)*

- Copies of questionnaire/s, survey/s or interview/focus group questions. *(Please include version number and date)*

- Copies of all material used to inform potential participants about the research, including advertisements and letters of invitation. *(Please include version number and date)*

- Evidence of permission to conduct research from site managers *(Not required for research sites within NSW Department of Health at this stage)*

N/A Evidence of approval/rejection by other HRECs, including comments and requested alterations to the protocol.

N/A Copies of Confidentiality Agreement templates for any third parties involved in the research.

N/A Copy of Research Contract for sponsored/contract research.
N/A Copy of Clinical Trial Insurance Requirements Form (UOW researchers answering YES to Q.10 only)

N/A Privacy Exemption Application (Researchers answering NO to Q.38 only)

For Clinical Trials also include:
- [ ] Protocol (17 copies)
- [ ] CTN or CTX Form (1 original copy)
- [ ] Summary Sheet (17 copies)
- [ ] Insurance Information (1 copy)
- [ ] Budget (17 copies)
- [ ] Clinical Trial Agreement (1 copy)
- [ ] Investigator’s Brochure (6 copies)

B. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. DESCRIPTIVE TITLE OF PROJECT:
Participatory Media and Australian Local Government

2. 7 LINE SUMMARY OF PROJECT AIMS:
This project aims to establish use of participatory media by local governments in the Illawarra region. In doing so, it will highlight how participatory media use by local government aligns with emerging governance practices, democratic responsibilities, and may be influenced by the policy.

3. PARTICIPATING RESEARCHERS:
Summarise the qualifications and experience of all personnel who will be participating in the project. NB: For student research a Supervisor must be the Principal Investigator.

<table>
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<th>Principal Investigator/Supervisor</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title:</strong> Professor</td>
<td><strong>First Name:</strong> Susan</td>
<td><strong>Family Name:</strong> Turnbull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email:</strong> <a href="mailto:sturnbul@uow.edu.au">sturnbul@uow.edu.au</a></td>
<td><strong>Phone No:</strong> 4239 2392</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>PhD, M. A, B.Arts (Hons)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
<td>Professor, Communication and Media Studies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role in Project,</strong> relevant research experience <em>(if no experience describe how relevant experience will be obtained)</em></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<th>Second Investigator</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title:</strong> Dr</td>
<td><strong>First Name:</strong> Teodor</td>
<td><strong>Family Name:</strong> Mitew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email:</strong> <a href="mailto:tmitew@uow.edu.au">tmitew@uow.edu.au</a></td>
<td><strong>Phone No:</strong> 4221 4219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Qualifications | PhD, M.A History
---|---
Position | Lecturer, Digital Communication

**Role in Project**, relevant research experience *(if no experience describe how relevant experience will be obtained)* | Supervisor
---|---

**Co-Investigator/Student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Mr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Name</strong></td>
<td>Travis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Name</strong></td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Email: tah727@uowmail.edu.au

**Qualifications** | B Communication and Media Studies; B Arts
---|---
**Position** | PhD Candidate

**Role in Project**, relevant research experience *(if no experience describe how relevant experience will be obtained)* | This research project forms the bulk of Travis’ PhD research, which will provide him with the research experience to conduct future research projects.
---|---

Please add extra boxes for additional researchers

**4. CONTACT DETAILS FOR CORRESPONDENCE**: *(Please note that most correspondence is sent electronically so please ensure that email addresses are included)*

Name: Travis Holland

Postal Address: [deleted]

Email: tah727@uow.edu.au
Phone: Mobile: [deleted]

If principal contact is not the Principal Investigator (PI) please provide the contact details for the PI:

Name:
Postal Address:

Email
Phone: Mobile:

**5. EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH**: *(Please specify as near as possible start and finish dates for the conduct of research)*
6. **Purpose of project:**
Indicate whether the research is one or more of the following:

- [ ] Staff Research (University of Wollongong)
- [ ] Staff Research (ISLHD)
- [X] Student Research (*Please specify*):

Course undertaken: Doctor of Philosophy
Unit/Faculty/Department: Faculty of Law, Humanities and The Arts
Supervisor/s: Prof Susan Turnbull and Dr Teodor Mitew

- [ ] Other (*Please specify*): ______________________________

7. **HAS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT BEEN REVIEWED BY ANY OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE?**

YES [ ] NO [X]

If NO go to Section B. If YES:

(a) What committee/s has the application been submitted to?

(b) What is the current status of this/these applications? *Please include copies of all correspondence between the sponsor or researcher and the other ethics committee/s.*

---

**C. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH**

8. **WHAT IS THE SOURCE AND AMOUNT OF FUNDING FROM ALL SOURCES FOR THIS RESEARCH?**

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For sponsored research please include the budget for the trial including information about capitation fees, payments to researchers, institutions or organisations involved in the research, current and consequential costs and costs which may be incurred by participants. If the research is sponsored:

(a) Is there any affiliation/association or financial interest between the researcher/s associated with this research and the sponsor/funding body/supplier of a drug, surgical device or other therapeutic device to be used in the study?
   YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES please detail.

(b) Are there any conditions placed on this research by the funding body?
   YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please provide details and provide a copy of the contract/letter of agreement with the funding organisation detailing the terms on which the research is being supported.

(c) Is a copy of the HREC approval to be forwarded to the granting body?
   YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please advise of any deadlines.

D. RESEARCH METHODS

9. RESEARCH CATEGORIES:

Please mark the research categories relevant to this research proposal. At least one category should be marked for each grouping. You should mark as many categories as are relevant to the proposed research. For OTHER please specify.

(a) RESEARCH PROCEDURES USED:
   ☐ Anonymous questionnaires/surveys
   ☐ Coded (potentially identifiable) questionnaires/surveys
   ☐ Identifiable questionnaires/surveys
   ☐ Examination of student work, journals etc
   ☐ Examination of medical, educational, personnel or other confidential records
Observation (overt)
Observation (covert)
Interviews (structured or unstructured)
☐ Telephone interviews
☐ Procedures involving physical experiments (eg exercise, reacting to computer images)
☐ Procedures involving administration of substances (eg drugs, alcohol, food)
☐ Physical examination of participants (eg blood glucose, blood pressure and temperature monitoring)
☐ Collection of body tissues or fluid samples
☐ Surgical procedures
☐ Other ________________________________

(b) **RESEARCH AREAS:**
X Qualitative research
X Social science research
X Humanities research
☐ Educational research
☐ Health research
☐ Psychological research
☐ Comparison or evaluation of drugs, surgical or other therapeutic devices
☐ Comparison or evaluation of clinical procedures
☐ Comparison or evaluation of counselling or training methods
☐ Investigation of the effects of an agent (drug or other substance)
☐ Investigation of biomechanical processes
☐ Biomedical research
☐ Epidemiology
☐ Genetic research
☐ Other ________________________________
10. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE THE USE OF DRUGS, A SURGICAL DEVICE, A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION OR A PHYSIOLOGICAL TRIAL?

YES ☐ NO X

If NO to Q.11.

If YES:

(a) Please give details of the type of intervention and provide evidence that appropriate indemnity and compensation arrangements are in place to ensure adequate compensation to participants for any injury suffered as a result of participation in the trial (indemnification forms). If the research is being undertaken in a private practice please provide evidence of adequate and appropriate insurance coverage.

(b) Is the research registered:

☐ As a CTN Trial with the TGA
☐ As a CTX Trial with the TGA
☐ On any national or international clinical trial registers
☐ Other (please detail) ____________________________

11. RESEARCH DESIGN AND JUSTIFICATION:

Describe what you want participants to do and justify the design. Please provide an explanation in terms that can be understood by a non-expert reader. A flow chart or other diagram illustrating the sequence of research activities should be included if possible. For research involving a treatment or physical intervention (eg clinical studies, physiological trials, mental health interventions) a protocol should be provided.

There will be three phases to this research: 1) a scoping study, which will include an explanation of the online presence of the selected local governments and textual analysis of their relevant community plans and engagement policies; 2) observation of the surface (public) web activities of each of the local governments; and 3) a series of semi-structured interviews with council officials and members of the public. It is only the third phase (interviews) that seeks the direct involvement of research participants. Therefore, the remainder of the response to this question concerns only that phase of research. The diagram below outlines the research timeline.
There are two categories of interview subjects proposed for this research. The first is staff and elected councillors from the five local government areas under consideration. The second category involves representatives of groups that engage with councils via social media. This is set out in the diagram below. The overlapping area is the interaction between the two via participatory media technologies, which is the subject of interest and therefore the interviews will focus on this area.

Both groups of participants in effect self-identify as potential interview subjects by being active in public online environments. For example, during the observation phase, if a group or individual is observed to be interacting or attempting to interact with any of the relevant councils via Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs or other social
media on policy matters (as opposed to service delivery concerns) they may be considered for interview selection. Similarly, councillors considered for interview will be those who are active on social media such as Facebook and Twitter and who specifically engage with council matters on these platforms. They will be approached through these media platforms initially and then met for a short interview (anticipated duration of up to one hour) at a time and place of their convenience. The council staff will be indentified via contact with the council managers. These staff will be those already engaged in online communicative activities for the councils such as social media staff, community engagement officers, and communications officers. They too will be interviewed at a time and place of their convenience (most likely their workplace). The staff will be asked to speak in an ‘official’ capacity, ie, formally on behalf of their organisation.

The members of the public who participate in this research will initially be approached through electronic media such as social networks, email or website contact forms. They will be asked to participate in interviews at a time and place of their choosing, and may speak on behalf of formal or informal groups or as individuals. In all cases, these individuals will be asked about their experiences engaging online with councils including the tactics they employ, their view of the responses by councils, and (where relevant) details of the issues and organisations around which they engage with councils.

All research participants will be free to refuse participation at any time and withdraw information already shared.

Interviews have been selected as the primary method for gathering data because they allow for detailed examination of the areas of concern, but also give scope for pursuing interesting areas as they arise. This flexibility is not allowed by a static questionnaire/survey approach. Furthermore, the combination of three research methods (textual analysis, observation and interviews) follows a well-worn ‘triangulation’ pattern of research that allows data to be collected from multiple points in order to increase the level of reliability.

12. STATISTICAL DESIGN:

Any research project that involves the collection of data should be designed so that it is capable of providing information that can be analysed to achieve the aims of the project. Usually, although not always, this will involve various important statistical issues and so it is important that the design and analysis be properly planned in the early stages of the project. You should seek statistical advice. The University of Wollongong has a Statistical Consulting Service that provides such advice to research students and staff undertaking research. Are statistical issues relevant to this project?

YES ☐ NO X

If NO to to Q.13.

If YES:
(a) Have you discussed this project with the Statistical Consulting Service or any other statistical advisor?
YES ☐ NO ☐
If NO, please explain why not.

(b) Provide the calculations used to determine the appropriate sample size. If no power calculations have been done please explain the reason for choosing the sample size.

E. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

13. What are the ethical considerations relevant to the proposed research, specifically in relation to the participants’ welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage? How has the research design addressed these considerations? Consideration should be at both individual and collective levels.
There are no specific foreseeable risks to individuals who choose to participate in this research. Participants are already conducting public activities, which are the subjects of the research enquiry, and therefore the information they will be asked to provide only relates to that public activity. Participants are to be drawn largely from institutions such as councils where they should already have a high degree of information and technology literacy and would not feel compelled to provide information that they are uncomfortable providing, or which might have any negative impact. Furthermore, interview information will be de-identified and information such as name or position will not be published in the research. No personal information will be sought. Employees will be approached directly for interview following general approval from the council general manager. This will allow participants to freely comment on their employers without risk.

F. RISKS AND BENEFITS

14. Does the project involve the risk of emotional distress or physical harm, or the use of invasive procedures (eg blood sampling)?
YES ☐ NO ☒
If YES:
(a) What are the risks?
(b) Explain how the risks of harm or distress will be minimised. In the case of risks of emotional distress, what provisions have been made for an exit interview or the necessity of counselling?

15. Is information about criminal activity likely to be revealed during the study?
YES ☐ NO ☒
If YES, have you included a caution regarding any relevant mandatory reporting requirements in the Participant Information Sheet?

16. Detail the expected benefits of the study to the participants and/or the wider community.
There are expected to be few direct benefits to participants in this research. However, conclusions about the effectiveness or otherwise of particular engagement strategies and tools may provide insights that prove useful to both participants and the wider community in the long term. There are a variety of more general benefits, detailed below.

There is a social utility aspect to the research. The identified frameworks of practice might be useful for other governments, in Australia and elsewhere, considering the ways that participatory media might be deployed to support democratic local governance.

Aside from potential benefits to local democracy in general, there are also potential benefits specifically for the selected councils involved, including new insights and analysis of existing data and information about their online engagement behaviours. An examination of the way local governments make things public and respond to public issues through participatory media might potentially illuminate ways to streamline and improve these processes, further democratising local governance.

The project has academic significance in aligning two relatively disconnected fields of participatory governance and participatory culture through an understanding of participatory media. It will expose the role that participatory media can play in local democratic governance. In the process, John Stuart Mill’s vision of a “whole public” participating in and shaping representative government will be reconceptualised in such a way that the demos at the heart of democratic government might be properly rediscovered. If the role of the public is accepted as central to the participatory framework, then articulating a coherent understanding of who and what a public is and how publics form will also be a key outcome of this study.
G. PARTICIPANTS

17. MARK THE CATEGORIES RELEVANT TO THIS PROPOSAL:
- [ ] Healthy members of the community
- [ ] University students
- [x] Employees of a specific company/organisation
- [x] Members of a specific community group, club or association
- [ ] Clients of a service provider
- [ ] Health Service clients (eg users/clients of a Health Service)
- [ ] School children
- [ ] Hospital in-patients
- [ ] Clinical clients (eg patients)
- [ ] Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people
- [ ] Members of socially disadvantaged groups
- [ ] Cadavers/cadaveric organs
- [ ] Other (please specify) ____________________________

18. EXPECTED AGE/S OF PARTICIPANTS - PLEASE MARK ONE OR MORE
- [ ] Children (under 14 years)
- [ ] Young people (14-18 years)
- [x] Adults (> 18 years)

19. What is the rationale for selecting participants from this/these group/s?
The case study approach necessitates selecting participants from particular groups and organisations. In particular, staff and elected representatives will be selected from the following local governments: Wingecarribee Shire; Wollondilly Shire; Wollongong City; Shellharbour City; Kiama Municipality. Additionally, selected members of the public will be individuals that engage with these local governments online.

The reasoning for selecting these particular local government areas includes that they share resources, populations, and occupy contiguous territory and yet are very different.

H. RECRUITMENT
20. **How will potential participants be approached initially and informed about the project?** For example, direct approach to people on the street, mail-out to potential participants through an organisation, posters or newspaper advertisements etc. Please explain in detail and include copies of any letters, advertisements or other recruitment information.

Interviewees will largely self-identify. That is, they will be considered for interview because of their involvement in public engagement activities either on behalf of or with the selected local governments. Individuals including members of the public, elected councillors and staff will be sent short messages via social networks (on which they are active) or email seeking their participation. This will include URL links to further information. If they respond positively, further contact will be made via phone or email to arrange a suitable interview time. Either ahead of time or at the interview, participants will be provided with further information via consent forms or other information that might be requested. They will be guided through the consent form and asked to sign it before the interview commences.

For staff at the local governments in question, approval to conduct the research will initially be sought via the council general-manager. Staff will then be approached via email, social media, or over the telephone in the same method as other interviewees. Any required information can be provided ahead of time, and participants will be guided through consent forms ahead of the interview.

21. **Where will potential participants be approached by the researchers to seek their participation in the research, and where will research activities involving participants be conducted?**

Participants will be approached online and at their workplaces (with approval of the relevant council managerial staff). Interviews will be conducted at locations convenient to the participants. These are likely to be public places such as coffee shops or libraries (for councillors and members of the public) but may also be appropriate workplaces such as offices. Council staff interviews are likely to take place at the offices of the relevant council. These are: Wingecarribee Shire Council Civic Centre (Elizabeth St, Moss Vale); Wollondilly Shire Civic Centre (Menangle St, Picton); Wollongong City Council Chambers (Burelli St, Wollongong); Shellharbour Civic Centre (Lamerton Cres, Shellharbour City Centre); Kiama Municipal Council Chambers (Manning St, Kiama).

22. **How many participants in total do you anticipate will be involved in the project?** If the research has several stages and/or groups of participants, please provide the total number of participants expected as well as the number and participant group involved in each stage.

There will be up to thirty (30) interview participants, made up of the following numbers:

- Wollongong City Council staff/councillors: 4
- Wollongong members of the public: 4
- Wingecarribee Shire staff/councillors: 2
- Wingecarribee members of the public: 2
- Wollondilly Shire staff/councillors: 2
- Wollondilly members of the public: 2
- Shellharbour City councillors/staff: 3
• Shellharbour members of the public: 3
• Kiama Municipality members of the public: 2
• Kiama members of the public: 2

The remaining four interview slots would be utilised only if considered necessary and could come from any of the groups identified above or be members of the public who engage with more than one council or multi-council bodies (such as Regional Organisations of Councils or the Australian Local Government Association)

I. CONSENT PROCESS

Generally the consent of participants must be obtained prior to conducting research. If you do not intend to seek people’s permission to use information about them which may be identifying, you may need an exemption from State and Federal Privacy requirements. This is addressed in Section J.

Attach copies of any letters of invitation, information packages, consent forms, proxy/substitute consent forms, debriefing information, identification cards, contact details cards, etc and ensure they include a version number and date.

23. Will consent for participation be obtained from participants or their legal guardians?

YES X NO ☐

If NO, go to Q.31.

How will consent for participation be obtained?

X In writing
☐ Verbally
☐ Tacit (For example, indicated by completion and return of survey)
☐ Other (please specify) ________________________________
☐ Consent not being sought

Please explain why the method chosen is the most appropriate and ethical. This method provides clear, written consent that will ensure both participants and researchers are certain about their roles and obligations.

24. Is it anticipated that all participants will have the capacity to consent to their participation in the research?

YES X NO ☐

If NO, please explain why not (eg children, incompetent participants etc) and explain how proxy or substitute consent will be obtained from the person with legal authority to consent on behalf of the participant.
25. For participants who have the capacity to consent, how does the process ensure that informed consent is freely obtained from the participant?
Participants will be provided with detailed participant information sheets and consent forms. Due to the fact that online participatory media is primarily a written medium, it is anticipated that all participants will have the capacity to understand and assess their involvement independent of any further involvement from the researcher. However, any further information required by participants will be freely provided.

26. Are any participants in a dependant relationship with the researcher, the institution or the funding body (eg, the researcher’s clinical clients or students; employees of the institution; recipients of services provided by the funding body)?
If so, what steps will be taken to ensure that participants are free to participate or refuse to participate in the research without prejudice or disadvantage?
No participants are in a dependant relationship with the researcher. However, a very small number may be students at the University of Wollongong. Their participation in the research is independent of this status. Furthermore, it will be clearly explained that any decision to participate will not affect any relationship, now or in the future, with the University of Wollongong or the researcher.

Participants who are council staff may be in a dependent relationship with their employer, who may be aware of their participation. Regardless, it will be made clear in writing to the manager and the participant that any decision to participate should not have any bearing on their employment now or into the future.

27. How does the project address the participants’ freedom to discontinue participation? Will there be any adverse effects on participants if they withdraw their consent and will they be able to withdraw data concerning themselves if they withdraw their consent?
There will be no adverse effects on participants if they withdraw consent. Further, participants will be free to review and withdraw their data from the research at any stage or, should they wish, choose to have it restricted from publication. These options will be made clear to participants via the information and consent sheets.

28. Does the project involve withholding relevant information from participants or deceiving them about some aspect of the research?
YES ☐ NO X

If YES, what is the justification for this withholding or deception and what steps will be taken to protect the participants’ interest in having full information about their participation?
29. **Will participants be paid or offered any form of reward or benefit (monetary or otherwise) for participation in the research? If so, please detail and provide a justification for the payment, reward or benefit.**

Participants will not be offered any form of reward or benefit from participation in the research, except for those interviews that may take place in a public place such as a coffee shop, where the researcher will meet the cost of a cup of coffee or other beverage. This will be in recognition of the fact that since the participant would not have otherwise gone to that coffee shop at that time, they should not have to bear the (admittedly minor) cost of any beverage consumed during the interview.

### J. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

30. **How will the privacy of individual subjects be protected when recording and analysing the data?**

Participants will be largely commenting as representatives of organisations, and the particular perspective of their role within that organisation. It may be difficult to absolutely guarantee anonymity, but this does not pose significant ethical concerns since no private information will be sought during interviews. Further, will de-identify any interview information provided and will not publish names or positions. For example, for councillors active on social networks and organisations where only one person undertakes a particular role (eg, communications manager at a council), it will be difficult to maintain any anonymity. Nonetheless, de-identification is an appropriate and necessary measure.

31. **Will information collected from data or interview be published or reported?**

- **YES** ☒
- **NO** ☐

If **YES**, what form will this take? All uses of data must be explicitly consented to. The data may be published as part of the material in a thesis that will be lodged for assessment as part of Travis Holland’s Doctor of Philosophy degree. This will take the form of quotes throughout the thesis and descriptions of material provided by the participants. Such use will be agreed to by participants via the consent sheet.

32. **Will any part of the research activities be placed on a visual or audio recording (e.g. digital audio/visual recordings or photographs)?**

- **YES** ☒
- **NO** ☐

If **YES**:

(a) **What will the recording be used for?**

The audio recording will be used for the purposes of accessing the information contained therein, and for making transcriptions of such information. Quotes may be subsequently used in the published research.

(b) **Who will see/hear the recording?**

Only the participant researchers will be given access to the unedited original recordings.
33. Data (including questionnaires, surveys, computer data, audio/visual digital recordings, transcripts and specimens) must be securely stored at all times. Where will the data be held and who will have access to it? (Please include building and room numbers if relevant)

(a) During the project?
The audio recordings and transcripts will be collected and maintained in a digital format on a password-protected Software as a Service (SaaS) product.

(b) On completion of the project?
Following completion of the project, data previously retained and accessed on the SaaS will be downloaded to a removable hard-drive and retained in the principal researcher’s locked files (room 19.2098 at the University of Wollongong), or another suitable facility within the Faculty of Law, Humanities and The Arts, for the required timeframe.

34. Data should be held securely for a minimum of 5 years (15 years for clinical research) after completion of the research. How long will the data be stored for? If it is not being stored, please provide an ethical justification for this.
The data will be downloaded to a removable hard-drive and retained in the principal researcher’s locked files (room 19.2098 at the University of Wollongong), or another suitable facility within the Faculty of Law, Humanities and The Arts, for the required timeframe.

35. Does this project involve obtaining identifiable information (eg, data) from a third party without prior consent from the participant or their legal guardian?
YES ☐ NO X
If NO, you have completed the questionnaire. Please ensure that the form has all the appropriate signatures and attachments and complete checklist before submission.
If YES, go to Question 37.

36. Who will be providing the information? Please include copies of any correspondence regarding permission to access this information from a responsible officer of the agency.

37. Will the information be de-identified during collection, use or disclosure?
YES ☐ NO ☐
If NO, you must apply for an exemption to the State and Federal Privacy Acts. Please complete the Privacy Exemption Application Form available from the Forms section of the Ethics web page.
If YES:
(a) Who will be de-identifying the information? Is this a person who would normally have access to the information?

(b) How and when will the data be de-identified?
K. DECLARATION BY INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator:

- I certify that I am the Principal Investigator named on the front page of this application form.
- I undertake to conduct this project in accordance with all the applicable legal requirements and ethical responsibilities associated with its carrying out. I also undertake to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all persons under my supervision involved in this project will also conduct the research in accordance with all such applicable legal requirements and ethical responsibilities.
- I certify that adequate indemnity insurance has been obtained to cover the personnel working on this project.
- I have read the NHMRC’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. I declare that I and all researchers participating in this project will abide by the terms of these documents.
- I make this application on the basis that it and the information it contains, are confidential and that the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District will keep all information concerning this application and the matters it deals with in strict confidence.

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Signature/s of other researcher/s: The first named researcher will assume responsibility for the project in the absence of the Chief Investigator. **All investigators must sign the application.**

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L. APPROVAL BY HEAD OF UNIT

This person must not be a member of the research team.

I am aware of the content of this application and I am satisfied that:
- All appropriate safety measures have been taken;
- The research is in accordance with UOW/ISLHD Policy;
and approve the conduct of the project within this unit.

Name (please print)  Signature  Date

NOTE: RESEARCH MUST NOT COMMENCE UNTIL THE APPLICATION HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE HREC